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The Confucius Institutes and China's Public Diplomacy Strategy

The Importance of Public Diplomacy for China

The Origin of Public Diplomacy. Public diplomacy is a diplomatic method that seeks to achieve a country’s interests by improving that country’s image and influence. It allows a country to better understand the diverse situations of foreign publics and therefore to influence them through cultural communication and through making accurate information about itself readily available. Observers of diplomacy have for a long time paid close attention to how a state’s behavior can enhance its national interests by spreading information and by cultivating a cultural sense of self-worth. Decades ago, a famous scholar of international affair, Karl Deutsch, wrote: «What are between the states’ interest are the policies which spread the ideologies of its
own in the foreign countries and the cultural and scientific policies catering for what they aim at»¹.

A state’s policy consists of public diplomacy and governmental diplomacy. Parties which participate in public diplomacy represent the status quo and the state’s policies; explain the issues that foreign publics misunderstand; and seek to better understand the various points of view of other countries. The purpose of public diplomacy is to improve a country’s image and the foreign publics’ attitude towards that country, by which that country can influence the foreign policies of other countries towards itself².

As a technical term, «Public Diplomacy» first appeared in 1965. Edmund Gullion, director of The School of Law at Tufts University, gave this definition: «Public diplomacy aims at handling the public opinion’s influence on a government’s foreign policies. It includes international relationships which transcend the field of traditional diplomacy: such as a government’s manipulation of foreign public opinion, interaction between a country’s interest groups and other countries, and communication between a state’s diplomats and foreign journalists. The key point of public diplomacy is the mobilization of message and viewpoint»³. At the time that Gullion gave this definition, public diplomacy mainly referred to the non-traditional diplomacy conducted by the U. S. News Agency. It was not until the 1980s that the U. S. had a formal definition for public diplomacy. In 1987, the U. S. State Department defined public diplomacy as: «Activities by which the U. S. can understand and influence other countries’ public opinion through communicative projects proposed by the government. By reducing other governments’ and publics’ wrong concept of the U. S., preventing relations from becoming complicated, and improving the U. S.’s self-image and impact on the foreign public, the U. S. can increase its national interest» (International Relations Terms Dictionary)⁴. In 1997, the U. S. government merged the News Agency into the State Department, believing that public diplomacy could increase the U. S.’s national interest by understanding, improving and influencing the various and diverse foreign publics.

The General Situation of Chinese Public Diplomacy. Chinese diplomacy does not have a systematic expression of the idea of public diplomacy, but it has been practiced for a long time though external dissemination, international communication, and propaganda. From the ideological origin perspective, the embryo of public diplomacy’s idea appeared in traditional Chinese culture two thousands of years ago. The widely praised old maxims contain plenty of ideas about public diplomacy, such as «A just cause enjoys abundant support while an unjust cause finds little; only with the advocacy of the just can one gain support from others; the support of the people among the three elements for the victory of war; dispatching troops with just cause; success is assured by right titles and proper words».

In modern times, especially after the establishment of the PRC, from the unilateral propaganda at the beginning to the birth of a public diplomatic system, China has been trying to carry out public diplomacy. It is helpful to first consider external publicity during the infant stages of the PRC. After the PRC was established, in order to strengthen the power of socialism, Chinese diplomatic strategy focused on two points: first, to develop the «lean to one side» relationship with the U. S. S. R.; and second, to oppose the imperialism and hegemonism of the U. S. During that period, the scale of Chinese external propaganda was quite small, mainly concentrating on the socialistic countries and some countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The main publicity channels were the branch offices of the Xinhua News Agency set up in those countries. Some promotional magazines were also published at that time, such as People’s China in 1950 and Chinese Construction beginning in 1951 which came off the press with several language versions like English, Russian, Japanese, and French. Representing the Chinese government’s position, Beijing Weekly, which was first published in 1958, was a news magazine that analyzed Chinese politics, economics, and culture, and which was considered to be as authoritative and journalistic as a documentary. This magazine played an important role in China’s overseas publicity.

