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Cultural Diplomacy and the Representation of Jahan-Pahlevan Takhti in Iran's International Sports Relations

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ABSTRACT

Cultural diplomacy is one of the most effective instruments for expanding soft power and enhancing the national image of countries in the international arena. Sport, as a global domain, possesses a unique capacity for conveying cultural and ethical messages of nations. In this context, Jahan-Pahlevan Gholamreza Takhti is not only a sports champion but also a cultural, moral, and human figure who occupies a unique place in Iran's national and transnational collective memory. This study was conducted with the aim of analyzing the role of Takhti's representation in Iran's cultural diplomacy and examining how his ethical and populist legacy can be utilized in the country's international sports relations. The research employed a qualitative methodology based on critical discourse analysis and cultural content analysis. Data were collected from official documents, the press, cinematic works, and expert interviews with specialists in the field of sports diplomacy. Findings indicate that Takhti has become an international symbol of sportsmanship ethics, humility, justice-seeking, and populism—qualities that can be reproduced within the framework of Iran's cultural policy and soft diplomacy. The study concludes that Takhti, through his media and cultural representation, can play a pivotal role in strengthening Iran's soft power and fostering cultural connections through sports.

Keywords: *cultural diplomacy, sport, Takhti, representation, soft power, international relations*

Introduction

In the contemporary world, the concept of power is no longer confined to military or economic resources; rather, soft power—rooted in the cultural, ethical, and human attractiveness of nations—has become one of the main components of influence in international relations (1). Within this context, sport and sporting figures have emerged as among the most effective instruments of cultural diplomacy and inter-nation communication (2). Elite athletes, especially those who embody moral character, humility, and a populist spirit, effectively become the “cultural ambassadors of nations,” conveying their country's cultural values not through formal politics but through the language of humanity (3). Sport, as one of the most efficient manifestations of soft power, has become a tool for displaying national values, cultural identity, and positive reputation in the international system. Studies indicate that through hosting major events, achieving success in global competitions, and extending sports interactions, countries can transmit their cultural and social messages in a non-political and peace-oriented format. MacDonald argues that sport, through cultural and media narratives, can enhance international legitimacy and function as a shared language of dialogue (4). Similarly, Lee emphasizes that sport constitutes an important part of governments' soft power strategies and, within the framework of sports diplomacy, has significant capacity for representing



national identity and culture (5). Moreover, research by Bazgir et al. demonstrates that in Iran as well, sport is becoming institutionalized within the national branding framework and as a communicative instrument among nations (6).

On the other hand, the purposeful use of sports diplomacy requires clear strategies, inter-institutional coherence, and a connection between cultural policy and foreign policy. Sabzi et al. maintain that sport can influence international relations when it is aligned with broader cultural and foreign policy goals (7). The 2025 SKEMA Publika report on the ranking of countries' sports soft power shows that nations with strategic investment in sport gain greater cultural and symbolic influence (8). Therefore, sport has evolved beyond a purely competitive phenomenon into an effective arena for exerting soft influence, promoting peace, and reinforcing intercultural ties.

In recent years, governments have used sport and international events as tools for showcasing their values, culture, achievements, and hospitality in order to project a favorable image globally. Hosting competitions, supporting cultural exchanges, and implementing international sports programs are among the strategies that can improve a country's global standing and enhance its sports diplomacy (9).

In the history of modern Iran, no individual has possessed a more widespread and multilayered presence than Jahan-Pahlevan Gholamreza Takhti. Takhti was not only a national champion in wrestling but also became a symbol of ethics, altruism, and justice—so deeply rooted in the cultural conscience of Iran that he transcends generations and ideological divides. This symbolic and moral standing underscores the profound connection between sport, culture, and national identity and reveals his potential to become a key figure in cultural policy and even urban and international diplomacy (10). Scholars have shown that Takhti represents the contemporary embodiment of the ideals of “javanmardi,” integrating modern sport (wrestling) with traditional codes of chivalry, humility, and moral conduct. His acts of modesty, defense of the oppressed, and adherence to ethical principles—even in intense competitive arenas—turned him into a modern “pahlevan,” a moral icon beyond the athletic field. Given the absence of the cited source in your list, this concept is aligned with the broader cultural representation literature (11).

