Cultural Diplomacy as a Tool for Enhancing Nigeria's International Image: A Documentary Review of the Cultural Heritage and Traditional Institutions of Biu Emirate, Borno State, Nigeria

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.68050/JAMS.2026.942

Received: 22 October 2026; Accepted: 30 October 2026; Published: 07 November 2026

ABSTRACT

Cultural diplomacy has become an important dimension of contemporary international relations because states increasingly recognize that their international standing is influenced not only by political decisions, economic performance and military capacity but also by cultural identity, historical reputation, social values and the relationships they establish with foreign publics. This article examines the potential of cultural diplomacy to contribute to Nigeria's international image through a documentary review of the cultural heritage and traditional institutions of Biu Emirate in Borno State. It draws on literature concerning cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, soft power, national image, heritage diplomacy, cultural tourism, traditional institutions and intangible cultural heritage, alongside historical and ethnographic publications relating to Biu and the wider Southern Borno cultural environment. The article adopts a qualitative documentary-review approach and uses thematic synthesis to examine the relationship between local cultural resources and international cultural engagement. Particular attention is given to Biu's historical development, traditional rulership, linguistic diversity, oral traditions, community festivals, performance traditions, marriage practices and heritage landscapes. The review considers the extent to which these resources could support Nigeria's international cultural engagement and identifies the institutional, administrative, infrastructural and representational conditions necessary for their effective use. The literature indicates that heritage can contribute to soft power by creating opportunities for attraction, dialogue, mutual learning and people-to-people relationships. However, the diplomatic value of cultural resources is neither automatic nor guaranteed. It depends on credible interpretation, community ownership, sustained institutional coordination, ethical documentation, effective communication and the quality of engagement with external audiences. The review further identifies a research gap in the limited direct examination of Biu Emirate within Nigeria's cultural diplomacy discourse. It argues that a community-centred approach, supported by traditional institutions, government agencies, universities, cultural organizations and diaspora networks, could make Biu's heritage more visible within Nigeria's broader cultural representation. The article concludes that cultural diplomacy should be approached not simply as the promotion of cultural events but as a long-term process of heritage safeguarding, intercultural dialogue, institutional cooperation and responsible international communication.

Keywords: Cultural diplomacy; Biu Emirate; Nigeria; Borno State; soft power; national image; heritage diplomacy; traditional institutions; cultural heritage; cultural tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The changing character of international relations has broadened the meaning and practice of diplomacy.

Traditionally, diplomacy was largely associated with formal negotiations, official representation, treaty-making and communication between sovereign states. Although these activities remain central to international relations, contemporary diplomatic practice increasingly extends beyond government representatives to include international *organizations*, cultural institutions, universities, private-sector *organizations*, media networks, civil-society groups and ordinary citizens. This expansion reflects the growing recognition that international relationships are influenced by public attitudes, cultural familiarity, social networks and the credibility of national representation (Cull, 2022; Grincheva, 2024; Melissen, 2005). The development of digital communication has further transformed the environment in which countries communicate with international audiences. Information about a country now circulates through official government platforms, international news *organizations*, social media, entertainment industries, tourism networks, educational exchanges and personal interactions. As a result, national image is no longer shaped exclusively by diplomatic statements or formal foreign-policy positions. It is also influenced by the cultural products people consume, the historical narratives they encounter, the experiences of visitors, and the representations of a country circulated by individuals and institutions outside government control (Jiménez-Martínez, 2024; Hao *et al.*, 2021; Surowiec, 2021).

This development has increased the importance of cultural diplomacy as a component of international engagement. Cultural diplomacy involves the use of cultural exchange, artistic expression, heritage, language, education, literature, traditional practices and other cultural resources to develop relationships between societies. It may be organised by governments, but its participants are not limited to state institutions. Artists, historians, traditional authorities, museums, universities, cultural associations, diaspora *organizations* and community groups can all contribute to the communication of cultural identity across national boundaries. Contemporary scholarship increasingly treats cultural diplomacy as a field of interaction in which cultural actors and institutions participate in international relationships rather than as a communication activity controlled entirely by governments (Ang *et al.*, 2015; Grincheva, 2024; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022).

The relevance of culture to diplomacy is closely associated with the idea of soft power. Nye (2004) explains soft power as the ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than primarily through coercion or payment. Culture can serve as a source of attraction because it provides people with opportunities to encounter unfamiliar histories, artistic traditions, languages, social values and ways of life. Nevertheless, attraction should not be confused with influence. A cultural product may receive international attention without necessarily changing the attitudes or behaviour of its audience. The relationship between cultural visibility and diplomatic influence therefore requires careful examination, particularly when cultural promotion is used to support claims about national reputation or international standing (Nye, 2004; Wüest & Nicolai, 2023; Todorović, 2022).

The connection between culture and national image has also become important in discussions of nation branding. Nation branding concerns the ways in which countries communicate and manage representations of their identity, reputation and distinctive characteristics. It draws attention to the relationship between national identity, external perceptions, economic interests and international positioning. However, scholarly literature warns that nation branding is conceptually complex and should not be reduced to the application of commercial marketing techniques to a country. National reputation is shaped by political conduct, social conditions, economic performance, cultural representation and the experiences of people who interact with the country (Hao *et al.*, 2021; Jiménez-Martínez, 2024; Tijani *et al.*, 2024).

Cultural heritage provides one of the resources through which national identity may be communicated. Heritage includes monuments, historic settlements, archaeological materials, traditional institutions, oral traditions, languages, festivals, performing arts, rituals, craftsmanship, foodways and inherited knowledge. It may be tangible or intangible, although these categories frequently interact. A traditional festival, for example, may involve physical objects, costumes and locations while also communicating oral histories, social relationships, music, dance and collective memory. UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage recognises the importance of living cultural practices and the communities that create, maintain and transmit them. It also emphasises community participation in heritage safeguarding and management (UNESCO, 2003).

Heritage has consequently become a subject of growing interest in international relations and cultural diplomacy. Lähdesmäki and Čeginskas (2022) explain that heritage diplomacy involves more than the preservation of historic objects or the exchange of conservation expertise. It also concerns the relationships, power structures, mutual recognition and forms of cooperation that develop around cultural heritage. Todorović (2022) similarly argues that heritage can operate within diplomacy and can itself become a diplomatic practice when states and other actors incorporate heritage into international relationships. Chalcraft (2021) adds that heritage diplomacy takes place within contact zones where local meanings, transnational themes and international expectations may not always align.

These perspectives are particularly relevant to countries with substantial cultural diversity. Nigeria possesses a wide range of historical traditions, languages, artistic expressions, traditional institutions and community-based cultural practices. Its international cultural visibility has been strengthened by creative industries, including film, music, literature and fashion. However, the country's cultural resources extend beyond widely recognised commercial and popular-cultural products. Local histories, traditional leadership systems, community festivals, oral traditions and indigenous knowledge also contribute to the country's cultural identity and may provide opportunities for cultural exchange and heritage-based engagement (Ezenagu, 2020; Tella, 2026).

The importance of this broader cultural perspective becomes clearer when attention is directed towards communities that receive comparatively less international recognition. Cultural diplomacy that concentrates on a small number of highly visible national cultural products may provide an incomplete representation of the historical and social diversity of the country. A broader approach would recognise the contribution of local communities and traditional institutions to the preservation and communication of cultural knowledge. Such an approach would also make it possible to connect national cultural representation with local development, educational exchange, heritage conservation and community participation (Ang *et al.*, 2015; Ezenagu, 2020; UNESCO, 2003).

Biu Emirate in Borno State provides a useful setting for examining these issues. Biu has a distinctive historical identity and a traditional institution that forms part of the wider historical and cultural landscape of Southern Borno. Usman's A History of Biu provides an extensive account of the geographical setting, historical development, settlement patterns, traditional administration, social organisation and cultural life of the Emirate (Usman, 2015). The book, which contains 693 pages, is an important published resource for understanding Biu's historical experience and the development of its traditional polity. Its publication also demonstrates the importance of written historical documentation in preserving local knowledge and making it accessible to wider audiences (Usman, 2015; Tomoloju, 2015).

The historical account of Biu is particularly relevant to cultural diplomacy because local history can provide the basis for international cultural communication. The historical narrative associated with Yamtarawala, the development of the Biu traditional polity, the settlement of different communities and the transformation of traditional administration offer subjects for historical research, public education and cultural interpretation. These narratives should, however, be presented with careful attribution because historical reconstruction may involve oral traditions, written records and differing interpretations. A credible cultural diplomacy programme must distinguish documented historical information from oral narratives and interpretations rather than presenting every account as an uncontested historical fact (Usman, 2015; Tomoloju, 2015).

Another important feature of Biu is its cultural and linguistic diversity. The wider Biu historical and social environment includes communities with distinct identities, languages and cultural practices. Usman's work on language disappearance and cultural diversity in Biu Emirate draws attention to the relationship between language, cultural identity and the transmission of knowledge (Usman, 2014). Language is not simply a means of communication; it also carries historical memory, expressions of social identity, indigenous knowledge and distinctive ways of interpreting the environment. The disappearance or weakening of a language may therefore affect the transmission of cultural knowledge and reduce the diversity of expressions available to future generations (Usman, 2014; UNESCO, 2003).

Research on cultural practices in Southern Borno further demonstrates the importance of local heritage.

Samaila *et al.* (2019) examined the history and cultural festivals of Pabur-Bura people in Hawul Local Government Area and discussed their social, political and economic significance. Although the study focuses on Hawul rather than the Biu Emirate institution as a whole, it provides relevant evidence of the importance of festivals within the wider Southern Borno cultural environment. Abdullahi and Ishaku (2024) examined traditional dances among Pabur-Bura, Glavda, Kibaku, Kilba, Marghi and Mbula communities, highlighting the potential relationship between cultural performance, cultural revival and social reconciliation. These studies indicate that traditional performance can serve as a medium through which cultural knowledge is transmitted and relationships among communities are expressed (Abdullahi & Ishaku, 2024; Samaila *et al.*, 2019).

More recent research has also examined the documentation of Pabur-Bura marriage practices in Biu Local Government Area. Kashim *et al.* (2025) used an ethnographic approach involving interviews with fifteen purposively selected cultural custodians to document the stages, symbols and social meanings associated with the Pabur-Bura marriage ceremony. The study is particularly relevant because it demonstrates that cultural heritage is not limited to public festivals or formal traditional ceremonies. Everyday social practices, family relationships, marriage customs and the knowledge maintained by cultural custodians are also important components of intangible heritage (Kashim *et al.*, 2025; UNESCO, 2003).

These cultural resources create opportunities for examining the possible relationship between Biu Emirate and Nigeria's international image. The Emirate's historical identity, traditional institution, language communities and cultural practices could contribute to a broader representation of Nigeria's cultural diversity. However, the existence of cultural resources does not automatically mean that they are being used for cultural diplomacy. Their contribution depends on whether they are properly documented, interpreted, communicated and connected to meaningful relationships with external audiences. It also depends on whether the communities concerned participate in decisions about how their heritage is represented and whether they benefit from cultural promotion (Chalcraft, 2021; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022; UNESCO, 2003).

The role of traditional institutions is particularly important in this context. Traditional institutions may maintain historical records, support cultural ceremonies, preserve customary knowledge and provide a recognised platform for community engagement. Their authority and responsibilities, however, operate within a contemporary governance environment that includes elected government, local councils, cultural agencies, educational institutions and civil-society *organizations*. A cultural diplomacy strategy centred on Biu should therefore be based on institutional collaboration rather than the assumption that the traditional institution alone can manage all aspects of heritage protection, tourism development and international engagement (Usman, 2015; UNESCO, 2003; Eyisi *et al.*, 2021).

The international promotion of cultural heritage also raises questions of representation, ownership and authenticity. Cultural practices are living and dynamic; they change as communities respond to religious, economic, technological and social developments. Consequently, cultural preservation should not require communities to reproduce an imagined historical condition or perform traditions solely to satisfy external expectations. UNESCO (2003) emphasises the role of communities in identifying and safeguarding their intangible cultural heritage. Lähdesmäki and Čeginskas (2022) similarly draw attention to power relations within heritage diplomacy and the importance of recognising the interests of heritage communities. These perspectives suggest that cultural diplomacy involving Biu should prioritise community participation, informed consent and respect for local cultural protocols.

Against this background, the present article examines cultural diplomacy as a possible instrument for enhancing Nigeria's international image through the cultural heritage and traditional institutions of Biu Emirate. It approaches the subject as a documentary review rather than an empirical report based on newly conducted interviews. The purpose is to synthesise relevant conceptual and historical literature, identify the cultural resources that may support international engagement, examine the institutional conditions required for their promotion and identify gaps that future field research should address.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

The growing importance of culture in international relations has encouraged many countries to use cultural resources as part of their public diplomacy, soft-power strategies and international image-building activities. Cultural festivals, museums, heritage sites, language programmes, educational exchanges, creative industries and international cultural partnerships have become important channels through which countries communicate aspects of their identity. However, the existence of cultural resources does not automatically translate into effective cultural diplomacy. Cultural resources must be identified, documented, safeguarded, interpreted and connected to sustained relationships with audiences beyond national borders (Ang *et al.*, 2015; Grincheva, 2024; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022). In Nigeria, cultural visibility has been strengthened by the international circulation of popular music, film, literature and fashion. Nevertheless, the country's cultural representation remains broader than its most commercially visible cultural industries. Local histories, traditional institutions, community festivals, indigenous languages and oral traditions also form part of the national cultural landscape. Ezenagu (2020) argues that Nigeria's heritage resources can support cultural tourism by providing opportunities for visitors to experience traditional beliefs, practices and cultural landscapes. Tella (2026) further examines the relationship between Nigeria's cultural policy and soft power, drawing attention to the need to connect cultural resources with a coherent approach to international engagement. These perspectives raise the question of how less internationally visible cultural communities can contribute to Nigeria's wider cultural diplomacy.

The problem is particularly relevant to Biu Emirate in Borno State. Although Biu has a substantial historical record and a culturally diverse social environment, its heritage is not yet adequately represented in the literature on Nigeria's cultural diplomacy. Usman (2015) provides an extensive historical account of Biu, while Usman (2014) examines language disappearance and cultural diversity within the Emirate. Other studies document cultural festivals, traditional dance and Pabur-Bura marriage practices in Southern Borno (Abdullahi & Ishaku, 2024; Kashim *et al.*, 2025; Samaila *et al.*, 2019). However, these publications primarily address historical, ethnographic, linguistic and cultural questions. They do not directly establish how Biu's heritage is incorporated into Nigeria's international cultural relations or whether it has produced measurable changes in the perceptions of foreign audiences.