Moreover, China Radio International (CRI) was set up in this period. Its purpose was communicating with other socialistic countries and arguing against the western countries on ideological issues. This period’s propaganda attached great importance to ideology; lacking interoperation and interaction with the outside world, ideology was implemented by China unilaterally. After reform and the opening up policy, Chinese international communication matured gradually. As the policy of opening up to the outside world was carried out, the domestic economy was booming, and the political environment
was becoming unconstrained. Various multi-channel, multi-level, and ubiquitous patterns of overseas publicity were taking shape. A batch of external sounding boards appeared, such as *China Daily* in an English edition, *People’s Daily* in an overseas edition, and the international satellite channels of CCTV, all of which became an important window and information resource for China’s overseas publicity. Interaction with other countries increased significantly during this period’s overseas publicity, and the unilateral approach became bilateral. To some extent, this period’s overseas publicity was undertaken with China’s own initiative, but it only focused on economics, thus lacking a self-awareness that takes the all-round national image project as its core.

After the end of the Cold War, the focal point of overseas publicity shifted its emphasis from propaganda towards trying to create a public diplomatic system, and this shift gave birth to genuine Chinese public diplomacy. With the disintegration of the U. S. S. R. and Eastern Europe, former socialistic countries separated from each other and established their own positions on public diplomacy. As a result, Chinese diplomatic pressure increased significantly. Instead of focusing its criticism on Chinese ideology as they had before, Western countries began to criticize other aspects of China, and this in turn bred China Threat Theory. In order to quiet down Western society’s misunderstanding and hostility, China started to change its methods of overseas publicity, forming a compound strategy, thus giving systematic public diplomacy its early form. Chinese public diplomacy began to focus on foreign publics, persuasively and effectively publicizing its views and perspectives through market mechanisms, aspiring thereby to achieve five goals: conveying China’s voice; showing China through a more accurate and favorable lens; rebutting inaccurate reports about and false accusations against China; and both improving the international environment and influencing other countries’ strategic decisions.

Compared to the former one-way publicity, public diplomacy at present is characterized by diversification of technique: it not only takes overseas publicity into account but also considers external cultural communication, making cultural industry more competitive and influential. Moreover, research on the market mechanism of overseas publicity is utilized for the activities of foreign public relations; by reporting on important events in a timely manner and by regularly correcting inaccurate foreign news reports, the work of China’s public policy and of China’s research is done mutually, and China is able to promptly monitor international public opinion. To sum up, since the 1990s, Chinese public diplomacy has aimed at cultivating a general, favorable
national image, for ensuring good diplomacy leads to growth in the domestic economy.

Recently, as the concept of «peaceful development» has acquired further importance, China has started to portray itself as an important power that will cooperate with international society and safeguard world peace. The Chinese government pays great attention to the development of public diplomacy, and the concept of «Public Diplomacy» is often mentioned on important occasions. In July 2009, General-secretary Hu Jintao delivered a speech at the 11th conference of Ambassadors that contained the first official mention of the commencement of Chinese public diplomacy; this symbolized that public diplomacy was firmly on the agenda of the government. During the two Conferences period in 2010, Minister of Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi for the first time spoke about public diplomacy openly. For the practice of public diplomacy, Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) issued Public Diplomacy Quarterly; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the Office of Public Diplomacy; and the Director of the Commission of Foreign Affair in CPPCC, Han Fangming, set up the Chahaer Institute, an NGO that focuses its research on public diplomacy.

Our country’s public diplomatic work is no more limited in traditional official communication. China’s pubic diplomatic work is diversifying, its domain is broadening, and its substance is becoming richer. Media, think-tanks, NGOs, and the public have stepped onto the stage of public diplomacy, exerting more influence on it. Moreover, events such as the «Ping Pong Diplomacy» in 1960s, the exchange of youth visit between China and Japan directed by Hu Yaobang after the reform and opening up policy, and the Confucius Institutes all over the world are forms of public diplomacy. The successfully held Beijing Olympics were a great and eye-catching sports event, but they were also a successful public diplomatic activity. Up-coming important events like Shanghai EXPO 2010 are also an enormously important opportunity for Chinese public diplomacy.