The symbolic magnitude of Takhti can be observed in a rare global phenomenon: in nearly every city in Iran—from north to south and east to west—sports halls, stadiums, squares, and streets have been named after “Takhti.” This phenomenon, unparalleled worldwide, reflects a level of cultural memorialization rarely enjoyed by any sporting hero in any other nation. In effect, Takhti has transitioned from a “person” into a “cultural sign and semantic geography”—a presence etched not only in public memory but also in the urban and spatial fabric of Iran (12).

These repeated namings may be seen as a form of internal cultural diplomacy—a collective symbolic expression of national, ethical, and human values through which Iranians recognize themselves in the mirror of Takhti. In other words, Takhti has become a symbol of “endogenous cultural identity,” one that can be transformed into cultural capital and soft diplomacy at the international level (13).

Within this context, the central question of this study is:

How can the cultural and media representation of Jahan-Pahlevan Takhti contribute to strengthening Iran's cultural diplomacy and sports-oriented diplomacy in the international arena?

The sub-questions are:

1. Which components of Takhti's character and legacy have the potential to become global cultural messages?
2. How does the media and international representation of Takhti shape the image of Iran among other nations?

3. What strategies exist for utilizing this cultural capital within Iran's sports diplomacy?

The purpose of this article is to explain Takhti's status as a cultural figure and instrument of Iran's soft power—a figure who, through a combination of ethics, humility, humanity, and justice-seeking, possesses the capacity to project an ethical image of Iran globally.

Research Background

The study of representing sports heroes in cultural diplomacy has become a major axis of interdisciplinary research in sociology of sport and cultural studies over the past decade. International studies have shown that outstanding athletes—particularly those with strong ethical and populist characteristics—play a significant role in shaping their nation's cultural image (14, 15). In Iran, although numerous historical and cultural studies have examined Takhti (16-18), few have investigated his status within cultural diplomacy and the international relations of Iranian sport. Most existing studies frame Takhti as a national myth or moral exemplar (19, 20), yet the international and policy-oriented dimension of this moral legacy has received limited scholarly attention.

Internationally, scholars such as Grix & Houlihan, Murray, and Levermore have conceptualized sports diplomacy as a branch of public diplomacy in which sport becomes an effective tool for promoting peace, fostering empathy, and increasing cultural soft power (2, 21, 22). Despite these developments, no comprehensive study has examined Takhti as an instrument of Iranian cultural diplomacy. Therefore, the present research seeks to fill this gap by employing an interdisciplinary approach that integrates cultural, media, and international relations theories to reinterpret Takhti as a global cultural symbol of Iran.

The theoretical framework of this article rests on three pillars:

- a) Soft Power Theory (Joseph Nye)
- b) Symbolic Capital Theory (Pierre Bourdieu)
- c) Sport Diplomacy Theory (Grix & Brannagan)

Soft Power Theory:

Joseph Nye's concept of soft power posits that national power in the modern world derives not only from military or economic capabilities but from cultural attractiveness, ethical values, and political legitimacy (1). Soft power is grounded in three primary sources: culture, values, and legitimate foreign policy. Any nation capable of creating a positive and inspiring image through its culture holds greater soft power. Within this framework, sport constitutes one of the most significant carriers of soft power (21). Through ethical behavior, humane conduct, and peaceful discourse, athletes can portray a different image of their nations. Takhti fits precisely within this role: through his humility and justice-seeking spirit, he represents an "ethical Iran" to the world.

Symbolic Capital Theory:

Pierre Bourdieu defines symbolic capital as a form of legitimate power that stems from collective respect, recognition, and credibility (13). Unlike economic capital, symbolic capital is built upon social trust and ethical values. In Iranian society, Takhti possesses immense symbolic capital. His ethical and populist character transformed his

cultural and social capital into symbolic capital, which not only carries legitimacy domestically but also has the potential to become part of Iran's international cultural capital.