A further problem concerns the institutional organisation of cultural heritage. The protection and promotion of cultural resources require cooperation among traditional authorities, government agencies, community *organizations*, researchers, cultural practitioners and tourism stakeholders. Where responsibilities are unclear or institutional relationships are weak, cultural documentation may remain fragmented, preservation initiatives may depend on individual efforts, and international promotion may lack continuity. UNESCO (2003) places strong emphasis on the participation of communities in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, while Eyisi *et al.* (2021) demonstrate the importance of collaboration and community participation in tourism development in the Nigerian context. These perspectives indicate that cultural promotion requires institutional arrangements that recognise the knowledge and interests of local communities.

There is also the question of cultural representation. Biu and the wider Southern Borno region contain different communities with distinct histories, languages and cultural practices. A cultural diplomacy initiative that presents the area as culturally uniform could marginalise some groups or incorrectly attribute one community's practice to another. The literature on heritage diplomacy shows that the international use of heritage can involve unequal power relationships and competing expectations between institutions and communities (Chalcraft, 2021; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022). Consequently, the challenge is not merely to make Biu's culture visible but to ensure that the process of representation is historically accurate, inclusive and consistent with community ownership.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this article is to examine cultural diplomacy as a tool for enhancing Nigeria's international image through a documentary review of the cultural heritage and traditional institutions of Biu Emirate, Borno State.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the conceptual foundations of cultural diplomacy and its relationship with public diplomacy, soft power and national image.
2. Review the historical development, cultural identity and traditional institutional structure of Biu Emirate.
3. Identify the tangible and intangible cultural resources associated with Biu Emirate that may support cultural diplomacy.
4. Examine the relationship between cultural heritage, international communication, cultural tourism and Nigeria's international image.
5. Analyse the role of traditional institutions, government agencies, cultural *organizations* and local communities in heritage safeguarding and cultural promotion.
6. Identify the institutional, administrative, financial, infrastructural and representational challenges that may constrain the use of Biu's heritage for international cultural engagement.
7. Propose strategies for strengthening community-centred cultural diplomacy through heritage documentation, educational exchange, digital communication and institutional partnerships.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of this article lies in its attempt to connect the historical and cultural literature on Biu Emirate with contemporary debates on cultural diplomacy, soft power and national image. Although the literature on cultural diplomacy has expanded considerably, the relationship between local heritage and international engagement remains an area requiring further examination, particularly in contexts where cultural resources are maintained primarily by communities and traditional institutions. Grincheva (2024) demonstrates the changing scope of cultural diplomacy scholarship, while Lähdesmäki and Čeginskas (2022) identify the importance of examining heritage as a space of dialogue, cooperation and power relations. By applying these discussions to Biu Emirate, the article extends the geographical and cultural range of the Nigerian cultural diplomacy debate.

The article is also significant for the study of traditional institutions and cultural governance. Traditional institutions are often examined in relation to customary leadership, local authority and community administration. Their contribution to the preservation and international communication of cultural heritage deserves further attention. Usman (2015) provides an extensive historical account of the development of Biu's traditional institution, while UNESCO (2003) recognises the role of communities and groups in identifying, safeguarding and transmitting intangible cultural heritage. The present review brings these perspectives together to consider how traditional institutions can work with contemporary public institutions and cultural *organizations*.

For government policymakers, the article highlights the importance of connecting national cultural policy with local heritage resources. Cultural diplomacy cannot be sustained solely through occasional events or publicity campaigns. It requires institutional coordination, research, funding, cultural infrastructure, professional communication and partnerships. Nigeria's heritage resources have been identified as potential drivers of cultural tourism (Ezenagu, 2020), while research on Nigerian tourism development highlights the importance of collaboration and community participation (Eyisi *et al.*, 2021). The article therefore offers a basis for considering how cultural promotion can be linked to local development without separating it from heritage safeguarding.

For researchers and academic institutions, the review identifies opportunities for further historical, linguistic, ethnographic, tourism and international-relations research. The publication of Language Disappearance and Cultural Diversity in Biu Emirate and A History of Biu provides a substantial documentary foundation for future investigations (Usman, 2014, 2015). Recent studies on Pabur-Bura cultural practices also demonstrate the continuing relevance of ethnographic documentation in Southern Borno (Abdullahi & Ishaku, 2024; Kashim *et al.*, 2025; Samaila *et al.*, 2019). These publications can be extended through oral-history projects, community archives, comparative cultural research and studies of international audience perceptions.

The article may also be useful to cultural custodians, artists, performers, language advocates, tourism operators and community *organizations*. By treating heritage as both a cultural responsibility and a potential resource for international engagement, it emphasises the importance of local ownership, accurate representation and fair participation. The argument is consistent with UNESCO's (2003) position that communities should be actively involved in the management and safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage they create and transmit.

1.5 Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The article focuses on Biu Emirate in Borno State, Nigeria, and examines the relationship between its cultural heritage, traditional institutions and the broader objective of enhancing Nigeria's international image. The geographical focus is the Emirate and the cultural setting directly relevant to its historical and institutional identity. However, selected studies from the wider Southern Borno area are considered where they provide useful evidence about cultural practices, festivals and performance traditions among related or neighbouring communities.

The conceptual scope covers cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, soft power, national image, heritage diplomacy, intangible cultural heritage, traditional institutions, cultural tourism and digital cultural communication. The historical and cultural discussion draws particularly on Usman's works on Biu history and linguistic diversity, as well as relevant studies of Pabur-Bura cultural festivals, traditional dances and marriage practices (Abdullahi & Ishaku, 2024; Kashim *et al.*, 2025; Samaila *et al.*, 2019; Usman, 2014, 2015).

The article is a documentary review. It relies on published literature, scholarly journal articles, historical publications, archival descriptions and institutional documents. It does not report original interviews, questionnaires, focus-group discussions or participant observation conducted by the author. Where a cited study has collected primary data, the article identifies that evidence as belonging to the cited study rather than presenting it as newly collected data.

The review also distinguishes between the Biu Emirate institution and the wider cultural communities of Southern Borno. A study of Pabur-Bura cultural festivals in Hawul, for example, is relevant to the broader regional setting but should not be treated as direct evidence about the organisation of all cultural activities within Biu Emirate (Samaila *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, research on traditional dances involving several communities in North-East Nigeria is used to discuss performance and cultural revival without attributing every practice to Biu alone (Abdullahi & Ishaku, 2024).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Understanding of Culture

Culture is a broad and multidimensional concept that encompasses the shared meanings, values, knowledge, beliefs, practices, customs and expressions through which individuals and communities organise social life. It includes visible forms such as clothing, music, dance, architecture, food and artistic production, but it also includes less visible elements such as language, moral expectations, historical memory, customary relationships and systems of knowledge. Consequently, culture should not be understood only as entertainment or ceremonial performance. It is also a framework through which communities interpret their environment, maintain relationships and transmit knowledge across generations (UNESCO, 2003; Usman, 2014).

The concept of culture is particularly important in the study of international relations because it helps explain how societies communicate identities and establish relationships beyond their immediate geographical boundaries. Cultural expressions may provide external audiences with information about a community's historical experience, social organisation and worldview. However, cultural interpretation is not always straightforward. The same practice may have different meanings for different groups, and external audiences may interpret a cultural expression according to assumptions that differ from those of its custodians. This makes contextual explanation essential to responsible cultural diplomacy (Ang *et al.*, 2015; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022).

Culture is also dynamic rather than permanently fixed. Communities may modify their practices in response to religious influences, migration, education, economic change, technological development and interaction with other societies. Cultural change does not necessarily mean cultural disappearance. In many cases, traditions are adapted, reinterpreted or incorporated into new forms of social life. Nevertheless, rapid change can weaken the transmission of certain languages, rituals and forms of indigenous knowledge where younger generations have limited opportunities to learn from cultural custodians (Kashim *et al.*, 2025; Usman, 2014; UNESCO, 2003). This dynamic understanding is relevant to Biu Emirate because its cultural heritage cannot be represented adequately through a static description of traditional practices. The historical development of Biu, the interaction of different communities, changes in traditional administration and the continuing transformation of cultural practices all form part of its cultural experience. Usman (2015) documents the historical and institutional development of Biu, while Usman (2014) draws attention to language disappearance and cultural diversity. Together, these works demonstrate why cultural heritage should be studied as both inherited knowledge and an evolving social reality.

Culture may also function as a resource for social cohesion and international engagement. Within communities, shared practices may reinforce belonging, transmit values and create spaces for intergenerational interaction. Across national boundaries, cultural activities can facilitate dialogue and mutual understanding. However, cultural exchange is most meaningful when participants recognise differences and engage with the historical context of the practices being shared. The literature on cultural diplomacy therefore supports an approach that treats culture as a medium of relationship-building rather than merely as a promotional commodity (Ang *et al.*, 2015; Grincheva, 2024; Nye, 2004).

2.2 Concept of Diplomacy

Diplomacy is a central instrument through which states and other international actors manage relationships, communicate interests, negotiate differences and pursue cooperation. Its traditional practice is associated with diplomatic missions, official correspondence, negotiations, treaties and representation. Contemporary diplomacy, however, operates in a more complex environment in which public opinion, media, economic networks, international institutions and non-state actors can influence the direction and outcomes of international relations. This wider environment has encouraged the development of public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, digital diplomacy and other specialised forms of international engagement (Cull, 2022; Grincheva, 2024; Melissen, 2005).

The changing nature of diplomacy does not mean that formal state-to-state relations have become irrelevant. Rather, it indicates that diplomatic influence increasingly depends on the interaction between official policies and broader social relationships. A country may establish formal diplomatic relations with another state while still facing negative public perceptions among its citizens. Conversely, cultural familiarity, educational exchange and professional networks may create positive relationships even where political relations are complicated. Public diplomacy seeks to address this wider environment by engaging audiences beyond government officials (Cull, 2022; Melissen, 2005).

Diplomacy also involves representation. A diplomatic representative communicates information about a country, but the credibility of that representation depends on the consistency between official messages and the realities experienced by external audiences. Cultural diplomacy faces the same challenge. Promoting a country's cultural diversity without supporting cultural preservation, community participation and credible visitor experiences may create a gap between representation and reality. This is why cultural diplomacy should be linked to substantive cultural policy and institutional practice rather than treated as a publicity exercise (Ang *et al.*, 2015; Jiménez-Martínez, 2024). In the context of Biu Emirate, diplomacy provides a framework for understanding how local cultural institutions and community actors may participate in international engage-

ement. The Emirate does not need to operate as a sovereign diplomatic actor for its cultural resources to become relevant to international relations. Its heritage may be communicated through university partnerships, cultural exhibitions, diaspora networks, heritage research, international conferences and responsible tourism

initiatives. These activities would normally operate in cooperation with Nigerian public institutions and relevant cultural *organizations* (Grincheva, 2024; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022).

2.3 Concept of Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy refers to the ways in which governments and other actors communicate and develop relationships with foreign publics. It differs from traditional diplomacy because its principal audiences are not limited to foreign ministries or official representatives. It includes citizens, students, journalists, academics, artists, business communities, cultural organizations and other groups whose views may influence the international environment. Melissen (2005) identifies the emergence of a new public diplomacy in which relationship-building and engagement become increasingly important, while Cull (2022) discusses the continuing development of public diplomacy in a changing international environment.

Public diplomacy includes several related activities. These may involve listening to foreign audiences, explaining national policies, facilitating cultural exchange, supporting educational programmes, communicating through international media and developing long-term relationships with institutions in other countries. The importance of listening is particularly significant because public diplomacy should not be understood as a one-way process through which a country simply tells others what to think. Engagement requires an understanding of how external audiences interpret information and what concerns or expectations they bring to the interaction (Cull, 2022; Melissen, 2005).

Cultural diplomacy forms one component of public diplomacy, although the two concepts are not identical. Public diplomacy can involve political communication, international broadcasting, policy explanation and educational relationships, while cultural diplomacy places particular emphasis on cultural exchange and cultural resources. The distinction is important because not every international communication activity is cultural diplomacy. A government statement about economic policy, for example, may form part of public diplomacy but does not necessarily involve cultural exchange. By contrast, a collaborative exhibition, international music programme or heritage research partnership may constitute cultural diplomacy when it is designed to encourage cultural understanding and relationships (Ang *et al.*, 2015; Grincheva, 2024).

Public diplomacy also raises questions about credibility and representation. A country may seek to communicate positive aspects of its identity, but external audiences are not passive recipients of official messages. They interpret information in relation to their own experiences, existing perceptions and independent sources. Jiménez-Martínez (2024) notes the changing environment of nation promotion, including the relationship between branding, public diplomacy, soft power and digital communication. This suggests that national image cannot be managed entirely through official campaigns because public perceptions are shaped by multiple sources of information.

For Biu Emirate, public diplomacy provides an institutional pathway through which local heritage could become part of Nigeria's international cultural engagement. Historical exhibitions, translated heritage materials, academic exchanges, cultural documentaries and international partnerships could introduce Biu to audiences who may have limited knowledge of Southern Borno. However, such activities would need to be connected to wider public-diplomacy institutions and should accurately represent the communities whose heritage is being communicated. The approach is consistent with the relationship-based understanding of public diplomacy developed by Cull (2022) and Melissen (2005).

2.4 Concept of Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy is commonly understood as the use of cultural resources and exchanges to develop understanding, relationships and cooperation between societies. Its activities may include the exchange of artists, cultural exhibitions, music and dance performances, language programmes, literary events, museum

partnerships, educational exchanges, heritage conservation and collaborative research. The concept is broader than the presentation of national culture at international events because it also includes the development of relationships through which cultural knowledge is shared and interpreted (Ang *et al.*, 2015; Grincheva, 2024).

The development of cultural diplomacy reflects the recognition that culture can influence how societies perceive one another. Cultural encounters may create familiarity, challenge stereotypes and encourage interest in unfamiliar histories and social practices. Nevertheless, cultural diplomacy does not necessarily produce agreement or eliminate political differences. Its value may lie in creating channels of communication and relationships that remain useful even when governments disagree. Ang *et al.* (2015) caution against treating cultural diplomacy solely as a tool of national interest, emphasising the importance of dialogue and the broader social meanings of cultural exchange.

Cultural diplomacy can be organised through state institutions, but non-state actors play an important role. Universities, museums, libraries, cultural centres, artists, community *organizations* and diaspora networks may facilitate exchanges that government institutions cannot organise independently. Grincheva (2024) traces the development of cultural diplomacy scholarship and highlights the changing relationship between cultural institutions, digital communication and international engagement. This supports an understanding of cultural diplomacy as a network of actors rather than a programme controlled exclusively by foreign ministries.

The distinction between cultural diplomacy and cultural promotion is also important. Cultural promotion often seeks to increase awareness of a country's cultural products or attract visitors and consumers. Cultural diplomacy may include promotional activities, but its broader purpose is to build understanding and relationships. A cultural event may attract an audience without creating meaningful exchange. Conversely, a long-term academic partnership involving historians, language specialists and cultural custodians may have significant diplomatic value even if it attracts limited public attention. The quality of engagement, rather than publicity alone, is therefore a central consideration (Ang *et al.*, 2015; Grincheva, 2024; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022).

