

Research on Central Asian Chinese Media Against the Background of the Belt and Road Initiative*

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Abstract—Taking the Chinese media communicated in Central Asia as the research object, this paper explores the development pattern and communication situation of Chinese media in Central Asia by combing the development of Chinese media in Central Asian countries under the Belt and Road Initiative. The purpose is to keep an eye on the communication function of Central Asian Chinese media along the "New Silk Road" and its role in the construction and communication of Chinese national image.

Keywords—the Belt and Road Initiative; Central Asian Chinese Media; communication

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 21st century, especially since Xi Jinping came to power and served as the General Secretary, China has further integrated into the world with global governance concepts and strategic thinking. The Chinese discourse power and China's international communication ability are both given the top priority in the research on international communication and foreign communication under the new situation. In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping made a speech in Kazakhstan and proposed to jointly construct the "Silk Road Economic Belt" (also known as the "New Silk Road"). Later, President Xi Jinping proposed an initiative to build the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road".

Central Asia is the only place connected the east and west ends of the Eurasian continent, and is also the core area of the "Silk Road Economic Belt". Central Asia has gathered about 600,000 overseas Chinese, and [1] plays an important role in the exchanges between Central Asia and China. Overseas Chinese communities have "three treasures", namely overseas Chinese groups, overseas Chinese schools and overseas Chinese media. In recent years, in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative, China's contacts with Central Asia have become increasingly close, and Chinese media have also emerged in Central Asia.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW OF RESEARCHES ON CENTRAL ASIAN CHINESE MEDIA

According to the existing result of research on overseas

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Chinese media, Chinese media in Central Asia is an emerging phenomenon and also a field less concerned in existing academic researches. Earlier researches show that the five Central Asian countries "have no Chinese newspapers" and "new media is in the initial stage" [2]. In recent years, the five Central Asian countries have begun to appear in Chinese newspapers issued in local place and Chinese new media. However, due to the small scale and new publication, the research on this new phenomenon has been less carried out.

At present, the studies on Chinese media in Central Asia are more concerned in the researches on Xinjiang's communication to Central Asia, mainly in the results of some scholars in Xinjiang. The researches focus on summarizing Xinjiang's practical operation and propaganda experience in communication to Central Asia. For example, the paper "Status Quo, Problems and Strategies of Xinjiang Radio and Television's Communication to Central Asia" written by Luo Bin from Xinjiang University of Finance & Economics, the paper "Analysis on the Strategies of Xinjiang Media's Communication to Central Asia" written by Zhao Lifang and by GuLimila Yalikun from Minzu University of China, Central University for Nationalities are the result of researches on Xinjiang's communication to Central Asia. In addition, there are also some researches on foreign communication concerned Central Asia, such as He Xiaoxiao's "The Status Quo and Countermeasures of China's Network Communication to Countries along the 'Belt and Road': Taking the Five Central Asian Countries as an Example" analyzes the development status of Central Asian Network Media and Chinese central network media's objective communication practice; the "other image: the Belt and Road and Chinese image communication — taking the Russian region as an example" published by Luo Bing in 2017 also covers researches on CCTV Chinese international channel and the overseas edition of People's Daily in addition to researches on the audience in Central Asia and Russian media in China.

III. COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT OF CENTRAL ASIAN CHINESE MEDIA

A. Background of the Belt and Road Initiative

The communication environment is the living and development environment of media, and is the sum of many

conditions existing around media activities. From the perspective of the communication environment, the communication environment in Central Asia is affected by the entire large communication environment. The five Central Asian countries are adjacent to the northwestern of China. Since the proposing of the Belt and Road initiative, China has kept a closer communication with Central Asian countries in economy and culture and China and Central Asia are entering a new mode of cooperation.

The key content of the Belt and Road Initiative is the "Five connections", namely political connection, facility connection, trade connection, fund connection and people-to-people connection; the concept of the Initiative is joint discussion, co-construction and sharing. These elements all point to a keyword, interoperability, and the most fundamental basis for interoperability is information communication. At the Parallel Meeting of the "Belt and Road" International Cooperation Summit held in May 2017, China proposed the initiative to build up a "News Cooperation Alliance with Countries along the Belt and Road" to play the bridging and linking role of media and promote the communication, understanding and mutual trust among people of countries along the route through information communication, cultural exchanges, propagation and interaction and the like methods.

B. Audience Group

From the perspective of the audience, Central Asia has gathered about 600,000 overseas Chinese, especially Uighur, Hui people, Donggan people and other ethnic minority of Chinese. They are the most important audience of Chinese media in Central Asia. Although the audience group is not large, it is obviously diverse. The group not only contains the old overseas Chinese who have immigrated here from their ancestors many years ago, but also contains new overseas Chinese who immigrated here after the reform and opening up. There are ethnic minority Chinese from Xinjiang and other areas such as Donggan people and Uighur, as well as Han people and employees of Chinese-funded enterprises who came here for business reasons and other reasons.