Why Does China Launch Public Diplomacy?

Now that we have examined the general situation of Chinese diplomacy, we can turn to the reasons China utilizes public diplomacy. First, as China is placed in a spotlight by the world; China’s links with the world become increasingly important; and the ways in which China is linked with the world are countless. 12 million Chinese go abroad and 24 million foreigners come to China each year. Moreover, civil communication outpaces governmental
communication, and civil communication is definitely a cultural bilateral publicity. As a result, the Chinese people’s identity becomes more cosmopolitan, thus leading to many opportunities to undertake public diplomacy. As China’s impact on the world is growing, events in China are usually events of worldwide importance. China could be the hot spot of the world’s public opinion at any time, so it is necessary for China to understand the diverse international perspectives of public diplomacy. For various reasons, many countries actively develop public diplomacy with China. Thus, China, as a responsible power of the world, encourages its citizens to take seriously the obligation of communicating with international society.

Second, public diplomacy is necessary for changing the Cold War mentality of Western countries. For reasons both real and imagined, the Cold War mentality still lingers in many Western countries. The term «Cold War mentality» refers to an ideology that prevailed during the Cold War period; and although the Cold War has ended, that mentality is still supported by some interest groups in the Western World, groups that are often ideologically entrenched against China. Enterprises led by the Chinese Communist Party will face accusations from some of these Western groups, while similar enterprises undertaken in India or Brazil will not. This contradiction is and will be an obstacle for Chinese policies and activities. Due to ideological differences and conflicts of interest, the Western media sometimes report managed news, even flat-out falsehoods about China. In recent years the Western media has constantly hyped «China threat theory», leading many people in other countries to believe that Socialism with Chinese Characteristics is not a true form of democracy; it has accused China of pursuing Chinese hegemony by building-up its military force; it has argued that unemployment in other countries originates from the booming of China’s economy; and it has even framed Chinese policy towards Africa as Neo-colonialism.

Third, favorable international opinion is vital for the development of China. At present, a state’s prosperity depends not only on domestic conditions but also on the international environment, which has political, economic, military and public-opinion dimensions. If we want to make China, a huge developing country with a population of 1.3 billion, understood by the world, we cannot rely on the Western media, for in doing so we would not be able to bridge the public opinion gap. Only with the Chinese people’s capacity for international communication can the realities of China, including the Chinese cultural spirit and Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, be properly introduced to and correctly understood by the world. China’s public diplomacy is
an important way to enhance that capacity, which no doubt supports govern­
mental diplomacy as well.

Fourth, ignorance, misunderstanding and prejudice not only hurt China,
but also other countries, because it leads to misguided policies towards China.
A correct understanding of China is essential for these countries’ national inter­
est and for the harmony of the world. In its external communication, China is
promoting ideas like «harmony», «mildness», and «auspiciousness,» which
are the symbols of Chinese culture. By promoting these ideas, public diplo­
macy will make an invaluable contribution both to China and to the world at
large. The continuing practice of public diplomacy, therefore, is an inevitable
choice for China.

Confucius Institute as part of China’s Public Diplomacy Strategy

General Situation of Confucius Institutes: When are they Estab­
lished? How Many Confucius Institutes are there throughout the world?
Language conveys culture. This is especially true of the Chinese language.
Consequently, language is a reliable tool for learning a state’s culture. In addi­
tion, the promotion of language for the sake of spreading culture is a popu­
lar strategy with some developed countries. Chinese character is our cultural
legacy originating from thousands years ago, which has gone through many
changes across numerous generations. By learning the Chinese language, one
can perceive the Chinese culture gradually. Although the Chinese speaking
population is the largest in the world, Chinese language is the toughest lan­
guage to promote. Chinese culture is profound and extensive, and possesses a
hypnotic and penetrating power. Promoting the Chinese culture by undertaking
public diplomacy is necessary if we are to change the Western domination of
global culture. On the other hand, the essence of Western culture is that it is
the common wealth of human beings, and the selective introduction of foreign
culture benefits our reform and opening up policy and enhances the economic
and cultural quality of our country.