In the Nigerian context, cultural diplomacy may involve the international circulation of music, film, literature, fashion, food, heritage and educational exchange. Nigeria's creative industries provide visible examples of cultural products reaching international audiences. However, a broader approach should also consider local heritage resources that are not necessarily part of commercial cultural industries. Ezenagu (2020) identifies Nigeria’s diverse heritage resources as potential drivers of cultural tourism, while Tella (2026) examines the relationship between Nigeria’s cultural policy and soft power. These discussions create a basis for examining how the cultural resources of Biu Emirate could contribute to a more comprehensive national cultural representation.

Cultural diplomacy involving Biu should therefore be understood as a possible process of connecting local cultural knowledge with international audiences through respectful and sustained exchange. It may involve historical documentation, cultural exhibitions, academic partnerships, digital archives, language promotion and community-based cultural visits. Such activities should not be assumed to exist already; rather, they represent potential strategies that require institutional planning, community consent and reliable funding (UNESCO, 2003; Grincheva, 2024; Ezenagu, 2020).

2.5 Cultural Diplomacy and International Relations

The relationship between cultural diplomacy and international relations reflects the growing importance of non-coercive forms of influence and cooperation. Traditional approaches to international relations often emphasised military capabilities, economic resources and political alliances. Although these remain important, contemporary scholarship recognises that perceptions, values, culture and transnational relationships also affect how countries interact. Cultural diplomacy provides a means through which societies can establish connections that complement formal political and economic relationships (Nye, 2004; Ang *et al.*, 2015; Grincheva, 2024).

Cultural diplomacy may contribute to international relations by encouraging mutual understanding. When people encounter the history, literature, language, music or social practices of another society, they may develop a more informed understanding of its identity and internal diversity. Such encounters can challenge simplistic representations and create opportunities for dialogue. However, cultural understanding is not automatic. The meaning of a cultural practice may be misunderstood when it is presented without context or

when external audiences interpret it through stereotypes. Cultural exchange therefore requires interpretation and opportunities for interaction (Ang *et al.*, 2015; UNESCO, 2003).

Another dimension is institutional cooperation. Museums, universities, archives, cultural centres and research *organizations* may develop partnerships that support heritage documentation, conservation and education. Lähdesmäki and Čeginskas (2022) identify reciprocal cooperation, mutual trust and dialogue as important dimensions of heritage diplomacy. Todorović (2022) similarly examines how heritage can be incorporated into diplomatic practice and international relationships. These studies suggest that cultural heritage can provide a basis for cooperation that is not limited to the exchange of artistic performances.

The international-relations significance of cultural diplomacy is also linked to the way cultural resources are interpreted within national and international contexts. Heritage may be used to communicate national identity, but it may also reveal internal differences and historical disputes. Cultural diplomacy must therefore avoid presenting national culture as entirely uniform. The case of Biu Emirate is relevant because the wider cultural environment contains multiple communities and cultural traditions. An international presentation that recognises this plurality may provide a more accurate account of Nigerian society than one that presents a single cultural narrative as representative of the whole country (Usman, 2014, 2015; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022).

2.6 Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power

Soft power is one of the most influential concepts used to explain the relationship between culture and international influence. Nye (2004) argues that states can influence others through attraction and persuasion, rather than relying only on coercion or financial incentives. Culture is one of the resources that may contribute to attraction, alongside political values and foreign policies when these are perceived as legitimate or credible. The concept is relevant to cultural diplomacy because it explains why cultural exchange may influence perceptions and create opportunities for international engagement. However, soft power should not be treated as a simple measure of cultural popularity. A country may have internationally popular music or films without necessarily achieving corresponding political influence. Cultural products may create familiarity, admiration or interest, but the translation of these attitudes into cooperation or policy outcomes depends on several additional factors. Wüest and Nicolai (2023), in their study of cultural diplomacy and the reconfiguration of soft power in Morocco, examine how cultural diplomacy interacts with the changing practices of soft-power projection. Their work illustrates the need to analyse the relationship between cultural resources, institutional strategies and the wider political context rather than assuming that culture automatically generates influence.

Soft power also depends on the credibility of the actor projecting it. Cultural attraction may be weakened when a country's actions appear inconsistent with the values communicated through its cultural programmes. Similarly, a heritage promotion campaign may lack credibility if the communities whose traditions are being displayed are excluded from decision-making or do not benefit from the initiative. The relationship between cultural representation and institutional practice is therefore important. Soft power cannot be sustained through cultural visibility alone; it requires a degree of consistency between the image being communicated and the conduct of the institutions responsible for presenting it (Nye, 2004; Surowiec, 2021; Jiménez-Martínez, 2024).

For Nigeria, the soft-power perspective provides a framework for considering how cultural industries and local heritage may contribute to international attraction. Music, film and literature provide widely circulated cultural products, while local heritage offers opportunities for deeper historical and community-based engagement. Ezenagu (2020) demonstrates the potential relevance of heritage resources to cultural tourism in Nigeria, while Tella (2026) discusses the relationship between cultural policy and Nigeria's soft-power ambitions. These studies suggest that cultural resources should be considered within a broader institutional strategy rather than as isolated promotional opportunities.

Biu Emirate's contribution to soft power would depend on the extent to which its cultural heritage is made accessible and meaningful to external audiences. Historical publications, language documentation, cultural exhibitions, performances and heritage partnerships could create opportunities for attraction and learning.

However, these possibilities should not be described as established diplomatic outcomes. The evidence reviewed here supports the existence of cultural resources and the theoretical possibility of their contribution to international engagement; it does not establish that Biu's heritage has already changed foreign perceptions of Nigeria (Usman, 2014, 2015; Kashim *et al.*, 2025; Nye, 2004).

2.7 Cultural Diplomacy and National Image

National image refers to the perceptions and associations that people outside a country hold about its identity, people, institutions, culture, political conduct and social conditions. It is not a single or permanently fixed impression. Different audiences may hold different views of the same country because their perceptions are shaped by media exposure, education, personal experience, political interests, travel, economic relationships and cultural consumption. National image is therefore better understood as a changing set of perceptions than as a message that can be controlled completely by government campaigns (Hao *et al.*, 2021; Jiménez-Martínez, 2024).

The relationship between national image and cultural diplomacy is based on the ability of cultural encounters to introduce external audiences to aspects of a country's identity. Cultural programmes may provide opportunities to encounter a country's history, artistic traditions, languages, literature, heritage sites and social practices. These encounters may broaden existing perceptions, especially where international audiences have limited knowledge of particular regions or communities. However, the effect of cultural engagement depends on the quality of the experience and the credibility of the information communicated (Ang *et al.*, 2015; Grincheva, 2024). National image is also influenced by the relationship between representation and actual conditions. A country may communicate a positive cultural narrative, but audiences may evaluate that narrative alongside information about governance, security, human rights, economic conditions and the treatment of citizens. This means that cultural diplomacy cannot operate as a substitute for effective public institutions or responsible political conduct. It may contribute to a country's reputation, but it cannot independently resolve problems that arise from other dimensions of national life (Nye, 2004; Surowiec, 2021; Jiménez-Martínez, 2024).

The literature on nation branding also demonstrates that national image is not identical to national identity. National identity concerns the meanings and characteristics through which a society understands itself, while national image concerns how external audiences perceive the country. Nation branding attempts to connect these dimensions through communication and strategic representation, but the relationship is complex. Hao *et al.* (2021) identify fragmented conceptualisations within nation-branding research, while Tijani *et al.* (2024) review country-branding research and identify recurring themes concerning national branding campaigns and country-of-origin perceptions. These reviews suggest that image-building should be approached as a multidimensional process rather than a simple exercise in promotional communication.

For Nigeria, cultural diplomacy may contribute to national image by communicating the country's historical depth, cultural creativity and social diversity. International perceptions of Nigeria are influenced by a range of issues, and cultural representation alone cannot determine the country's overall reputation. Nevertheless, a broader cultural narrative can help external audiences understand that Nigerian society is not culturally homogeneous. The heritage of Biu Emirate could contribute to this broader representation by introducing historical and cultural experiences from Southern Borno that may receive limited attention in international cultural coverage (Ezenagu, 2020; Usman, 2015; Tella, 2026).

The value of including Biu in Nigeria's cultural representation lies partly in the opportunity to move beyond a narrow focus on highly commercialised cultural products. Popular music, film and fashion are important aspects of Nigeria's international cultural presence, but local histories, traditional institutions, indigenous lan-

guages and community practices also form part of national identity. A more inclusive approach would connect national image-building with the cultural knowledge held by communities across the country. Such an approach would be consistent with the community-centred principles of intangible heritage safeguarding and the broader understanding of cultural diplomacy as an exchange-based practice (UNESCO, 2003; Ang *et al.*, 2015; Grincheva, 2024).

2.8 Nation Branding and Cultural Representation

Nation branding refers to the deliberate communication and management of a country's identity and reputation in relation to international audiences. It has been used in discussions of tourism promotion, foreign investment, exports, international competitiveness, public diplomacy and cultural representation. However, the concept has attracted debate because countries are more complex than commercial products. A nation contains different communities, histories, political interests and social experiences that cannot easily be reduced to one brand identity (Hao *et al.*, 2021; Jiménez-Martínez, 2024).

The literature identifies different ways of understanding nation branding. Some approaches emphasise the promotion of a country's economic and tourism opportunities, while others focus on national identity, political values and international reputation. Hao *et al.* (2021) observe that nation-branding research has developed across different theoretical and methodological directions, producing a fragmented field. Their review indicates that the concept involves multiple variables and cannot be explained through a single model. Tijani *et al.* (2024) similarly identify different themes within country-branding research, demonstrating that national image and country promotion are influenced by diverse factors.

Cultural representation is important to nation branding because it provides visible expressions of national identity. Film, music, literature, food, festivals, heritage sites and traditional institutions may become part of the way a country is recognised internationally. However, the selection of cultural resources for promotion raises questions about whose identity is represented and whose cultural experience remains less visible. If national branding concentrates on a limited number of cultural products, it may create an incomplete representation of the society. A more inclusive cultural approach should acknowledge regional, linguistic and historical diversity (Ang *et al.*, 2015; Hao *et al.*, 2021; UNESCO, 2003).

In Nigeria, cultural representation can draw from the country's creative industries as well as its historical and community-based heritage. Ezenagu (2020) examines the potential of heritage resources as drivers of cultural tourism in Nigeria and identifies the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage and cultural identity. Tella (2026) addresses Nigeria's soft power and cultural diplomacy through a reconsideration of the 1988 cultural policy, highlighting the relevance of cultural policy to the country's international projection. Together, these studies support the argument that cultural diplomacy and nation branding should be linked to broader cultural policy and heritage development rather than treated as separate promotional activities.

Biu Emirate can contribute to a more plural national representation through its historical narratives, traditional institution, cultural practices and linguistic environment. The objective should not be to create a separate national identity for Biu but to communicate how its heritage forms part of Nigeria's wider cultural landscape. Such representation requires careful historical interpretation and the involvement of the communities concerned. It should also avoid presenting one cultural group or institution as the sole representative of the entire area (Usman, 2014, 2015; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022).

2.9 Cultural Heritage: Meaning, Categories and Significance

Cultural heritage refers to the historical, social, material and intangible resources that communities recognise as part of their inherited identity. It includes buildings, monuments, historic settlements, archaeological materials, landscapes, objects, traditional knowledge, language, oral traditions, performing arts, festivals, rituals and craftsmanship. Heritage may be transmitted through physical objects and locations, but it also survives through practices, memory, storytelling and everyday social relationships (UNESCO, 2003; Ezenagu, 2020).

The distinction between tangible and intangible heritage is useful for analysis, although the two categories frequently overlap. Tangible heritage includes physical structures, artefacts, monuments, historic sites and cultural landscapes. Intangible heritage includes oral traditions, language, music, dance, rituals, festive events, customary practices, knowledge systems and traditional craftsmanship. A traditional ceremony, for example, may involve physical objects and clothing while also communicating oral knowledge, social values and customary relationships. Heritage safeguarding should therefore consider both the material and non-material

dimensions of cultural expression (UNESCO, 2003). Heritage is significant because it provides communities with a sense of historical continuity and collective identity. It can connect present generations with the experiences of earlier generations and provide a basis for understanding social change. Heritage may also support education, cultural research, tourism and local economic activity. Ezenagu (2020) argues that Nigeria's heritage resources can serve as drivers of cultural tourism, while UNESCO (2003) links intangible cultural heritage with cultural diversity and sustainable development. These perspectives indicate that heritage has social, educational and economic dimensions in addition to its historical value.

The significance of heritage does not mean that every cultural practice must be preserved in an unchanged form. Cultural practices may evolve as communities respond to new circumstances, and communities themselves determine which aspects of their heritage remain meaningful. The UNESCO Convention recognises intangible heritage as living heritage and places emphasis on the communities that create, maintain and transmit it (UNESCO, 2003). This approach is particularly relevant to Biu because the region's cultural practices have developed through historical interaction, social change and the coexistence of different communities (Usman, 2014, 2015).

2.10 Tangible Cultural Heritage and the Cultural Landscape of Biu

Tangible cultural heritage consists of physical resources that provide evidence of historical settlement, social organisation, cultural expression and interaction between communities and their environment. Such resources may include historic buildings, traditional structures, monuments, archaeological materials, artefacts, cultural landscapes and sites associated with historical events. Their value depends not only on physical appearance but also on the meanings attached to them by communities and the historical information they preserve (UNESCO, 2003; Ezenagu, 2020).

The historical documentation of Biu provides a basis for considering the relationship between its physical environment and cultural identity. Usman (2015) examines the location and physical features of Biu, its settlement history, the development of its traditional polity and the relationship between communities and their environment. The book is an important source for understanding the historical and geographical context of Biu. Its extensive coverage also provides a foundation for future work on the documentation and interpretation of sites associated with the Emirate's historical development.

Cultural landscapes are particularly important because they connect the natural environment with human history and cultural practice. Hills, lakes, settlements, routes and other geographical features may carry historical, social or symbolic significance. The 2015 review of Usman's work identifies Tilla Hill and Tilla Lake among the environmental attractions discussed in relation to Biu (Tomoloju, 2015). These features may be relevant to heritage and tourism planning, although their current accessibility, conservation condition, facilities and visitor safety require independent assessment before they can be promoted as destinations.