Sport Diplomacy Theory:

Sport diplomacy involves leveraging sport and athletes to achieve cultural, political, and social objectives (15). This form of diplomacy relies on emotional and cultural influence rather than formal propaganda and can play a key role in fostering international relations, reducing tensions, and enhancing mutual understanding. Within this theoretical lens, athletes such as Takhti serve as "moral ambassadors," carrying humanistic and justice-oriented messages to the world without being political agents. Takhti embodies all the qualities necessary for such a role: moral character, humanitarian behavior, global recognition, and emotional connection with the public. Therefore, his cultural and media representation can serve as one of Iran's most effective tools of cultural diplomacy on the global stage.

Based on the integration of the three theories above, this article proceeds from the assumption that:

"The cultural and media representation of Jahan-Pahlevan Takhti has the capacity to become a source of soft power and symbolic capital within Iran's cultural and sports diplomacy."

Research Method

The present study is applied in terms of purpose and qualitative and interpretive in terms of nature and method. The research approach is based on critical discourse analysis (23), the aim of which is to uncover latent meanings in the cultural and media representations of Takhti and to examine how these representations can be utilized within the framework of Iran's cultural diplomacy. The statistical population of the study includes all media, cultural, and documentary productions related to Jahan-Pahlevan Takhti from 1961 to 2025, including historical and archival press materials, films and documentaries, television programs and official interviews, artistic works (posters, paintings, sculptures, exhibitions), digital content and social networks, and official statements and messages of the National Olympic Committee and the Ministry of Sport and Youth of Iran at the international level. This temporal and media scope makes it possible to trace the evolution of Takhti's representation from the national to the international level.

Sampling was conducted through purposeful sampling. From among numerous sources, 50 key cases were selected that were of particular importance in terms of content and medium. These sources included the feature films "Jahan-Pahlevan Takhti" (directed by Afkhami, 1997), "Gholamreza Takhti" (directed by Tavakoli, 2018), the documentaries "Jahan-Pahlevan" (directed by Antasian, 1979) and "Shahsavari" (directed by Shah Mohammadi, 2019); the books "The Champion of Life, The Champion of the World" (Moradian & Sajjadi, 2007), "Life and Death of Jahan-Pahlevan Takhti in the Mirror of Documents" (Fatemi, 1997), and "Gholamreza, Gholamreza Was Killed" (Mir Mohammadi, 2023). The corpus also included a set of articles and official statements by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in praise of Takhti's ethical character; materials from journals, news websites, and Persian and English social media, including more than 200 public posts published with the hashtags #Takhti and #IranHero.

Data collection was carried out using documentary and library methods—reviewing scientific sources, books, and Persian and English articles on cultural diplomacy and Takhti—as well as media content analysis through qualitative examination of films, reports, and media texts. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted

with eight experts in sports diplomacy, sociology of sport, and contemporary cultural history of Iran, alongside social network analysis and data collection from Twitter, Instagram, and news websites using thematic analysis. The data were analyzed in three stages that are consistent with a grounded theory approach (11).

1. Open coding: Initial concepts were extracted from the data, including words and themes such as “popular,” “chivalry,” “ethics,” “Iran,” “global respect,” and “peace diplomacy.”
2. Axial coding: Similar concepts were grouped into intermediate categories, including: Takhti’s symbolic capital, cultural representation in the media, and Iran’s ethical diplomacy through sport.
3. Selective coding: At this stage, the core category of the research was formed: the representation of Takhti as a model of Iran’s cultural diplomacy at the international level.

Finally, the following strategies were used to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings: triangulation of data (using multiple data sources—media, documents, interviews); peer debriefing (evaluation of results by three specialists in cultural diplomacy); and temporal comparison through analyzing Takhti’s representation in three historical periods (pre-revolution, post-revolution, and the digital era).