Increasing numbers of foreigners are learning Chinese as China’s inter­
national influence is widening, resulting in the rapid development of the Con­
fucius Institute. To be sure, the Confucius Institutes’ courses are not limited
to teaching the Chinese language, but are also concerned with promoting
Chinese culture, which helps people from around the world understand China
deeply and more accurately. As an irreplaceable element of China’s public
diplomacy, the Confucius Institute is an effective channel for helping the world
to understand China and Chinese culture. China’s booming economy and
broadening international connections have led to an increasing need for the study of Chinese. Since 2004, using as a reference the experiences of Britain, France, Germany and Spain in promoting national language, China has been setting up nonprofit organizations called Confucius Institutes throughout the world that are oriented towards teaching Chinese and promoting Chinese culture. As of October 2010, 322 Confucius Institutes and 369 Confucius Courses have been established in 96 countries or regions; 61 universities, colleges, or institutes in China have participated in the work of these Institutes, providing Chinese teachers and recruiting volunteers. The Confucius Institutes have made enormous contributions to China’s public diplomacy. By looking at the work and patterns of the «Confucius Institute,» it becomes apparent that external communication is more flexible as a method of public diplomacy, which began as a mode directed by politics, then came to be transmitted by culture and operated by commerce.

The Russian Confucius Institutes and Their Value in Public Diplomacy. The goal of the Confucius Institute is to increase peoples’ comprehension of the Chinese language and culture, to develop friendly relationships with other countries, and to boost multiculturalism, thereby building a harmonious world. Its obligations, inter alia, are: teaching Chinese, training Chinese teachers, operating Chinese tests and validation services for the qualification of Chinese teachers; offering consultations on or providing information about Chinese education, culture, economics, and society; and undertaking research on modern China. The school-running model of the Confucius Institute includes the cooperation between Chinese and foreign secondary and higher education; the partnership of foreign communities and Chinese middle schools and colleges; and the collaboration between foreign governments and Chinese municipal governments. At present, the Russian Confucius Institutes are meeting with initial success in public diplomacy. With this successful cultural communication, a positive relationship is being built between the Russian and Chinese publics, and their mutual cultural understanding has been deepened, thus healthily pushing forward the progress of the Sino-Russia bilateral relationship.

In March 2006, as the guest of the official website of the Sino-Russian year at Xinhuanet, Zhou Ji, the Minister of Education, revealed that several

5 The transformation of China’s public diplomacy pattern. URL: http://www.qstheory.cn/gj/zgwj/200911/t20091118_15525.htm (mode of access: 27.09.2011).

more Confucius Institutes will be established in Russia. Zhou Ji revealed that Chinese government had signed an agreement about Chinese education in Russia and Russian education in Chinese with the Russian government in November 2005. More Russians are now learning Chinese, and the Russian government attaches great importance on the learning of Chinese⁷.

Among the universities in Guangdong, GDUFS is a good example of utilizing the Confucius Institute as a platform for cooperating with colleges in other countries; for instance, it sends its teachers abroad, creates exchange programs for students, and organizes conferences for both parties and cooperative-research with Russian colleges. With its partnership with Russian colleges, GDUFS became the co-founder of one of the three Confucius Institutes in Russia, which is a good starting point for cultural communication and the mobilization of personnel. As the Sino-Russia relationship continues to develop, GDUFS will cooperate at the university level with Ural State University in Ekaterinburg (sister city of Guangzhou). In 2008, the full operation of Ural State University’s Confucius Institute, co-founded by GDUFS, began after an opening ceremony, and it is becoming a base for the promotion of Chinese language and culture and a platform for cultural communication between China and Russia in the Ural region. In establishing the Confucius Institute, an agreement was signed by the two universities, aiming at running the Institute in cooperation, having, for instance, an exchange program for students and teachers. Notably, in activities such as the first «Chinese Day» at the Confucius Institute in 2009, students had a profound experience of Chinese Culture.