The relationship between tangible heritage and cultural diplomacy arises when physical sites and landscapes become subjects of international research, educational exchange, conservation cooperation and cultural tourism. Heritage sites can provide opportunities for visitors to learn about local histories and community experiences. However, the promotion of such sites requires accurate interpretation, conservation planning and community participation. Lähdesmäki and Čeginskas (2022) emphasise that heritage diplomacy involves power relations and the interests of heritage communities, while Chalcraft (2021) highlights the tension between local realities and international expectations. These arguments suggest that Biu's tangible heritage should not be promoted without considering the interests of local custodians and the long-term protection of the sites concerned.

2.11 Intangible Cultural Heritage and Community Identity

Intangible cultural heritage consists of living practices, knowledge and expressions that communities recognise as part of their cultural identity. UNESCO's (2003) Convention identifies oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship as important domains of intangible cultural heritage. These forms of heritage are

transmitted between generations and are continually recreated in response to changes in the social and natural environment.

The concept is relevant because many cultural resources are not preserved in buildings or museums. They exist in language, memory, ceremonies, performance, social relationships and everyday knowledge. A community may maintain its cultural identity through storytelling, marriage practices, music, dance, food preparation, customary relationships and knowledge of the environment. These practices may be difficult to document fully because their meanings are often embedded in social relationships and local contexts. Ethnographic research and community participation are therefore important for understanding intangible heritage (UNESCO, 2003; Kashim *et al.*, 2025). The study by Kashim *et al.* (2025) illustrates the relevance of ethnographic documentation to Pabur-Bura cultural heritage in Biu Local Government Area. The authors used interviews with fifteen purposively selected cultural custodians to examine the traditional marriage ceremony and its associated stages, symbols and social values. The study demonstrates that cultural knowledge may be distributed among elders and other custodians rather than contained in a single written source. It also highlights the need to document practices in ways that preserve their meanings and social context.

The relevance of intangible heritage to cultural diplomacy lies in its capacity to communicate the lived experiences of communities. International audiences may encounter a community's history through oral narratives, music, dance, language and customary practices. However, these practices should not be separated from the people who maintain them. UNESCO (2003) emphasises community participation, while Lähdesmäki and Čeginskas (2022) argue that heritage diplomacy must recognise power relations and the interests of heritage communities. Cultural diplomacy involving Biu should therefore be based on the informed participation of cultural custodians and the communities whose knowledge is being represented.

2.12 Language, Cultural Identity and Heritage Transmission in Biu Emirate

Language is an important component of cultural identity because it carries historical memory, oral literature, indigenous knowledge, social values and distinctive ways of interpreting the world. Through language, communities transmit stories, proverbs, songs, customary rules, historical accounts and knowledge of the environment. The weakening or disappearance of a language can therefore affect more than communication; it may also interrupt the transmission of cultural knowledge and reduce the diversity of cultural expressions available to future generations (UNESCO, 2003; Usman, 2014). Usman's (2014) Language Disappearance and Cultural Diversity in Biu Emirate provides a directly relevant source for examining the relationship between language and cultural identity in Biu. The book focuses on endangered languages and linguistic diversity within the Emirate and includes bibliographic references on language disappearance, language obsolescence and language revival. Its subject is important for cultural diplomacy because language can serve as a medium through which local heritage is communicated to external audiences. It can also provide opportunities for linguistic research, educational exchange and digital documentation.

Language diversity presents both opportunities and challenges. It provides evidence of the historical and cultural plurality of a region, but it also creates practical questions concerning documentation, translation, interpretation and the selection of languages for public communication. A cultural heritage platform that uses only one language may be accessible to some audiences while excluding others. Similarly, international materials that translate cultural concepts without explanation may fail to communicate their full meanings. A multilingual strategy should therefore combine local-language materials with carefully prepared translations and explanations (Usman, 2014; UNESCO, 2003). Language safeguarding requires more than the production of dictionaries or recordings. It involves opportunities for children and young people to learn and use the language in family, educational and community settings. It may also involve the documentation of oral litera-

ture, songs, proverbs, place names and traditional knowledge. Digital platforms can support these activities, but community participation is essential in determining what is recorded, how it is interpreted and who may access it (UNESCO, 2003; Usman, 2014).

For Biu Emirate, language documentation could form part of a wider cultural diplomacy programme. Collaborative projects involving universities, language specialists, community custodians and diaspora

organizations could develop audio archives, oral-history collections, translated educational resources and language-learning materials. Such initiatives would contribute to cultural preservation while providing international researchers and learners with opportunities to engage with the linguistic heritage of Southern Borno. The potential of this approach is supported by the direct relevance of Usman's (2014) work and the community-centred safeguarding principles established by UNESCO (2003).

2.13 Oral Traditions, Historical Memory and Cultural Diplomacy

Oral traditions are important sources of historical and cultural knowledge in societies where information has been transmitted through storytelling, praise poetry, proverbs, songs, genealogies, ritual narratives and accounts maintained by elders and cultural custodians. They can preserve memories of settlement, migration, leadership, conflict, social relationships and environmental change. Oral traditions should not automatically be treated as identical to written historical records, but they provide evidence of how communities remember and interpret their past. Historical research is strengthened when oral accounts are considered alongside documentary, archaeological and archival materials (Usman, 2015; UNESCO, 2003).

The historical account of Biu provides an example of the importance of combining written documentation with oral and community-based historical knowledge. Usman (2015) examines the origin and settlement history of Biu and discusses the historical narrative associated with Yamtarawala. Tomoloju's (2015) review notes that the account draws attention to the relationship between historical reconstruction and narratives that have been transmitted within the community. The existence of different types of historical evidence requires careful interpretation, particularly where accounts differ in their explanation of origins, migration or political succession.

Oral traditions can contribute to cultural diplomacy by providing audiences with access to historical perspectives that may not be available through conventional written publications. Storytelling programmes, recorded interviews, translated narratives, oral-history exhibitions and digital archives can introduce international audiences to the historical experiences of communities. However, the recording and circulation of oral knowledge require ethical procedures. Some narratives may be restricted, some may involve sensitive family or community information, and some may be subject to differing interpretations. The consent of knowledge holders and the proper attribution of sources are therefore essential (UNESCO, 2003; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022).

In Biu, oral-history documentation could support a more comprehensive understanding of the Emirate's historical development and the experiences of its constituent communities. Such work should not assume that a single elder or institution holds the complete history of the region. It should seek a range of perspectives and compare them with published historical accounts and available archival materials. This approach would help prevent the international presentation of contested historical claims as settled facts and would strengthen the credibility of cultural diplomacy initiatives (Usman, 2015; Tomoloju, 2015).

2.14 Festivals as Instruments of Cultural Expression and Social Identity

Festivals are important forms of cultural expression through which communities may communicate collective identity, historical memory, social relationships and customary values. They may involve music, dance, costume, food, ritual, storytelling, processions and other activities that bring people together. Their significance often extends beyond entertainment because they can mark seasonal events, commemorate historical experiences, reinforce social ties and provide opportunities for the transmission of cultural knowledge. UNESCO (2003) recognises festive events as one of the domains of intangible cultural heritage, while research on cultural tourism identifies festivals and traditional practices as resources that may attract visitors interested in local culture (Ezenagu, 2020).

The study by Samaila *et al.* (2019) on the history and cultural festivals of Pabur-Bura people in Hawul provides a relevant regional example. The authors used historical and analytical methods and drew on oral interviews, archival materials, manuscripts and secondary publications. Their study examined the background, history, social organisation, political organisation and economic significance of the festivals. The research is

valuable because it documents the place of festivals in Pabur-Bura cultural life and demonstrates the importance of combining oral and written sources in historical research.

However, the geographical scope of Samaila *et al.* (2019) must be retained accurately. The study focuses on Pabur-Bura people in Hawul Local Government Area and should not be presented as a direct study of every festival in Biu Emirate. Its relevance to this article lies in its contribution to understanding the wider cultural environment of Southern Borno and the role of festivals in community identity. Further research would be required to establish the current status, organisation and meanings of specific festivals within Biu Emirate itself. Festivals may support cultural diplomacy when they create opportunities for intercultural exchange. International visitors, researchers, artists and cultural *organizations* may engage with local communities through performances, exhibitions, workshops and educational activities. Nevertheless, the international promotion of a festival should not reduce it to a spectacle for visitors. Its cultural meaning, community ownership and customary protocols should remain central. UNESCO's (2003) emphasis on community participation and the heritage-diplomacy literature's attention to power relations provide important principles for such engagement (Chalcraft, 2021; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022).

The historical discussion of the Durbar tradition in Biu also requires particular caution. The 2015 review of Usman's A History of Biu reports that the Durbar had not been held in Biu for approximately thirty years at the time of the review (Tomoloju, 2015). This historical report does not establish the current position, and it should not be used to claim that Biu presently holds an annual Durbar. Any discussion of a contemporary revival or current event would require direct confirmation from the Emirate Council and relevant cultural custodians. The present review therefore treats the Durbar as a historically reported cultural form, not as an established current annual festival.

2.15 Traditional Dance, Music and Performing Arts

Traditional dance and music are important forms of cultural expression because they communicate identity through movement, rhythm, costume, language, symbolism and collective participation. They may be associated with festivals, marriage ceremonies, seasonal activities, historical commemorations, social gatherings and other community events. Performing arts can also preserve elements of oral history and customary knowledge that may not be recorded in written form. UNESCO (2003) includes performing arts among the domains of intangible cultural heritage, recognising their role in the transmission of cultural expressions and collective identity.

Research on traditional dance in North-East Nigeria provides evidence of the cultural importance of performance among several communities. Abdullahi and Ishaku (2024) examined cultural revival and the challenges associated with traditional dances among Pabur-Bura, Glavda, Kibaku, Kilba, Marghi and Mbula communities. Their study considered whether performance traditions could contribute to unity and reconciliation among communities in the region. The authors adopted a historicist perspective and discussed the cultural significance of dance practices that had experienced neglect or changes in their social environment. The study is relevant because it connects performance with cultural memory and social relationships rather than treating dance only as entertainment.

The contribution of traditional dance to cultural diplomacy lies in its ability to create opportunities for cultural encounter. Performances may attract interest from international audiences, but their deeper value depends on whether audiences are given an opportunity to understand the meanings, histories and social contexts associated with them. A performance presented without explanation may be interpreted simply as entertainme-

nt. By contrast, a programme that combines performance with demonstrations, storytelling, discussion and interaction with cultural practitioners can support more informed engagement (Ang *et al.*, 2015; Grincheva, 2024; UNESCO, 2003).

For Biu Emirate, traditional music and dance may form part of a wider cultural documentation and exchange programme. Such a programme would need to identify the specific communities associated with particular forms of performance, the circumstances in which they are practised and the cultural protocols governing their

presentation. The multi-community focus of Abdullahi and Ishaku (2024) demonstrates why practices should be attributed accurately rather than presented as belonging to Biu alone. Community consultation would also be necessary to determine whether a particular performance is appropriate for public presentation or should remain within its customary setting.

The use of performance for cultural diplomacy should also consider the risk of cultural commodification. When cultural practices are adapted exclusively to meet the expectations of tourists or international audiences, their original meanings may be altered or simplified. This does not mean that cultural practices cannot evolve or be presented in new settings. Rather, it means that communities should retain the authority to determine how their heritage is interpreted and shared. The principles of community participation established by UNESCO (2003) and the critical approach to heritage diplomacy developed by Lähdesmäki and Čeginskas (2022) provide a basis for this position.

2.16 Marriage Customs and Everyday Cultural Heritage

Marriage customs provide an important example of intangible cultural heritage because they involve social relationships, family obligations, customary practices, symbolic exchanges and the transmission of values. They may communicate ideas about kinship, responsibility, respect, family identity and community belonging. Unlike major public festivals, marriage practices are often embedded in private and family settings, although some stages may involve wider community participation. Their cultural significance therefore requires interpretation within the social context in which they are practised (UNESCO, 2003).

Kashim *et al.* (2025) examined the Pabur-Bura cultural marriage ceremony in Biu Local Government Area through a qualitative ethnographic design. The authors collected information through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with fifteen purposively selected cultural custodians and analysed the material thematically. The study describes a multi-stage marital process involving symbolic rituals, material exchanges and socio-cultural values. Its importance for the present article lies in its direct geographical relevance to Biu Local Government Area and its documentation of knowledge held by cultural custodians.

The study also demonstrates the vulnerability of cultural knowledge where transmission depends heavily on oral communication and the participation of older generations. Kashim *et al.* (2025) identify modernization, generational disconnection and limitations in oral transmission as concerns affecting the continuity of the practices examined. These concerns are consistent with the broader safeguarding framework of UNESCO (2003), which recognises the importance of transmission between generations and the participation of communities in identifying and maintaining their intangible cultural heritage.

Marriage customs may contribute to cultural diplomacy through ethnographic publications, educational exhibitions, documentary films and carefully designed cultural-learning programmes. However, unlike some public performances, marriage ceremonies may contain practices that are private or restricted. Their international documentation should therefore be based on informed consent and should respect the boundaries established by the people involved. Researchers and cultural institutions should not assume that every stage of a marriage ceremony is available for public display simply because it is culturally significant (Kashim *et al.*, 2025; UNESCO, 2003).

The Pabur-Bura marriage study also demonstrates the importance of distinguishing between a cultural practice and the institution responsible for it. The study concerns Pabur-Bura marriage practices in Biu Local Government Area; it does not establish that the Biu Emirate Council administers every stage of the ceremony or that the practice is identical across all communities in the Emirate. This distinction is important for a culturally accurate review and for any future programme that seeks to present Biu's heritage to international audiences.

2.17 Traditional Institutions and Cultural Heritage Management

Traditional institutions are important in the study of cultural heritage because they may maintain historical continuity, customary knowledge, social legitimacy and recognised forms of community leadership. Their

cultural roles can include the preservation of historical narratives, support for ceremonies, mediation of community relationships and recognition of customary practices. The nature and extent of these roles differ across societies and are shaped by historical developments, constitutional arrangements and contemporary governance structures (Usman, 2015). The historical development of Biu's traditional institution is documented in Usman's (2015) account of Biu. The book discusses the development of the traditional polity and the historical changes that shaped its administration. Such documentation is important because traditional institutions do not operate outside history; their structures and responsibilities have been affected by political change, colonial administration and post-independence governance. An accurate account of their contemporary cultural role must therefore distinguish historical authority from present-day administrative and legal responsibilities.

Traditional institutions may contribute to heritage management by identifying cultural custodians, supporting documentation initiatives, facilitating access to historical knowledge and encouraging intergenerational transmission. They may also provide a recognised platform through which government agencies, researchers and community *organizations* can consult about cultural matters. However, heritage management requires technical and administrative capabilities that may extend beyond the mandate or resources of a traditional institution. These include conservation planning, archival management, intellectual-property arrangements, tourism development, digital preservation and international communication (UNESCO, 2003; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022).