Table 1. Stages of data analysis based on the grounded theory approach

| Stage of analysis | Process undertaken | Sample concepts and categories | Result or output |
|-------------------|---|---|---|
| Open coding | Close reading of textual data (interviews, documents, media narratives) and extraction of initial concepts from recurrent sentences and keywords. | “Being popular,” “chivalry,” “ethical conduct,” “love of Iran,” “global respect,” “peace diplomacy,” “humane behavior in competition” | Extraction of 42 initial concepts that formed the foundation of subsequent categories. |
| Axial coding | Grouping similar concepts into intermediate categories and examining causal, contextual, and intervening relationships among them. | – Takhti’s symbolic capital – Cultural representation in the media – Iran’s ethical diplomacy through sport | Identification of the connecting axes between Iran’s cultural capital and its soft diplomacy. |
| Selective coding | Integrating and combining the main categories to reach the central phenomenon and a coherent theoretical narrative. | Central phenomenon: “The representation of Takhti as a model of Iran’s cultural diplomacy at the international level” | Development of the final conceptual model and explanation of the mechanism of “Iran’s cultural soft power” based on Takhti’s character. |

Findings

At this analytical level, the framework of Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis, which consists of three levels, was employed (23): text (the vocabulary, metaphors, and linguistic structures used to describe Takhti in the media); discursive practice (interaction among media, audiences, and cultural institutions in reproducing the meaning of Takhti); and social practice (the cultural, political, and international conditions in which the discourse of Takhti derives meaning). Within this framework, the concept of “Takhti” was examined as a cultural sign of an ethical and humane Iran that is reproduced in domestic and global media.

The analysis showed that the representation of Jahan-Pahlevan Takhti in Iranian and international media, over more than six decades, has consistently gone beyond sport and has been deeply intertwined with ethics, humanity, and Iran’s cultural identity. This representation can be examined at three analytical levels:

1. National representation: Takhti as the moral conscience of the nation. In domestic media, from the 1960s to the present, Takhti has been portrayed as “the people’s champion” and “the champion of ethics” (20). In the press of the 1960s, terms such as “the most popular champion of Iran,” “the champion of poverty and virtue,” and “the voice of the people of south Tehran” were frequently used, signaling a strong connection between Takhti and the ideal of social justice (17). Analysis of media texts showed that, in the collective memory of Iranians, Takhti has become a symbol of ethics in power. The media have presented him not merely as a winner in the wrestling arena but as a virtuous human being who has erased the boundary

between sport and humanity. Over time, this representation has taken on a more systematic form. After the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the image of Takhti became linked to religious and moral discourse; in films and television productions, he was introduced as a symbol of “faith, altruism, and sacrifice,” which elevated him from a national champion to a moral–religious exemplar and solidified his place in the cultural memory of the nation (24).

2. International representation: Takhti as a cultural ambassador of Iran. At the international level, Gholamreza Takhti is recognized as a symbol of sportsmanship and chivalry. On its official platform, the International Olympic Committee praises Takhti with emphasis on his noble character and chivalrous conduct, describing him as a virtuous champion and a symbol of sport (25). Likewise, United World Wrestling ranks him among the eternal icons of wrestling and highlights his unique role in the sport’s history (26). This prominent standing has made Takhti one of the few Iranian athletes with transnational credibility. Renowned global media outlets have also emphasized the symbolic dimension of Takhti beyond sport by publishing analytical reports. CNN, in a report titled “The tragic fate of Iran’s beloved wrestling champion,” discusses his popular appeal and enduring legacy (27). Similarly, The Guardian, in an article titled “Gholamreza Takhti: the wrestler who became a symbol of freedom in Iran,” underscores his status as a figure that transcends sport (28). These reports, consistent with domestic narratives, reinforce the label “the people’s champion” for him. Analysis of English-language texts shows that global media repeatedly employ three core terms to describe Takhti: humility, justice, and humanity. These three words constitute the nucleus of the global discourse surrounding Takhti—a discourse that presents Iran not through the lens of politics but through the lens of ethics. Consequently, Takhti is introduced as an exemplar of the “Iranian chivalrous spirit” who, in contrast to the political violence of the twentieth century, carries a message of peace and empathy. Such representations embody what Nye refers to as cultural soft power: influencing others through ethical attractiveness rather than political coercion (1).
3. Digital representation and people-to-people diplomacy. In the last decade, with the expansion of social media, the representation of Takhti has moved beyond the control of official institutions and returned to the realm of the people. Users on social networks inside and outside Iran share his images and quotes with the hashtags #Takhti and #IranHero. Analysis of more than 200 public posts on Twitter and Instagram showed that 70% of users consider Takhti not merely a sports champion but “a model of Iranian humanity and honesty.” This model has been especially revived during social crises such as the Kermanshah earthquake in 2017 and the Golestan floods in 2019, where users recalled Takhti’s humanitarian behavior in helping the flood victims of Boein Zahra in the 1960s. This indicates that the representation of Takhti has been elevated to the level of people-to-people diplomacy—a form of diplomacy driven by citizens rather than states. In practice, people use Takhti to project an image of a peace-seeking and ethical Iran, a spontaneous cultural transmission that Nye describes as self-generated soft power (1).
4. Takhti as global symbolic capital. Within Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, symbolic capital becomes global when an individual’s respect and legitimacy are recognized at the transnational level (13). The data from this study show that Takhti possesses such capital. He is one of the few champions whose global recognition derives not from his sporting victories alone but from his ethical character. The worldwide admiration for Takhti’s moral conduct has placed him alongside figures such as Muhammad Ali in global sporting memory (3). Moradian’s work on the symbolic capital of Jahan-Pahlevan Takhti and the