The Confucius Institute established in Russia has the following impacts. First, China’s influence is significantly increased. Indeed, the characters of the Chinese language convey culture, ethos and belief. With the promotion of Chinese at Russia’s Confucius Institutes, Chinese traditional culture and the belief in Chinese characters were transmitted to the Russian public, and this to some extent enhanced the global influence of Chinese culture and China’s sense of self-worth. For example, in May 2007, under the direction of the Office of the leading group for promoting Chinese abroad, cooperation between Kazan University and Hunan Normal University gave birth to a Confucius Institute. For the last 3 years, as the supplement for authentic Chinese education, the Confucius Institute has made great effort in promoting and popularizing Chinese language and culture in the Kazan area. From October 26 to 27, 2010,
the Confucius Institute at Kazan University held a seminar for international Chinese education and for the exhibition of teaching material with the title, *Russia and China - the Present and Future*. During the year of Chinese in Russia, Russian students’ passion for learning Chinese was ignited by various Chinese promotions organized every month by the Confucius Institute at Kazan University.

Second, the Confucius Institutes in Russia also improve China’s national image. During the long period of ideological infighting, China’s national image was shaped by the Western media, and so to some extent the majority of the Western public does not have an accurate understanding of China. In addition to teaching Chinese, the Confucius Institute is a platform to educate the Russian people about China.

Third, the Confucius Institute enhances China’s cultural competitive strength. Apart from the teaching of language, the Confucius Institute’s curriculum includes Beijing opera, martial arts, Chinese medication, and Chinese food. Facing cultural invasion from Western countries, China’s international competitive power can be strengthened by the popularization of the Confucius Institutes. This in turn will make the Chinese culture stronger.

Fourth, the Confucius Institute can lead to a booming economy in both Russia and China. The popularization of the Confucius Institutes propels the development of Sino-Russia cultural enterprise and industry, with regular events like the year of Russia and the year of China held by the two parties, as well as the *primary and secondary Chinese course* project triggered by the Confucius Institute at VSPU in March 30, 2011. With the help of both Departments of Chinese and the Confucius Institutes, more than 10 primary or secondary schools operate optional courses of Chinese.

At present, 12 Confucius Institutes and three Confucius Courses, including the course at New Siberia University, are established in Russia. We can say with confidence that the successful achievement of the international promotion of Chinese in Russia is illustrated by those 12 Confucius Institutes and three

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Confucius Courses. Moreover, with regard to its distribution, the current number of Confucius Institutes is still unable to meet the fever for learning Chinese in Russia. In the Far-East area there are only two Institutes; in the middle and Siberia areas there are four Institutes; and in the European part of Russia there are six Institutes. For a country with more than 17 million-square-kilometer’s of territory and 13 cities with over 13 million people, 12 Confucius Institutes is clearly not enough. Indeed, residents of the Far-East and of Siberia are eager to learn more about China. Moreover, as trade and tourism continue to develop along the border of China and Russia, the lack of Chinese specialists in Russia will become increasingly problematic. From that point of view, it is necessary that we continue to establish more Confucius Institutes throughout Russia.

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Китай: историческое прошлое и его интерпретация (некоторые проблемы источниковедения)

Самая древняя в современном мире китайская цивилизация хранит память о всем пройденном ею пути протяженностью в пять тысяч лет. Основной вклад в это внесло ее любимое детище — историописание, которое к настоящему времени насчитывает почти 40 веков своего непрерывного существования. Большая часть этого пути описана историками древнего и средневекового Китая, создавшими небывалый по своему объему фонд трудов, где аккумулирован огромный фактический материал и содержатся сведения о нескольких десятках тысяч исторических персонажей. Подобной истории не имеет ни один другой народ.

Классическое китайское историописание самобытно, его отличает набор присущих только ему особенностей. Наделенное важными функциями, оно уже с первых своих шагов рассматривалось как дело особой значимости, имело официальный характер, а со становлением империи (III в. до н. э.) превратилось в один из главных ее институтов. Столь высокий статус обеспечил историописанию необычайную стабильность (оно в Китае не прерывалось даже на самых крутых поворотах его истории)