The relationship between traditional institutions and public administration is therefore best understood through institutional collaboration. The Emirate may provide cultural legitimacy and local knowledge, while government agencies provide policy direction and public infrastructure. Universities may contribute research and documentation skills, and community *organizations* may support participation and accountability. Eyisi *et al.* (2021), in their study of tourism development in South-Eastern Nigeria, emphasise collaboration and community participation as important elements of tourism planning. Although their geographical case differs from Biu, their findings provide a relevant Nigerian perspective on the need for stakeholder cooperation.

Traditional institutions should also be considered in relation to cultural inclusion. The presence of multiple communities within the wider Biu cultural environment means that heritage programmes should not assume that all cultural knowledge is held by one institution or represented by one group. The role of traditional leadership should be combined with the participation of community custodians, historians, language specialists, women, young people, performers and other relevant groups. Such an approach would be consistent with UNESCO's (2003) community-participation principle and with the heritage-diplomacy literature's concern for power relations and representation (Chalcraft, 2021; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022).

2.18 Heritage Diplomacy: Concept and Development

Heritage diplomacy refers to the use of cultural heritage within international relationships and diplomatic practice. It includes cooperation in heritage conservation, the exchange of expertise, joint research, cultural exhibitions, educational partnerships and the use of heritage narratives to develop relationships between countries and communities. The concept has gained attention because heritage is increasingly recognised as more than a domestic cultural asset; it can also become a subject of international cooperation, dialogue and political representation (Chalcraft, 2021; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022; Todorović, 2022).

Chalcraft (2021) examines heritage diplomacy as a contact zone in which local realities interact with transnational themes and international expectations. This perspective is important because heritage projects

may involve actors with different priorities. Local communities may be concerned with cultural continuity, customary access and the protection of sacred knowledge, while government agencies may prioritise national visibility, tourism or economic development. International partners may focus on conservation standards, research outputs or global heritage recognition. These priorities may complement one another, but they can also create tension.

Lähdesmäki and Čeginskas (2022) provide a conceptual review of heritage diplomacy scholarship based on an analysis of 57 publications. Their review identifies the importance of heritage diplomacy as a field concerned with cultural heritage, power and international relationships. They note that much of the scholarship has focused on tangible heritage and conservation, while the diplomatic use of intangible cultural heritage has received less attention. This observation is relevant to Biu because many of the cultural resources discussed in the local literature involve language, oral history, marriage customs, festivals and performing arts rather than only physical monuments.

Todorović (2022) further develops a practice-based understanding of heritage diplomacy and distinguishes between incorporating heritage into diplomatic relations and using heritage as an instrument of diplomatic engagement. His discussion demonstrates that heritage may support soft-power activities and international cooperation, but its diplomatic use depends on how it is organised and interpreted. Heritage diplomacy should therefore not be reduced to the simple promotion of historical sites or cultural events.

For Biu Emirate, heritage diplomacy could involve partnerships between local institutions and international universities, museums, archives, cultural *organizations* and heritage specialists. Such partnerships might support oral-history documentation, language preservation, archival digitisation, cultural exhibitions and collaborative research. They could also create opportunities for international scholars and students to engage with Biu's history and cultural diversity. These are potential pathways rather than evidence of existing formal programmes. Their feasibility would depend on institutional capacity, community consent and the availability of appropriate partners (Chalcraft, 2021; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022; Todorović, 2022).

2.19 Cultural Tourism and Heritage-Based Development

Cultural tourism involves travel motivated by an interest in the history, cultural practices, heritage sites, artistic expressions and everyday life of a destination. It may include visits to historic settlements, museums, monuments, festivals, traditional performances, cultural landscapes and community-based heritage activities. Cultural tourism is relevant to cultural diplomacy because it creates opportunities for direct interaction between visitors and host communities. Unlike some forms of media communication, tourism allows visitors to encounter cultural settings and interact with people who maintain the heritage being presented (Ezenagu, 2020).

Ezenagu (2020) examines heritage resources as drivers of cultural tourism in Nigeria and discusses the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage and visitor experiences. The article identifies the country's diverse heritage resources as part of its cultural identity and national pride. It also explains how traditional practices, festivities and cultural landscapes may provide opportunities for tourists to experience aspects of local culture. The study provides a Nigerian context for considering heritage tourism as a possible avenue for cultural promotion.

However, the existence of heritage resources does not automatically produce sustainable tourism. Tourism development depends on transport, accommodation, sanitation, safety, visitor information, trained guides, conservation, marketing and coordination among stakeholders. Poorly managed tourism can create environmental pressure, cultural commodification and unequal distribution of benefits. Eyisi *et al.* (2021) emphasise collaboration and community participation in tourism development in South-Eastern Nigeria, demonstrating the importance of listening to different stakeholders and incorporating their concerns into planning.

The relationship between cultural tourism and cultural diplomacy is strongest when tourism is connected to education and meaningful exchange. A visitor who receives historical interpretation, interacts respectfully with local cultural practitioners and learns about the social context of a cultural practice may develop a more informed understanding of the destination. By contrast, a visit based only on entertainment or superficial observation may have limited educational value. This distinction reinforces the importance of interpretation, community involvement and responsible visitor management (Ezenagu, 2020; Eyisi *et al.*, 2021; UNESCO, 2003).

In Biu, cultural tourism could potentially connect historical interpretation, cultural learning and environmental attractions. Usman (2015) provides a historical basis for understanding the Emirate, while Tomoloju (2015) identifies natural attractions such as Tilla Hill and Tilla Lake in the discussion of Biu. These resources could be considered within a wider heritage-tourism assessment. However, their current condition, accessibility, visitor facilities, environmental management and safety must be verified before specific tourism products are proposed.

A community-centred tourism model would require the participation of local residents, cultural custodians, traditional institutions, tourism operators, government agencies and relevant businesses. Local communities should have a role in deciding which cultural activities are suitable for visitors, how they are interpreted and how benefits are distributed. The principles of community participation identified by UNESCO (2003) and the Nigerian tourism research of Eyisi *et al.* (2021) provide a basis for this approach.

2.20 Community Participation and Cultural Ownership

Community participation is a central principle in contemporary heritage safeguarding because cultural practices are created, maintained and transmitted by people rather than by institutions alone. Government agencies, museums and traditional authorities may provide support, but the knowledge and authority of cultural custodians remain essential. UNESCO's (2003) Convention specifically calls for the widest possible participation of communities, groups and individuals in safeguarding activities and encourages their active involvement in heritage management.

Community participation involves more than inviting residents to attend cultural events. It includes involving them in decisions about what should be documented, who may access cultural materials, how cultural practices are represented and how any economic benefits are distributed. It also requires recognising differences within communities. Women, young people, elders, artists, religious groups and other stakeholders may have different experiences and priorities concerning heritage. A participatory approach should provide opportunities for these voices to be heard rather than assuming that one representative can speak for everyone (UNESCO, 2003; Eyisi *et al.*, 2021).

The literature on heritage diplomacy also highlights the importance of power and representation. Lähdesmäki and Čeginskas (2022) identify power asymmetry and the interests of heritage communities as important dimensions of heritage diplomacy. Chalcraft (2021) similarly shows that heritage projects can involve different expectations between local communities and international actors. These arguments are important for Biu because the promotion of cultural heritage may involve decisions about historical narratives, community representation, access to cultural knowledge and the use of cultural materials in tourism or media.

Community ownership also has an economic dimension. Where cultural heritage is used to attract visitors, organise performances or produce commercial materials, communities should have clear information about sponsorship, fees, copyright and revenue-sharing arrangements. Cultural promotion should not lead to the extraction of community knowledge without recognition or benefit. The development of transparent arrangements would strengthen trust and support the long-term sustainability of heritage initiatives (UNESCO, 2003; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022).

For Biu Emirate, community participation should be reflected in any heritage documentation or cultural diplomacy initiative. The Emirate Council may provide an important institutional platform, but cultural custodians and representatives of different communities should be involved in identifying and interpreting their own heritage. This approach would reduce the risk of misrepresentation and support the development of cultural programmes that are meaningful to the people whose traditions are being shared.

2.21 Digital Cultural Diplomacy and Online Heritage Representation

Digital communication has expanded the ways in which cultural heritage can be documented and presented to international audiences. Websites, social media platforms, online exhibitions, digital archives, podcasts, short documentaries and virtual learning resources can make cultural information accessible beyond geographical

boundaries. Digital platforms may also support the preservation of oral histories, photographs, language materials, music, dance and historical records. Their significance has increased as cultural diplomacy increasingly operates in an environment shaped by digital communication and transnational networks (Grincheva, 2024; Jiménez-Martínez, 2024). Digital cultural diplomacy can support both communication and participation. Online platforms can introduce audiences to cultural practices, provide access to historical resources and facilitate dialogue between researchers and communities. Universities and cultural *organizations* can use digital resources to develop educational materials, online exhibitions and collaborative research projects. Diaspora networks may also contribute by sharing family histories, photographs, language knowledge and other cultural materials. Such activities can extend the reach of local heritage without requiring every interaction to take place through physical travel (Grincheva, 2024).

However, digital visibility does not automatically guarantee accurate representation or meaningful engagement. Short videos and social-media posts may remove cultural practices from their historical context, encourage superficial interpretation or circulate inaccurate information. Digital materials may also be copied or commercially reused without permission. These risks are particularly important where cultural knowledge is sensitive, restricted or associated with particular families and custodians. UNESCO's (2003) principles of community participation and respect for customary access should therefore guide digital documentation.

A digital heritage initiative for Biu could begin with an inventory of existing publications, historical photographs, oral-history materials, cultural recordings and linguistic resources. Materials could be organised into thematic collections covering history, traditional administration, language, community practices, performance, festivals and environmental heritage. Each item should include accurate information about its origin, creator, date, language, location and conditions of use. Community consent and copyright arrangements should be established before materials are uploaded or circulated. Digital heritage should also be multilingual where possible. Local-language recordings can preserve original expressions, while translations and explanatory notes can make the materials accessible to wider audiences. This would be particularly useful in the context of Usman's (2014) work on language disappearance and cultural diversity in Biu Emirate. A multilingual archive could support language learning, historical research and cultural education while introducing international audiences to the linguistic diversity of the area.

2.22 Cultural Diplomacy, Education and Academic Exchange

Education is an important channel of cultural diplomacy because it creates opportunities for sustained interaction between students, researchers, teachers and institutions from different societies. Educational exchange may involve scholarships, university partnerships, joint research, language programmes, visiting lectures, conferences, museum education and collaborative publication. Unlike occasional promotional events, academic relationships can provide continuing opportunities for knowledge exchange and mutual understanding (Cull, 2022; Melissen, 2005). Heritage research can form part of these educational relationships. Universities may collaborate with traditional institutions and community *organizations* to document oral histories, preserve languages, study cultural practices and develop educational materials. Such projects can produce benefits for both academic research and local heritage safeguarding. The heritage-diplomacy literature emphasises the importance of knowledge exchange and cooperation, particularly where cultural resources require specialist documentation and conservation (Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022; Todorović, 2022).

For Biu Emirate, academic exchange could involve research on the historical development of the traditional institution, linguistic diversity, cultural festivals, oral traditions, marriage practices and the social history of Southern Borno. Usman's (2014, 2015) publications provide a documentary foundation, while studies by Samaila *et al.* (2019), Abdullahi and Ishaku (2024), and Kashim *et al.* (2025) offer specific research directions. Future collaborations could extend these studies through comparative research, updated field documentation

and international academic exchange.

Educational partnerships should not be designed solely to collect information for external researchers. They should include local capacity development, access to research outputs, training for community researchers and opportunities for local scholars to participate in publication and dissemination. This would strengthen the

relationship between research institutions and heritage communities and reduce the risk of extractive research practices. The approach is consistent with UNESCO's (2003) emphasis on community participation and the reciprocal understanding of heritage diplomacy developed by Lähdesmäki and Čeginskas (2022).

2.23 Cultural Diplomacy and Diaspora Engagement

Diaspora communities can contribute to cultural diplomacy because they maintain social, cultural and economic relationships with both their country of origin and their countries of residence. Members of the diaspora may communicate cultural knowledge, support educational and heritage projects, organise cultural events, develop professional networks and facilitate exchanges between institutions. Their position across different societies can provide opportunities for cultural understanding and transnational cooperation. Diaspora engagement is relevant to Biu because individuals and families with connections to the Emirate may reside in other Nigerian states and outside the country. They may maintain relationships with family histories, language, customary practices and community *organizations*. These connections could support oral-history documentation, digital archives, cultural exhibitions, academic research and the dissemination of local publications. Such activities would need to be organised in cooperation with local custodians to ensure that diaspora representations remain accurate and respectful.

Diaspora involvement should not be treated as a replacement for local participation. People living outside the community may have valuable knowledge and resources, but their experiences may differ from those of residents and current cultural practitioners. A responsible programme should therefore create channels through which diaspora members and local communities can exchange information and agree on how heritage materials should be represented. This approach is consistent with the relationship-based understanding of cultural diplomacy and the community-centred principles of heritage safeguarding (Ang *et al.*, 2015; UNESCO, 2003).

2.24 Nigeria's Cultural Policy and Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural policy provides the institutional framework through which governments support the preservation, development, communication and use of cultural resources. It may address heritage conservation, creative industries, museums, festivals, cultural education, language, tourism and international cultural cooperation. Cultural policy is relevant to cultural diplomacy because international cultural engagement requires domestic institutions capable of identifying, safeguarding and supporting the cultural resources being presented abroad. Tella (2026) examines Nigeria's soft power and cultural diplomacy through a reconsideration of the 1988 cultural policy. The article identifies a gap in scholarship concerning the relationship between Nigeria's cultural policy and its soft-power projection. It discusses the relevance of cultural exports and the role of cultural policy in supporting Nigeria's international presence. Because the publication is identified as accepted/in press in the available academic record, its final volume, issue and page details should be checked before the reference is used in a submitted manuscript. University of Johannesburg

The relationship between cultural policy and national image should be understood as a two-way process. Cultural policy supports the preservation and development of cultural resources, while international cultural engagement may create demand for further documentation, investment and institutional cooperation. However, international promotion should not take priority over safeguarding. A country that promotes cultural heritage without supporting the communities that maintain it risks weakening the very resources on which its cultural diplomacy depends (UNESCO, 2003; Ang *et al.*, 2015).

Nigeria's cultural diplomacy can also benefit from a more geographically inclusive approach. Cultural resources in different regions should be considered as part of the country's broader cultural representation rather than as isolated local activities. Ezenagu (2020) identifies the potential of Nigeria's heritage resources for cultural tourism, while the studies of Biu and Southern Borno provide examples of local historical and cultural knowledge that could contribute to this wider picture (Abdullahi & Ishaku, 2024; Kashim *et al.*, 2025; Samaila *et al.*, 2019; Usman, 2015).