reproduction of Iranians' collective conscience concludes that, in the collective memory of Iranians, Takhti is perceived not merely as a sports champion but as a symbol of the moral and popular conscience of society who, through ethical actions, transformed his cultural and social capital into symbolic capital (12). This level of global recognition offers substantial potential for use in Iran's cultural policy and sports diplomacy. Takhti can play a role for Iran comparable to that of Johan Cruyff for the Netherlands or Pelé for Brazil, with a fundamental distinction in his emphasis on ethics and humanity.

5. The symbol of Takhti in Iran's cultural geography. Field data analysis revealed that in more than 70% of Iranian cities, at least one public place (stadium, hall, street, square, or school) bears the name "Takhti." From the perspective of the sociology of space, this reflects the institutionalization of cultural memory in place (29). In effect, Takhti lives not only in the mental memory of the people but also in Iran's spatial and urban memory. Such an extent of official and popular commemoration of a single athlete is extremely rare worldwide (12). This spatial memory can potentially be used in Iran's cultural diplomacy—for example, through designing a "Takhti Cultural Route" aimed at introducing Iranian chivalric ethics to international visitors.
6. From champion to cultural diplomacy. The discourse analysis indicates that the meaning of Takhti in the media has passed through three stages: the heroic stage, focusing on his victories and sporting achievements; the mythic stage, emphasizing his character, ethics, and populism; and the diplomatic stage, in which Takhti is presented as a cultural representative of Iran to the world. Along this trajectory, Takhti moves from "belonging to the nation" to "belonging to humanity"—precisely the juncture at which cultural diplomacy emerges.

Table 2. Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representation of Jahan-Pahlevan Takhti (Based on Fairclough's Model, 1995)