For Biu Emirate, the policy question concerns how local heritage can be connected to state and national cultural institutions without removing community ownership. This may involve support for historical documentation, cultural education, digital preservation, tourism planning and international partnerships. It also requires coordination between the traditional institution, relevant government agencies, educational institutions and community *organizations*. A coherent policy framework would help ensure that cultural promotion is linked to long-term safeguarding and institutional development rather than depending only on occasional events.

2.25 Institutional Capacity and the Administration of Cultural Diplomacy

Institutional capacity refers to the ability of *organizations* to plan, coordinate, implement, monitor and sustain programmes within their areas of responsibility. In cultural diplomacy, institutional capacity may involve personnel, funding, research expertise, communication systems, cultural infrastructure, legal arrangements, partnerships and administrative procedures. A cultural initiative may have strong public interest but still fail to produce sustained outcomes if the institutions responsible for its lack the resources or coordination required for implementation. Cultural heritage management involves several technical responsibilities. These may include documentation, conservation, archival management, interpretation, visitor services, intellectual-property protection and community consultation. UNESCO (2003) identifies education, awareness-raising and capacity-building as important measures for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. It also encourages the development of documentation institutions and the participation of communities in heritage management. These provisions demonstrate that heritage safeguarding requires more than public recognition; it requires institutional systems capable of supporting long-term practice. The institutional requirements for cultural diplomacy are also evident in the literature on heritage diplomacy. Lähdesmäki and Čeginskas (2022) identify cooperation, knowledge exchange and power relations as important dimensions of heritage diplomacy, while Todorović (2022) examines the practical ways heritage can be incorporated into diplomatic relationships. These studies suggest that cultural diplomacy requires *organizations* capable of maintaining partnerships and managing the relationships that develop around cultural resources.

In Biu, institutional capacity would involve the ability of the Emirate and relevant partners to coordinate cultural documentation, identify custodians, support research, manage cultural events and develop relationships with educational and cultural institutions. The Emirate Council may provide an important platform for cultural coordination, but technical responsibilities would require collaboration with government agencies, universities, museums, archives, cultural associations and tourism *organizations*. This would help distribute responsibilities according to institutional competence and avoid placing unrealistic expectations on a single institution.

Institutional coordination should also include clear accountability arrangements. Cultural programmes may involve public funds, sponsorship, visitor fees, commercial partnerships and the use of community knowledge. Transparent procedures are necessary to clarify who makes decisions, who controls cultural materials, how resources are allocated and how benefits are shared. Such arrangements would strengthen institutional trust and help protect communities from the unauthorized use of their heritage.

2.26 Funding, Sustainability and Cultural Heritage Promotion

Funding is a major consideration in the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. Documentation projects, archives, exhibitions, training, cultural events, conservation and tourism infrastructure all require financial and technical resources. Funding may come from government budgets, universities, cultural foundations, development *organizations*, private-sector partnerships, diaspora contributions and international heritage programmes. However, the availability of funding does not guarantee sustainability. Initiatives require realistic planning, transparent management and long-term maintenance arrangements. The UNESCO Convent-

ion provides a framework for state action in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and encourages measures that support education, awareness, documentation and capacity development (UNESCO, 2003). The heritage-diplomacy literature also demonstrates that international cooperation may involve material assistance, funding

and knowledge exchange, although such arrangements may create power imbalances if local communities are not involved in decision-making (Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022; Todorović, 2022).

For Biu, funding priorities could include historical and oral-history documentation, language preservation, community archives, cultural education, training for guides and interpreters, and the conservation of relevant heritage sites. These activities should be prioritised through consultation rather than determined only by the interests of external sponsors. The financial model should also distinguish between public heritage safeguarding and commercial cultural activities. Not every cultural practice should be commercialized, and some forms of heritage may require protection from unrestricted public access. Sustainability requires attention to maintenance and local capacity. A digital archive, for example, needs secure storage, technical support, content management and clear access policies. A cultural centre requires staff, utilities, programming and maintenance. A festival requires planning, community participation, safety arrangements and resources beyond the event date. Funding proposals should therefore include recurring costs and measures for local ownership rather than focusing exclusively on initial project activities.

2.27 Cultural Diplomacy, Cultural Authenticity and the Risk of Commodification

Cultural authenticity is a contested concept because cultural practices change over time and may be interpreted differently by different groups. Some approaches treat authenticity as the preservation of an unchanged historical form, while others recognise that communities continually adapt their traditions in response to social and environmental change. The UNESCO (2003) framework recognises intangible cultural heritage as living heritage that is recreated by communities across generations. This perspective discourages the assumption that cultural preservation requires freezing practices in an unchanging form. Commodification occurs when cultural practices are treated primarily as products for sale or consumption. Cultural tourism and international promotion may create economic opportunities, but they can also encourage the simplification of traditions to meet visitor expectations. A ceremony may be shortened, a performance may be altered, or a cultural narrative may be presented without its historical context. Such changes are not automatically harmful, but they raise questions about who controls the representation and whether the community continues to regard the practice as meaningful.

The literature on heritage diplomacy provides a useful basis for understanding these tensions. Chalcraft (2021) highlights the differences that may arise between local realities and international expectations, while Lähdesmäki and Čeginskas (2022) identify power asymmetry and the interests of heritage communities as central concerns. These perspectives suggest that international cultural promotion should not be driven only by external demand. Community custodians should have a role in deciding what is shared, how it is interpreted and under what conditions.

For Biu Emirate, the issue is particularly important where cultural practices involve private family arrangements, customary restrictions or knowledge held by particular custodians. The documentation of Pabur-Bura marriage practices by Kashim *et al.* (2025), for example, provides evidence of the importance of ethnographic research but does not imply that every element of the ceremony should be made available for tourism or public display. Cultural diplomacy should respect the distinction between documenting heritage for safeguarding and commercialising it for external consumption.

2.28 Security, Accessibility and the Practical Conditions for Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy is influenced by the practical conditions under which cultural exchange takes place. Visitors, researchers and cultural *organizations* require reliable information, safe access, appropriate accommodation, transport, communication and institutional support. Cultural sites may have substantial historical significance but remain difficult to access because of inadequate infrastructure, limited facilities or environmental challenges. These conditions affect whether cultural resources can be presented responsibly to external audiences.

Tourism research demonstrates that the development of cultural destinations requires coordination among public authorities, private operators and local communities. Eyisi *et al.* (2021) emphasise collaboration and

stakeholder participation in tourism development in South-Eastern Nigeria, while Ezenagu (2020) discusses the potential of heritage resources as drivers of cultural tourism. These studies provide a basis for recognising that cultural attraction alone is insufficient to establish a viable destination.

For Biu, any proposal for international cultural visits should be preceded by an assessment of access, safety, visitor facilities, transport, accommodation, communication and the condition of relevant sites. The existence of a cultural or natural attraction should not be treated as proof that it is ready for organised international tourism. Local authorities and relevant site managers would need to provide current information and determine the practical conditions under which visits could take place. Digital engagement can provide an alternative or complementary channel where physical access is limited. Online exhibitions, recorded interviews, virtual learning resources and digital archives may introduce Biu's heritage to international audiences without requiring immediate travel. Nevertheless, digital programmes should complement rather than replace community participation and physical heritage safeguarding. Their content must also be accurate, consent-based and properly maintained (Grincheva, 2024; UNESCO, 2003).

2.29 Measuring the Contribution of Cultural Diplomacy to National Image

The evaluation of cultural diplomacy is challenging because its outcomes may be indirect, gradual and difficult to attribute to a single programme. Attendance at a cultural event, online views or media coverage may demonstrate visibility, but they do not necessarily establish that audiences have developed greater understanding, trust or positive perceptions. A credible evaluation should distinguish between programme outputs, immediate audience responses and longer-term relationship outcomes (Cull, 2022; Grincheva, 2024). Possible output indicators include the number of cultural exchanges, exhibitions, publications, educational partnerships, documented heritage resources and participating institutions. Audience indicators may include visitor feedback, knowledge gained, changes in awareness and the quality of interaction with cultural practitioners. Longer-term indicators may involve repeat partnerships, collaborative research, sustained diaspora engagement and evidence of continuing relationships between participating institutions.

The measurement of national image requires particular caution. A positive response to a cultural programme does not necessarily mean that a participant's overall perception of Nigeria has changed. Other factors, including political events, media coverage, economic conditions and personal experiences, may influence national image. Hao *et al.* (2021) and Tijani *et al.* (2024) demonstrate the complexity of nation-branding research and the variety of approaches used to examine country image and branding. This suggests that any evaluation of Biu's contribution to Nigeria's image should use clearly defined indicators and avoid attributing broad reputational changes to isolated cultural activities. Future research could use pre- and post-event surveys, interviews with international visitors, analysis of media representation, partnership records and longitudinal audience studies. Such methods would help determine whether cultural engagement produces changes in knowledge, attitudes or relationships. Until such evidence is available, the contribution of Biu's heritage should be described as a potential rather than a demonstrated improvement in Nigeria's international image.

2.30 Empirical Literature Review

The empirical literature relevant to this article can be organized into four broad areas: historical documentation of Biu, studies of cultural practices in Southern Borno, research on Nigerian heritage and tourism, and international scholarship on cultural diplomacy and heritage diplomacy. These areas provide complementary evidence, although they differ in their research questions, methods and geographical coverage.

2.30.1 Historical and Cultural Documentation of Biu

Usman (2015) provides an extensive historical account of Biu in A History of Biu. The 693-page book covers the geographical setting, origin narratives, settlement history, traditional administration, social organization and cultural experiences of Biu. Its significance lies in the breadth of its historical documentation and its contribution to making local history accessible through a substantial written publication. For the present

article, the book provides the principal historical foundation for understanding Biu Emirate and its traditional institution.

Usman (2014) examines language disappearance and cultural diversity in Biu Emirate. The publication is directly relevant to the relationship between language and cultural identity because it addresses endangered languages, language obsolescence and language revival in the Emirate. Its contribution to this review is the recognition that cultural diversity is not sustained by public ceremonies alone; it also depends on the continued transmission of languages and the knowledge embedded within them. This is important for cultural diplomacy because language documentation can provide material for educational exchange, digital archives and international research.

Tomoloju (2015) reviewed Usman's historical publication and discussed its treatment of Biu's location, people, historical development and cultural setting. The review identifies the breadth of the book and highlights the historical narrative associated with Yamtarawala. It also draws attention to the historical and cultural significance of the Biu area. Since Tomoloju's publication is a review rather than the primary historical monograph, its claims should be checked against Usman's book where possible.

These publications provide a significant documentary foundation, but they do not directly investigate Biu Emirate's role in international cultural diplomacy. Their main contribution is historical and cultural documentation. The present article builds on this foundation by connecting the documented heritage to the concepts of soft power, national image and heritage diplomacy.

2.30.2 Studies on Baur-Pabur-Bura Cultural Festivals

Samaila *et al.* (2019) investigated the history and cultural festivals of Pabur-Bura people in Hawul Local Government Area of Borno State. The authors used historical and analytical methods, drawing on oral interviews, archival materials, manuscripts and secondary publications. Their study examined the historical background of the festivals and their social, political and economic organization. It is important because it demonstrates that festivals form part of the cultural and social life of Pabur-Bura communities in Southern Borno. The study contributes to the present review by providing evidence that cultural festivals may serve functions beyond entertainment. They may reinforce social relationships, express community identity and support economic activities. These dimensions are relevant to cultural diplomacy because they indicate that festivals can provide platforms for cultural exchange and interpretation. However, the geographical focus on Hawul must be retained. The study should not be used as direct evidence of the current organization of festivals within Biu Emirate.

2.30.3 Studies on Traditional Dance and Cultural Revival

Abdullahi and Ishaku (2024) examined challenges associated with the cultural revival of traditional dances among Pabur-Bura, Glavda, Kibaku, Kilba, Marghi and Mbula communities in North-East Nigeria. The study considered the cultural significance of dance and its potential relationship with unity and reconciliation. Its findings suggest that traditional dances may have a role in cultural revival and social relationships among the communities studied. The relevance of this study lies in its treatment of performance as a cultural and social practice. Dance can transmit historical memory, community values and forms of collective expression. The study also provides a basis for considering how performance traditions might be presented within cultural exchange programmes. However, the study covers several communities and should not be interpreted as evidence that all the dances examined belong exclusively to Biu Emirate.

2.30.4 Ethnographic Study of Pabur-Bura Marriage Practices

Kashim *et al.* (2025) examined the Pabur-Bura cultural marriage ceremony in Biu Local Government Area through a qualitative ethnographic design. The authors conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with fifteen purposively selected cultural custodians and analyzed the resulting material thematically. The study describes a multi-stage marital process involving symbolic rituals, material exchanges and socio-cultural values. It also identifies modernization, generational disconnection and limitations in oral transmission as

concerns affecting the continuity of the practices examined. The study is particularly important because it provides recent, geographically relevant evidence of cultural practices in Biu Local Government Area. It also demonstrates the value of consulting cultural custodians when documenting intangible heritage. Its contribution to the present article is therefore both substantive and methodological: it identifies specific cultural knowledge that may be relevant to heritage safeguarding and demonstrates an approach to collecting and analysing such knowledge. Nevertheless, the study does not examine cultural diplomacy or measure the international visibility of Pabur-Bura marriage practices. It therefore supports the discussion of heritage documentation and cultural identity but cannot be used to claim that the practices have already improved Nigeria's international image.

2.30.5 Research on Heritage Resources and Cultural Tourism in Nigeria

Ezenagu (2020) examined heritage resources as a driver for cultural tourism in Nigeria. The article discusses the diversity of Nigeria's tangible and intangible heritage and their relationship with cultural identity, national pride and tourism. It identifies the potential of traditional practices, festivities and cultural landscapes to attract visitors interested in experiencing local culture. The study is relevant because it provides a Nigerian context for understanding how heritage may support cultural tourism. Its argument also creates a connection between local cultural resources and broader national representation. However, it does not provide direct evidence about tourism development in Biu Emirate. Its findings are therefore used as a national-level conceptual and contextual reference rather than as proof of specific tourism outcomes in Biu.

Eyisi *et al.* (2021) examined collaboration and community participation in tourism development in South-Eastern Nigeria. Their study emphasises the importance of stakeholder collaboration and the need to listen to different community perspectives in tourism planning. Although the geographical case differs from Borno State, the research is relevant to the present article because it provides evidence from the Nigerian tourism sector concerning the importance of participation and cooperation. It supports the argument that heritage-based tourism in Biu should involve local communities and relevant institutions.

2.30.6 Research on Heritage Diplomacy

Chalcraft (2021) examined heritage diplomacy through the idea of contact zones, where local realities interact with transnational themes and international expectations. The study is relevant because it demonstrates that heritage projects involve different actors whose interests may not always be identical. Local communities may prioritise cultural continuity, while international partners may emphasise conservation, visibility or development outcomes. The article therefore provides a useful framework for analysing the relationships that may emerge when Biu's heritage is promoted internationally. Lähdesmäki and Čeginskas (2022) reviewed scholarship on heritage diplomacy and examined the ways in which the concept is understood in academic literature. Their review of 57 publications identified the importance of heritage diplomacy as a field involving heritage, power, international relationships and cooperation. The authors also observed that the use of intangible cultural heritage in heritage diplomacy had received less attention than tangible heritage. This observation provides a specific justification for examining language, festivals, oral traditions and marriage practices in the context of Biu Emirate. Todorović (2022) developed a practice-based study of heritage diplomacy and examined how heritage is incorporated into international relationships and used in diplomatic practice. The study demonstrates that heritage can support soft power and international cooperation, but its diplomatic role depends on the way it is organised and mobilised. It is relevant to the present article because it provides a conceptual bridge between the local heritage resources documented in Biu and the wider practice of international engagement.

2.30.7 Research on Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power

Ang *et al.* (2015) examined cultural diplomacy beyond the narrow pursuit of national interest. Their argument is important because it challenges the assumption that cultural exchange should be evaluated only by its contribution to a state's strategic objectives. The article highlights the broader role of cultural diplomacy in

dialogue and international relationships. It supports the present review's emphasis on mutual understanding and community participation. Grincheva (2024) examined the development of cultural diplomacy scholarship through a review of the evolution of the field. The article provides a broad account of how cultural diplomacy has developed and how its practices have changed in response to political, institutional and technological developments. Its relevance lies in showing that cultural diplomacy is not a fixed activity but a changing field involving different actors and forms of communication.

Wüest and Nicolai (2023) examined cultural diplomacy and the reconfiguration of soft power through evidence from Morocco. Their work is relevant because it explores the relationship between cultural diplomacy and the changing strategies through which states seek to generate international attraction. Although Morocco's historical and political context differs from Nigeria's, the study provides a comparative perspective on the institutional and strategic dimensions of cultural diplomacy. Nye (2004) provides the theoretical foundation for understanding soft power through attraction and persuasion. His work is not an empirical study of Biu or Nigeria, but it offers the conceptual framework through which the possible international relevance of cultural resources can be examined. The present article uses the theory cautiously, distinguishing between the existence of cultural resources, their international visibility and any demonstrated influence on external audiences.

2.30.8 Synthesis of the Empirical Literature

The reviewed literature establishes several points. First, Biu Emirate has a substantial historical and cultural record documented in published historical works (Usman, 2014, 2015). Second, research on Pabur-Bura festivals, traditional dances and marriage practices demonstrates the continuing significance of cultural practices in Southern Borno and Biu Local Government Area (Abdullahi & Ishaku, 2024; Kashim *et al.*, 2025; Samaila *et al.*, 2019). Third, Nigerian research identifies the potential of heritage resources for cultural tourism and highlights the importance of community participation in tourism development (Ezenagu, 2020; Eyisi *et al.*, 2021). Fourth, international scholarship establishes the relevance of heritage diplomacy, cultural exchange and soft power to international relations (Ang *et al.*, 2015; Chalcraft, 2021; Grincheva, 2024; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022; Todorović, 2022). Despite these contributions, the reviewed studies do not directly establish the extent to which Biu Emirate's heritage is incorporated into Nigeria's international cultural diplomacy. They also do not provide systematic evidence of international audience perceptions of Biu or measurable changes in Nigeria's national image attributable to Biu's cultural resources. This limitation creates a clear research gap. The present article addresses the gap conceptually and through documentary synthesis, while recognising that a separate field study would be necessary to measure actual international engagement and audience responses.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

3.1 Soft Power Theory

This article is anchored primarily in Soft Power Theory, developed by Joseph Nye to explain how states and other international actors can influence preferences through attraction rather than relying exclusively on coercion or financial inducement. Nye (2004) identifies culture, political values and foreign policies as possible sources of soft power when they are perceived as attractive or legitimate by external audiences. The theory is relevant to cultural diplomacy because cultural resources may create interest, familiarity and positive associations that support international relationships.

The central argument of Soft Power Theory is that influence does not always depend on the ability to compel another actor. It may also arise from the capacity to make particular values, ideas, institutions or cultural expressions attractive. In this sense, a country's music, literature, language, historical heritage, educational institutions and social practices may contribute to how it is perceived by others. However, the existence of these resources does not automatically produce soft power. Their influence depends on how audiences interpret them and whether the attraction they generate can be translated into meaningful relationships (Nye, 2004; Wüest & Nicolai, 2023).

The theory is particularly useful for examining the relationship between Biu Emirate's heritage and Nigeria's international image. Biu's historical narratives, traditional institution, cultural diversity, language resources, marriage practices, festivals and performing arts may provide material for cultural engagement. These resources could introduce international audiences to aspects of Southern Borno's history and social life that may be less visible in mainstream international representations of Nigeria. Nevertheless, the article does not assume that the existence of these cultural resources has already generated measurable international influence. Rather, it considers the conditions under which they could become sources of attraction and intercultural understanding (Usman, 2014, 2015; Abdullahi & Ishaku, 2024; Kashim *et al.*, 2025).

Soft Power Theory also draws attention to the importance of credibility. Cultural programmes may lose their attraction when the image being promoted is inconsistent with the conduct of the institutions responsible for promoting it. Similarly, international audiences may question cultural programmes that exclude local communities or present traditions in misleading ways. The relationship between attraction and credibility therefore requires cultural diplomacy to be supported by responsible governance, community participation and accurate communication (Nye, 2004; Ang *et al.*, 2015; Surowiec, 2021).

The theory has limitations when applied to local heritage. First, it can encourage an instrumental understanding of culture in which cultural practices are valued mainly for their contribution to national influence. Second, it may understate the agency of communities whose heritage is being promoted. Third, it can create an expectation that cultural visibility will automatically result in diplomatic benefits. These limitations are addressed in this article by combining the soft-power perspective with a heritage-diplomacy approach that places greater emphasis on community ownership, reciprocal relationships and the ethical management of cultural resources (Chalcraft, 2021; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022).

3.2 Heritage Diplomacy Perspective

The heritage-diplomacy perspective complements Soft Power Theory by focusing on the ways cultural heritage is used, interpreted and negotiated within international relationships. It recognises that heritage may support cooperation, knowledge exchange, conservation partnerships, cultural dialogue and international representation. However, heritage is not a neutral resource. Its use may involve competing interpretations, unequal institutional power and different expectations between local communities, governments and international *organizations* (Chalcraft, 2021; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022; Todorović, 2022). This perspective is relevant because the cultural resources associated with Biu are maintained by communities and cultural custodians whose interests may not always correspond with those of government agencies or external partners. A heritage project may seek international visibility, while local custodians may prioritise the preservation of cultural meaning, customary access or the protection of sensitive knowledge. These priorities need not be incompatible, but they require consultation and clear arrangements for decision-making. Heritage diplomacy therefore provides a framework for understanding the relationship between cultural promotion and the rights and interests of heritage communities.

The perspective also helps explain why cultural diplomacy should be based on reciprocal engagement. International cooperation should not involve only the extraction of local information for external research or the presentation of cultural practices to foreign audiences. It should create opportunities for local researchers, cultural custodians and community *organizations* to participate in knowledge production, receive research outputs, develop skills and benefit from partnerships. Lähdesmäki and Čeginskas (2022) emphasise dialogue, mutual trust and power relations in heritage diplomacy, while Chalcraft (2021) highlights the importance of understanding local realities within international heritage projects.

Applied to Biu Emirate, heritage diplomacy suggests that local cultural resources could support international engagement through collaborative historical research, digital documentation, educational exchange, language preservation and cultural exhibitions. Such activities should be designed with community participation and should respect differences among the communities associated with the wider Biu cultural environment. The perspective therefore helps prevent the reduction of heritage to a promotional asset controlled entirely by external institutions.

3.3 Application of the Theoretical Framework to the Study

The two perspectives are complementary. Soft Power Theory explains why cultural resources may contribute to attraction and international influence, while heritage diplomacy explains how those resources are managed, represented and negotiated within relationships. Together, they provide a framework for examining both the potential and the conditions of cultural diplomacy through Biu Emirate.

The analytical relationship can be explained through five connected dimensions:

1. Cultural resources: The historical narratives, languages, traditional institution, oral traditions, festivals, marriage practices, performing arts and heritage landscapes associated with Biu.
2. Safeguarding and community ownership: The documentation, transmission, protection and community management of cultural resources.
3. Institutional coordination: Cooperation among the Emirate, government agencies, universities, cultural *organizations*, community associations and external partners.
4. International communication and exchange: Cultural exhibitions, digital archives, educational partnerships, research collaboration, cultural visits and diaspora engagement.
5. Possible diplomatic outcomes: Greater cultural awareness, more informed external perceptions, educational relationships, heritage partnerships and opportunities for people-to-people cooperation.

The framework does not assume that the movement from one dimension to another is automatic. Cultural resources may remain locally known if they are not documented or communicated. International visibility may fail to produce trust if communities are excluded or representations are inaccurate. Cultural visits may not be sustainable if infrastructure and visitor services are inadequate. The framework therefore treats cultural diplomacy as a process dependent on institutional and social conditions rather than as an inevitable outcome of cultural richness (Nye, 2004; Chalcraft, 2021; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022).

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The article adopts a qualitative documentary-review design. It is intended to examine and synthesise existing knowledge on cultural diplomacy, soft power, national image, heritage diplomacy and the cultural history of Biu Emirate. A documentary approach is suitable because the study seeks to connect conceptual literature with published historical, linguistic and ethnographic evidence rather than report new field interviews or survey results. The review is narrative and analytical in orientation. It is not presented as a systematic review because the article does not claim to have conducted an exhaustive database search using a registered protocol, predefined screening stages or a complete reproducible search strategy. Instead, it draws on identifiable scholarly and institutional materials relevant to the subject and examines their contributions, geographical coverage and limitations. This distinction is important because a narrative review and a systematic review make different claims about the comprehensiveness and reproducibility of source selection.

4.2 Sources of Information

The documentary materials were organised into four broad groups.

The first group comprises historical and cultural publications relating directly to Biu Emirate. These include Usman's (2014) work on language disappearance and cultural diversity and his (2015) historical account of Biu. Tomoloju's (2015) published review of A History of Biu was also considered as a secondary account of the book's subject matter.

The second group comprises studies of cultural practices in Biu and the wider Southern Borno environment. These include Samaila *et al.*'s (2019) study of Pabur-Bura cultural festivals in Hawul, Abdullahi and Ishaku's (2024) study of traditional dances among selected North-East Nigerian communities, and Kashim *et al.*'s (2025) ethnographic study of Pabur-Bura marriage practices in Biu Local Government Area.

The third group comprises literature on cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, soft power, nation branding and heritage diplomacy. These sources include Ang *et al.* (2015), Nye (2004), Cull (2022), Grincheva (2024), Chalcraft (2021), Lähdesmäki and Čeginskas (2022), Todorović (2022), Hao *et al.* (2021) and Wüest and Nicolai (2023).

The fourth group comprises institutional and policy materials relevant to cultural heritage and tourism, particularly UNESCO's (2003) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and research on heritage tourism and community participation in Nigeria (Ezenagu, 2020; Eyisi *et al.*, 2021).

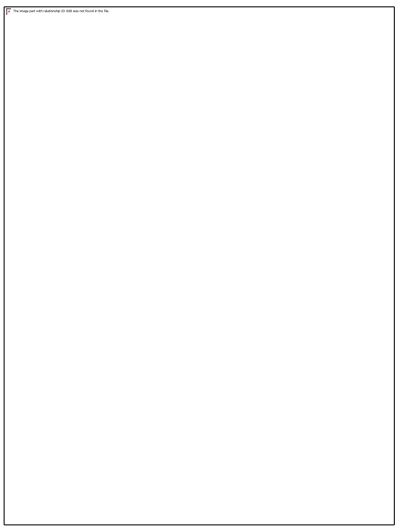


Figure: the emir of Biu emirate

Source: Facebook image

4.3 Relevance and Selection of Literature

Sources were considered relevant where they addressed at least one of the following themes: the history and traditional institution of Biu; cultural and linguistic diversity in Biu; festivals and performing arts in Southern Borno; marriage practices and oral traditions; cultural diplomacy and soft power; heritage diplomacy; national image and nation branding; intangible heritage safeguarding; cultural tourism; and community participation. Priority was given to identifiable scholarly publications, institutional documents and historical books with clear bibliographic records. Sources were not treated as interchangeable. A study of Pabur-Bura festivals in Hawul was used to discuss the wider cultural setting of Southern Borno rather than to establish the current practice of festivals in Biu Emirate. A study of Pabur-Bura marriage practices in Biu Local Government Area was used as geographically relevant ethnographic evidence, but not as proof that every Biu community follows the same marriage customs.

4.4 Method of Analysis

The materials were examined through thematic synthesis. The main themes were cultural identity, historical memory, traditional institutions, language, oral traditions, festivals, performing arts, marriage practices, cultural tourism, digital heritage, community participation, institutional capacity and international image.

The analysis considered three questions in relation to each source: what evidence does the publication provide; what are its geographical, historical and methodological limits; and how does its contribution relate to cultural diplomacy and the theoretical framework? The resulting themes were then synthesized to identify the potential pathways through which Biu's cultural resources could contribute to international engagement.

4.5 Source Evaluation and Verification

Source evaluation involved attention to authorship, publication details, research design, geographical coverage

and the type of evidence presented. Where a source was a book review, it was treated as a secondary discussion of the underlying book. Where a study used primary interviews, its findings were attributed to that study rather than presented as new data generated for this article. Where a publication concerned communities beyond Biu, its findings were used comparatively and not generalized to all residents of the Emirate.

Particular care is necessary when using older historical and ethnographic materials. Such publications may contain valuable records, but their terminology and interpretations reflect the historical and institutional contexts in which they were produced. Contemporary analysis should therefore compare older descriptions with more recent community-based research and use respectful terminology. This is especially important when discussing ethnic identity, traditional administration and cultural practices in Southern Borno (Usman, 2014, 2015; Samaila *et al.*, 2019).

4.6 Limitations of the Review

The article is limited by the availability and geographical distribution of published research. The literature on Biu Emirate is not equally developed across all communities, cultural practices and historical periods. Some aspects of cultural knowledge remain primarily oral, while others are represented in older historical publications. The review also does not include new interviews with traditional leaders, cultural custodians, residents, tourism operators or international visitors.

Consequently, the article cannot establish the current extent of formal cultural diplomacy activities in Biu, quantify international awareness of the Emirate or measure the effect of Biu's cultural heritage on Nigeria's international image. It also cannot establish current visitor numbers, tourism revenue or the operational status of individual heritage sites. Such claims would require current field data and administrative records. The conclusions are therefore analytical and should be interpreted as identifying potential opportunities and research priorities rather than reporting measured diplomatic outcomes.

5. SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 The Cultural Resources of Biu Emirate and Their Diplomatic Relevance

The literature reviewed indicates that Biu Emirate has several categories of cultural resources that could support cultural diplomacy. These include historical narratives, traditional administration, language diversity, oral traditions, community practices, festivals, performing arts and the wider cultural landscape. Usman's (2014, 2015) publications provide an important foundation for understanding the historical and linguistic dimensions of the Emirate, while studies on Pabur-Bura festivals, traditional dance and marriage practices provide examples of cultural knowledge and practices in the wider Southern Borno setting (Abdullahi & Ishaku, 2024; Kashim *et al.*, 2025; Samaila *et al.*, 2019).

The diplomatic relevance of these resources lies in their capacity to provide material for cultural learning and exchange. Historical publications can support international research partnerships; language materials can provide opportunities for linguistic and educational exchange; and cultural performances may introduce external audiences to local forms of expression. Ethnographic documentation can also contribute to the preservation of knowledge that might otherwise remain accessible only through particular cultural custodians. These possibilities are consistent with the broader literature on cultural diplomacy and heritage diplomacy, which emphasises the role of cultural institutions and communities in international relationships (Ang *et al.*, 2015; Grincheva, 2024; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022).

Nevertheless, the resources should not be treated as ready-made diplomatic products. Their international use requires historical accuracy, community consent, appropriate interpretation and institutional coordination. The fact that a cultural practice is documented in a scholarly publication does not mean that it is available for unrestricted public display. Some practices may have customary limitations, and the authority to determine how they are shared rests with the communities and custodians concerned (UNESCO, 2003; Chalcraft, 2021).

5.2 Traditional Institutions as Cultural Intermediaries

The Biu traditional institution may serve as an important intermediary between local cultural custodians and wider institutional partners. Its historical role provides a platform for convening community discussions, supporting the documentation of traditional knowledge and encouraging the transmission of cultural history. Usman (2015) provides the historical basis for examining the development of the institution and its place within Biu's wider social and political history.

However, cultural diplomacy requires more than traditional authority. It involves research, documentation, funding, communication, conservation, educational exchange and external partnerships. These activities may require technical expertise and administrative capacity beyond the resources of a traditional institution. The most practical approach would therefore involve cooperation between the Emirate, public cultural agencies, universities, museums, archives, community associations and tourism stakeholders. Such cooperation is consistent with the heritage-diplomacy literature's emphasis on multiple actors and negotiated relationships (Chalcraft, 2021; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022; Todorović, 2022).

The institution's role should also be balanced with the participation of different cultural communities. A traditional institution may provide an important coordinating platform, but it should not be assumed to possess exclusive knowledge or authority over every cultural practice in the wider Biu area. The participation of cultural custodians, language specialists, women, young people, performers and community associations would help ensure that cultural representation remains inclusive and accurate (UNESCO, 2003; Usman, 2014).

5.3 Cultural Diversity and Nigeria's International Representation

One of the potential contributions of Biu Emirate to Nigeria's international image is the opportunity to communicate a broader understanding of the country's cultural diversity. International representation often gives greater visibility to cultural products with established commercial and media networks. Although such products are important, they do not represent the full range of Nigerian historical and cultural experiences. Local heritage can add depth to the national narrative by showing how different communities contribute to the country's collective identity (Ezenagu, 2020; Usman, 2015).

The cultural and linguistic diversity associated with Biu makes this point particularly important. Usman (2014) examines language diversity and disappearance within the Emirate, while the wider regional literature documents cultural practices among Pabur-Bura and other communities in Southern Borno (Abdullahi & Ishaku, 2024; Samaila *et al.*, 2019). These publications demonstrate that local cultural identity involves more than a single narrative or practice. A credible cultural diplomacy programme should therefore communicate the plurality of the region rather than present one cultural group as representative of all communities. This approach could strengthen the inclusiveness of Nigeria's international cultural representation. It would also align cultural diplomacy with the principle that cultural diversity should be recognised and safeguarded. The UNESCO Convention identifies intangible heritage as an important dimension of cultural diversity and encourages the active participation of the communities that maintain it (UNESCO, 2003).

5.4 Cultural Heritage as a Resource for International Understanding

Cultural heritage may contribute to international understanding by providing audiences with opportunities to learn about the historical experiences, social organisation and cultural expressions of another society. In the case of Biu, historical publications, oral narratives, language materials, cultural practices and ethnographic studies could form the basis of educational exhibitions, research partnerships and digital learning resources. These activities could introduce external audiences to a part of Nigeria's history that is not widely represented in international cultural communication (Usman, 2014, 2015; Grincheva, 2024).

The process requires interpretation. A cultural exhibition should not simply display objects or images without explaining their historical and social significance. A performance programme should provide context about the communities and traditions involved. A digital archive should identify the sources and custodians of recorded

materials. Such measures would help audiences move beyond visual exposure towards a more informed understanding of the cultural practices being presented (UNESCO, 2003; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022).

The diplomatic contribution of such activities should be evaluated through audience engagement and institutional relationships rather than assumed from visibility. A successful exhibition may generate interest, but the development of lasting understanding may require educational follow-up, research collaboration and repeat engagement. This is consistent with the relationship-based understanding of cultural diplomacy advanced by Ang *et al.* (2015) and Grincheva (2024).

5.5 Cultural Tourism and Local Economic Opportunities

The heritage of Biu may provide opportunities for cultural tourism, particularly where historical interpretation, community knowledge and environmental attractions can be connected through responsible visitor experiences. Ezenagu (2020) identifies the potential of Nigeria's heritage resources as drivers of cultural tourism, while Usman (2015) provides a historical basis for understanding Biu's cultural landscape. Tomoloju (2015) also identifies Tilla Hill and Tilla Lake among the attractions discussed in the historical account of Biu.

However, tourism potential should not be confused with an established tourism industry. The availability of cultural resources does not prove that visitor facilities, access, safety, accommodation or conservation arrangements are adequate. A destination assessment would be required before organised international tourism could be recommended. Such an assessment should also identify the potential economic benefits for local enterprises and the possible social or environmental costs. Community participation is important because cultural tourism may create economic opportunities for guides, performers, artisans, food vendors, transport operators and accommodation providers. However, these benefits may be unevenly distributed if communities are excluded from planning or if external *organizations* control the commercial use of cultural resources. Eyisi *et al.* (2021) emphasise the importance of collaboration and community participation in tourism development in Nigeria. Their work supports the need for inclusive planning and stakeholder consultation in any future heritage-tourism initiative in Biu.

5.6 Digital Heritage and International Visibility

Digital communication offers an opportunity to introduce Biu's cultural heritage to audiences who may not be able to visit the area. A digital heritage platform could provide access to historical information, oral-history recordings, language materials, cultural photographs, interviews, educational resources and descriptions of cultural practices. It could also support diaspora engagement and academic collaboration. The growing importance of digital communication within cultural diplomacy makes this approach particularly relevant (Grincheva, 2024; Jiménez-Martínez, 2024).

However, digital heritage requires more than uploading photographs or recordings to social media. Materials need accurate descriptions, attribution, consent, translation and appropriate storage. The platform should also distinguish between public information and culturally sensitive material. Community custodians should be involved in decisions about what is recorded and how it is made available. These principles are consistent with UNESCO's (2003) emphasis on customary access and community participation.

5.7 Institutional and Administrative Challenges

The effective use of Biu's heritage for cultural diplomacy would depend on institutional coordination and administrative capacity. The responsibilities involved may be distributed among the Emirate, state cultural agencies, local government, universities, museums, tourism bodies, community associations and private-sector organizations. Without coordination, initiatives may overlap, remain temporary or depend excessively on individual office holders.

Institutional arrangements should clarify responsibilities for documentation, conservation, funding, visitor management, cultural communication and international partnerships. They should also provide procedures for community consultation, consent and accountability. The heritage-diplomacy literature shows that cooperation

can involve competing interests and unequal power relationships, making transparent governance essential (Chalcraft, 2021; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022). A multi-stakeholder working group could provide a practical coordination mechanism. It could support a heritage inventory, identify priority documentation projects, develop ethical guidelines and connect local institutions with academic and international partners. Its composition should reflect the diversity of communities and the different forms of expertise required for heritage safeguarding.

5.8 Research Gaps and Future Evidence Requirements

The review identifies a clear gap between the existence of cultural resources in Biu and the limited direct examination of their role in Nigeria's international cultural diplomacy. The available Biu-specific literature is primarily historical, linguistic and ethnographic. It provides important evidence about local heritage but does not systematically measure international awareness, foreign audience perceptions or the effect of cultural engagement on Nigeria's national image (Usman, 2014, 2015; Kashim *et al.*, 2025). Future empirical research should therefore examine the views of traditional leaders, cultural custodians, residents, researchers, tourism operators, government officials, diaspora members and international visitors. It should also assess the current status of cultural events and heritage sites rather than relying solely on historical descriptions. Research could investigate the extent of existing international partnerships, the availability of digital heritage materials, the level of community participation and the potential economic contribution of heritage-based tourism.

A further research direction concerns the measurement of international image. Studies could examine whether exposure to Biu's heritage changes international audiences' knowledge of Southern Borno or their perceptions of Nigeria. Such research would require clear indicators and careful methods because positive responses to one cultural programme cannot automatically be interpreted as a general improvement in national reputation (Hao *et al.*, 2021; Tijani *et al.*, 2024).

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

This article examined cultural diplomacy as a potential tool for enhancing Nigeria's international image through a documentary review of the cultural heritage and traditional institutions of Biu Emirate, Borno State. The review brought together literature on cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, soft power, national image, heritage diplomacy, cultural tourism and intangible cultural heritage with historical and ethnographic publications relating to Biu and the wider Southern Borno environment. The literature indicates that Biu possesses historical and cultural resources that may contribute to international cultural engagement. These include its documented historical development, traditional institution, linguistic diversity, oral traditions, festivals, performing arts, marriage practices and heritage landscape. Usman's (2014, 2015) publications provide a substantial historical and linguistic foundation, while studies by Samaila *et al.* (2019), Abdullahi and Ishaku (2024), and Kashim *et al.* (2025) provide evidence of cultural practices and knowledge in the wider Southern Borno setting.

The review also demonstrates that cultural resources do not automatically generate soft power or improve national image. Their diplomatic value depends on documentation, interpretation, institutional coordination, community participation and sustained engagement with external audiences. Cultural promotion that ignores local ownership or presents inaccurate historical narratives may undermine rather than strengthen the credibility of cultural diplomacy. The principles of community participation in UNESCO's (2003) Convention and the emphasis on power relations in heritage diplomacy scholarship provide important guidance for addressing these concerns (Chalcraft, 2021; Lähdesmäki & Čeginskas, 2022).

The article therefore argues that Biu Emirate's cultural heritage should be approached as both a potential diplomatic resource and a responsibility requiring safeguarding. Its international promotion should be connected to community-led documentation, educational partnerships, digital preservation, responsible cultural tourism and institutional collaboration. The review does not claim that Biu has already produced measurable

changes in Nigeria's international image. Rather, it identifies the cultural resources and institutional conditions through which such a contribution could be developed and evaluated.

6.2 Recommendations

At the end of the study, recommendsations were made as follows:

1. Develop a community-led cultural heritage inventory. The Biu Emirate Council, in collaboration with relevant community representatives, should support the systematic identification and documentation of historical sites, oral traditions, languages, festivals, performing arts, marriage practices, crafts and other cultural resources. The inventory should identify custodians and document any customary restrictions on access or public presentation.
2. Strengthen collaboration among cultural institutions. A multi-stakeholder working group should bring together the Emirate, relevant government agencies, local authorities, universities, researchers, community associations, cultural practitioners and tourism stakeholders. Its role should be to coordinate documentation, safeguarding, educational activities and cultural partnerships.
3. Support oral-history and archival research. Universities and research institutions should collaborate with local cultural custodians to document historical narratives, settlement histories, traditional administration and community experiences. Research should compare oral accounts with published historical and archival materials and should make appropriate research outputs accessible to participating communities.
4. Promote language documentation and transmission. Language researchers, community associations and educational institutions should develop initiatives to document local languages, oral literature, songs, proverbs and indigenous knowledge. Materials should be produced in relevant local languages alongside carefully prepared translations where appropriate.
5. Establish a responsible digital heritage platform. A digital archive should be developed to preserve historical documents, oral-history recordings, photographs, language resources and educational materials. The platform should use clear attribution, consent procedures, metadata, copyright arrangements and access restrictions for sensitive cultural materials.
6. Encourage academic and international cultural partnerships. The Emirate and relevant educational institutions should explore collaborative research, student exchange, exhibitions, conferences and heritage-documentation partnerships with universities, museums, archives and cultural *organizations*. Such partnerships should include local capacity development and community access to research outputs.
7. Develop responsible cultural tourism planning. A tourism assessment should examine the current condition, accessibility, safety, facilities and conservation needs of relevant cultural and environmental sites. Tourism proposals should be based on verified information and should include mechanisms for local participation and benefit-sharing.
8. Support cultural performances through community consultation. Traditional music and dance should be documented and promoted with the consent of the relevant custodians. Any public or international presentation should provide appropriate historical and cultural context and should not assume that all practices are suitable for unrestricted display.
9. Clarify institutional responsibilities. The roles of traditional institutions, government agencies, tourism bodies, research institutions and community *organizations* should be clearly defined in cultural heritage initiatives. This would improve coordination and reduce the risk of fragmented programmes.
10. Establish transparent funding and benefit-sharing arrangements. Any cultural programme involving sponsorship, tourism revenue, commercial recordings or the use of community knowledge should have clear financial and intellectual-property arrangements. Communities whose heritage is being used should be involved in decisions and should receive appropriate recognition and benefits.
11. Undertake empirical research on international perceptions. Future studies should examine the views of international visitors, diaspora communities, researchers and cultural partners to establish whether engagement with Biu's heritage affects their knowledge and perceptions of Nigeria.

6.3 Areas for Further Research

Further research should examine the contemporary role of Biu Emirate's traditional institution in cultural

heritage management and the relationship between the Emirate and the different cultural communities within its wider environment. An updated study of language use and intergenerational transmission would also be valuable, particularly in light of Usman's (2014) discussion of language disappearance and cultural diversity.

A separate ethnographic study could investigate the current practice, meaning and organization of selected festivals and performance traditions in Biu and neighboring communities. Another study could examine the economic feasibility of heritage-based tourism, including visitor demand, local enterprise participation, conservation requirements and potential revenue distribution. Finally, a comparative study involving Biu and other Nigerian traditional institutions could examine how local heritage is incorporated into national cultural diplomacy and whether international engagement produces measurable changes in cultural awareness or country image.

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