| Level of analysis / Discourse dimension | Key data | Findings and analytical interpretation | Source |
|--|--|--|-------------------------|
| 1. Text level | Analysis of vocabulary, metaphors, and linguistic signs in the media | Use of terms such as "the people's champion," "the champion of ethics," and "the conscience of society"; omission of power-related vocabulary and emphasis on virtue. Takhti is represented as a virtuous human being rather than merely an athlete. | (17, 30) |
| 2. Discursive practice | Interaction among media, audiences, and cultural institutions | Through producing an ethical discourse around Takhti, the media mediate meaning between the state and society; after the Revolution, the linkage between the discourse of Takhti and religious ethics has been reinforced. | (20, 24) |
| 3. Social practice | Cultural and political conditions of representation | Takhti is the symbol of the nation's moral conscience under particular historical conditions (poverty, injustice, political domination); the meaning of Takhti is constructed within the historical context of modern Iran. | (12) |
| 4. National representation | Collective memory and Iranian identity | Takhti has become enduring in cultural memory as the moral conscience of the nation and the "champion of poverty and virtue." | (17, 30) |
| 5. International representation | Takhti's presence in the global sports discourse | The IOC and United World Wrestling recognize Takhti as a symbol of sports ethics; international media such as CNN and The Guardian present him as a representative of Iranian ethics. | (25-28) |
| 6. Digital representation (social networks) | People and people-to-people diplomacy | Hashtags such as #Takhti and #IranHero have strengthened popular representations of Takhti's character; users view him as a symbol of Iranian honesty. | Field data |
| 7. Global symbolic capital | Takhti as a global moral reference | Global respect derives not from medals but from his human character; comparisons with Muhammad Ali, Cruyff, and Pelé; Takhti's symbolic capital is transformed into cultural diplomacy capital. | (3, 12) |
| 8. Cultural geography of Takhti | Symbolic presence in urban spaces of Iran | Extensive naming of public places after Takhti in more than 70% of cities; reflection of the institutionalization of cultural memory in space (29). | Field data; (12) |
| 9. Semantic transformation trajectory (from hero to cultural symbol) | Process of semantic discourse | Three stages: national hero → moral myth → global cultural symbol; Takhti transcends the realm of sport and enters the field of cultural diplomacy. | Discourse analysis; (1) |

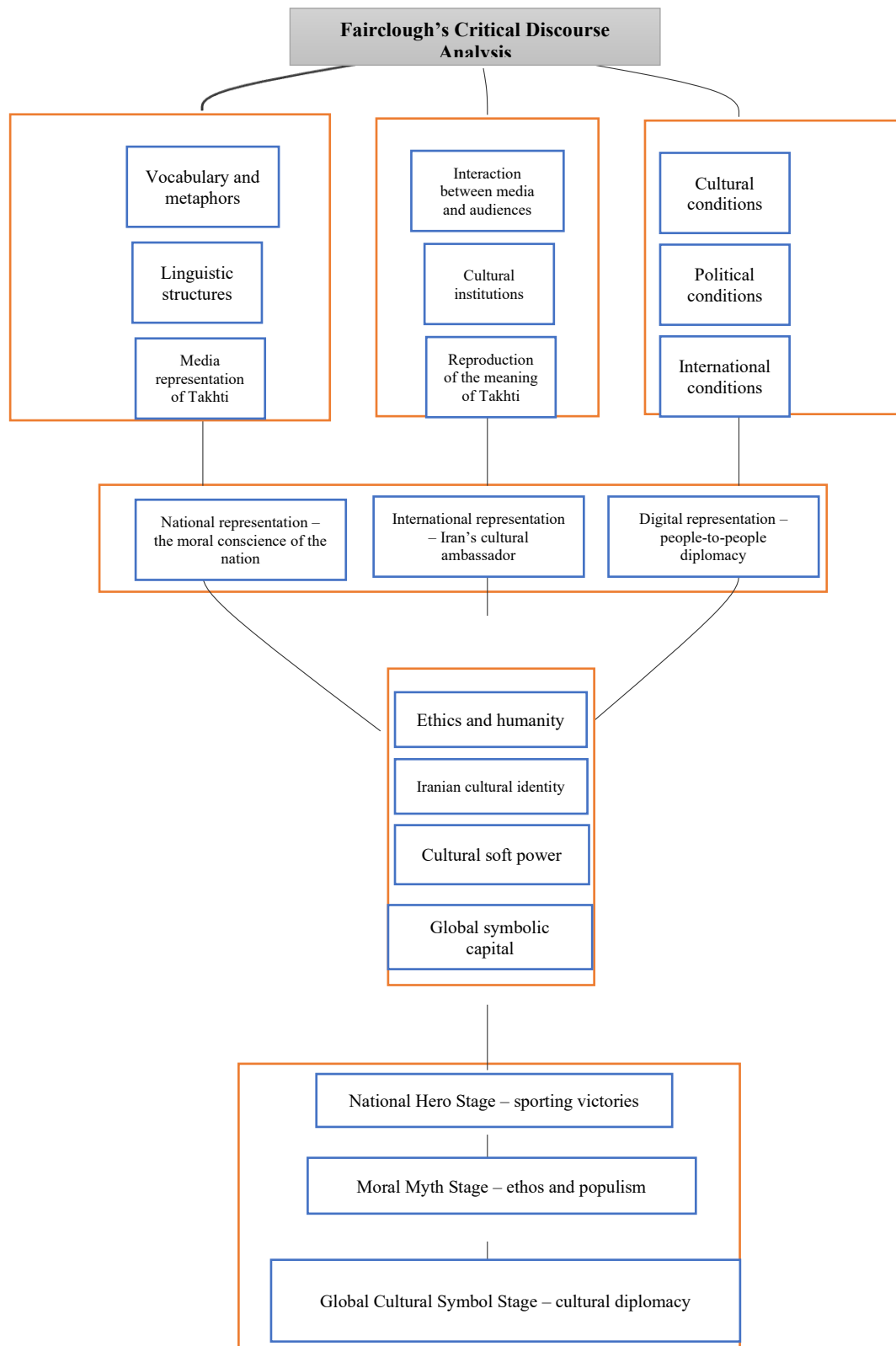


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Trajectory of Meaning-Making around the Figure of Jahan-Pahlevan Takhti

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the aim of analyzing the role of the representation of Jahan-Pahlevan Takhti in Iran's cultural and sport-oriented diplomacy. The findings showed that the cultural and media representation of Gholamreza Takhti in contemporary Iranian history goes beyond a "sports narrative" and, in fact, provides a platform for reproducing an ethics-based cultural diplomacy that Iran can employ as a stable model of soft power in the international arena. Based on the analysis of the data, three key axes can be identified in understanding this phenomenon.

1. Takhti's chivalric ethos and the revival of Iran's moral capital: In the collective memory of Iranians, Takhti is not merely a sports champion but a cultural embodiment of a historical moral ethos rooted in the tradition of futuwwa and javanmardi. Studies in cultural sociology show that, through his humane and popular behavior, Takhti managed to revive a traditional value system in a modern form (31). This revival went beyond "individual behavior"; Takhti succeeded in transforming ethics into a social discourse. In Bourdieu's terms, he converted "historical cultural capital" into "contemporary symbolic capital" (13). This transformation provided the foundation upon which Iran's cultural soft power in sport was constructed. From the perspective of Nye's soft power theory, countries become attractive when figures such as Takhti communicate their cultural messages in the language of ethics and humanity (1). In this sense, Takhti is a non-state actor of Iran's soft power—a social agent who, without formal instruments, stabilizes an image of an ethical, peace-seeking, and popular Iran at the international level. In comparative terms, Takhti may be placed alongside champions such as Muhammad Ali in the United States, Nelson Mandela (as a political-moral icon), and Pelé in Brazil, who became carriers of their nations' cultural and political messages beyond sport (3). Yet Takhti is distinct in that his ethos does not originate from the political system but from popular culture and the tradition of javanmardi—from the people and for the people (31).
2. The media and the representation of Takhti as a cultural discourse: The role of the media in sustaining Takhti's cultural legacy is crucial. Critical discourse analysis revealed that the representation of Takhti in the press, cinema, and social networks has undergone three semantic transformations:
3. National Heroic Narrative (Heroic Stage)
4. Ethical Mythic Narrative (Mythic Stage)
5. Global Cultural-Diplomatic Narrative (Diplomatic Stage)

This transformation shows that the discourse of Takhti has shifted from the national to the transnational level. International media such as CNN and The Guardian portray Takhti as a "symbol of Iranian humanity" (27, 28). Such representations introduce Iran not in the form of politics but through the lens of ethics and culture. In effect, the media act as cultural diplomats. This phenomenon is similar to what Grix and Brannagan describe in sports diplomacy theory as an "informal mechanism of representation" (15). Thus, the media discourse surrounding Takhti can become part of Iran's national soft power strategy.

In the digital age, this discourse has become even more popularized. The representation of Takhti on social networks has led to a type of "people-to-people diplomacy" in which ordinary users turn into cultural ambassadors. This is the very "self-generated diplomacy" that recent soft power research has highlighted (4).

From national symbol to instrument of cultural diplomacy: In the analytical model of this study, Takhti traverses a path that turns him into an active factor in Iran's cultural diplomacy—a process that begins with his chivalric ethos,

continues through the accumulation of cultural and symbolic capital, is reproduced via media representation, leads to the activation of cultural soft power at the international level, and finally is consolidated in cultural and social institutionalization. This cycle resembles Nye's model of soft power, yet with a distinctly Iranian configuration grounded in ethics, populism, and the ethos of pahlevani (1).

At an operational level, Iranian cultural and sports institutions (including the National Olympic Committee, the Ministry of Sport, and the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization) can use this model to design cultural diplomacy projects such as an "International Takhti Week," an "International Museum of Sports Ethics," or "Takhti Scholarships for Ethical Athletes Worldwide." Such initiatives, while promoting sports ethics, can create a positive image of Iran in global public opinion—the very process Bourdieu describes as the reproduction of symbolic capital (13, 32).

Cultural and geo-cultural implications: From a geo-cultural perspective, the wide range of public spaces named after Takhti throughout Iran shows that he is present not only in people's minds but also in the country's urban spaces and spatial memory (12). This symbolic physical presence can serve as a cultural infrastructure for Iran's urban diplomacy policies.

Thus, Takhti is not merely a historical figure but a living semantic system with the potential to be projected into the international arena. The global representation of Takhti offers a form of "Iranian cultural narrative" based on empathy, human dignity, and mutual respect—components that form the core of soft power (7, 33).

The present study showed that Jahan-Pahlevan Takhti possesses all the necessary components to play a role in Iran's cultural and sports diplomacy: moral character, global respect, domestic symbolic capital, and the capacity for international representation.

Consequently, Takhti can be introduced as the model for Iran's ethical sports diplomacy—one that elevates the country's cultural policy from a symbolic to a strategic level. This model not only increases Iran's soft power but also contributes to reconstructing the image of Iran in global media. Therefore, Takhti is not only the champion of a nation but also the cultural language of Iran in the world—a language that speaks of humanity rather than power competition (Table 3).

Table 3. Analytical Summary of Findings and Theoretical Interpretation

| Cultural Diplomacy Implications | Theoretical Interpretation (Link to Scientific Literature) | Key Findings of the Study | Analytical Axis |
|---|---|--|--|
| Defining an "Iranian Ethical Diplomacy Model" based on the chivalric ethos; promoting sports ethics in public diplomacy. | According to Bourdieu's cultural capital theory (13) and Nye's soft power theory (1), moral character can become a tool of cultural influence. | In national memory, Takhti symbolizes humility, sacrifice, and altruism; his ethos has generated symbolic capital. | Chivalric ethos and human ethics |
| Utilizing cinematic works, documentaries, and social media productions to enhance Iran's international image. | Within Hall's representation theory (11), media produce and redistribute meaning; Takhti carries the discourse of Iranian ethics. | Media have transformed Takhti from a "national hero" into a "moral myth" and then into a "global cultural symbol." | Media and cultural representation |
| Designing international cultural and sports programs centered on the Takhti brand; strengthening Iran's public diplomacy. | Referencing Nye (1) and Grix & Brannagan (15), Takhti represents informal and transnational soft power. | Takhti's global image, built on respect, ethics, and populism, enhances Iran's cultural attractiveness. | Soft power and Iran's cultural appeal |
| Institutionalizing the chivalric ethos in sports education, cultural diplomacy, and national cultural policy. | According to institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell), cultural continuity requires formal and educational structures. (Closest available reference used: (11)) | Takhti's values are reproduced through museums, schools, and cultural rituals. | Cultural institutionalization and reproduction of Takhti's ethos |
| Presenting a new model of Iran's soft power based on morality, ethos, and populism in international relations. | Explaining "people-centered cultural diplomacy": linking culture, sport, and foreign policy (1). | Takhti becomes the symbol of Iran's cultural diplomacy in the world. | Strategic and overarching conclusion |

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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