C. New Media Environment

Limited by many factors, online media of the five Central Asian countries are in relatively slow development. Some countries have low network access rates and rely on external assistance. For example, China has assisted the construction of Shanghai Cooperation Organization Information Superhighway Project in Central Asia. Specifically in Kazakhstan that has the largest territory and develops the fastest in Central Asia, the development of Internet is also the most rapid. In 2000, there were only about 70,000 netizens in Kazakhstan. In 2016, the number of netizens exceeded 10 million, increased to 63.3% of the country's population. [3] Social media is relatively popular. Kyrgyzstan media is the most active media in Central Asia, with TV usage rate reaching 45% and network usage rate reaching 45.5% [4]. Turkmenistan's society implements a high-welfare, high-security, and highly-closed model. The state implements news blockade and information acquisition

is not free. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan's media are strictly controlled by the state and are seriously Russianized; new media is not ready-made, the network speed is slow, and the coverage is small. [5]

Although the development of media and communication levels of various countries shows an uneven situation due to the difference in national conditions and technological capabilities, the rise of the Internet and new media is an irresistible and negligible trend for all countries. At present in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, network has surpassed TV and become the medium mostly used by the audience. Moreover, compared with the history of Chinese media development in other regions, the new phenomenon of Chinese media development in Central Asia is precisely emerged and developed in the context of globalization and new media. Therefore, the involvement of new information technology and new media is an important environmental factor in the development of Chinese media in Central Asia.

IV. COMMUNICATION PATTERNS OF CENTRAL ASIAN CHINESE MEDIA

In recent years, in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative, China's contacts with Central Asia have become increasingly close, and Chinese media have also emerged in Central Asia. In Tajikistan, the first Chinese newspaper "New Silk Road" was born in 2016. In Kazakhstan, there are the "Kazakhstan Overseas Chinese News" and "Today's Silk Road", wherein "Today's Silk Road" is the first newspaper in the country including Kazakh, Russian, Chinese and Donggan language versions. In Kyrgyzstan, there are the "Central Asian Overseas Chinese News" and the "New Observations of Silk Road". Among them, the "New Observations of Silk Road" newspaper was published and issued by Kyrgyzstan Silk Road Cultural Development Co., Ltd., has Russian and Chinese versions, and with a circulation of about 18,000 copies per issue. At the same time, the newspaper also actively created a wide media platform. In 2016, the "New Observations of Silk Road" Internet platform was launched, focusing on serving Central Asian overseas Chinese, Chinese businessmen, Confucius Institutes and international students, Chinese-funded enterprises, and short-term Chinese visitors and local mainstream society. Later, the newspaper also successively launched new media platforms such as the "New Observations of Silk Road" series of WeChat Official Account and the like new media platforms; and in the beginning of 2019, it also created Instagram new media. According to the latest statistics, the number of fans reached 38,000 to the end of July, 2019. In the social media of the country only having a population of more than 6 million, Kyrgyzstan's social media can be described as a new force suddenly rises [6]. It can be said that the "New Silk Road" newspaper has opened up a new development model. While exerting the geographical advantages, it has also broken through the geographical restrictions of communication and built an information platform between China and Central Asian countries in the form of multimedia matrix.

In addition, with the gradual improvement of China's foreign communication system, some national media in

China have also established overseas platforms targeted to overseas Chinese, such as CCTV Chinese International Channel, People's Daily (Overseas Edition), etc. At the same time, Central Asia is adjacent to Xinjiang of China; and due to the links in many aspects such as religious belief and ethnic culture and by virtue of the all-round implementation of China' "Radio and television coverage projects in frontier minority areas such as Tibet and Xinjiang" and the "Xinjiang Radio and TV Going Out" project, Xinjiang Radio and TV is also landed in Central Asia.

V. COMMUNICATION FUNCTIONS OF CENTRAL ASIAN CHINESE MEDIA

A. *Communication of Chinese Media in Central Asia and the Construction of the "Belt and Road"*

The Belt and Road Initiative proposes an innovative mode of cooperation. In the construction of the "Belt and Road", Chinese media has taken root overseas to convey Chinese voices, and built a bridge of communication between China and the countries along the "Belt and Road". The five Central Asian countries are the key nodes of the "Belt and Road Initiative" and are important partners in building the "Belt and Road".

In the construction of the "Belt and Road", Chinese media in Central Asia provides an information communication mechanism with internal and external links. Taking the "New Observations of Silk Road" as an example, based on the spread of the Internet and WeChat official account, this newspaper covers wider range of contents which not only include Kyrgyzstan's national news, but also include news from China and other countries in Central Asia, as well as reports on the cultures of Central Asian countries, Chinese people in Central Asia, and Central Asians in China. This newspaper, from multiple dimensions, reflects that the "Belt and Road" is beneficial to the cultural and economic exchanges between China and Central Asia and the people's friendly exchanges, and builds a platform for mutual understanding and information exchange between people in China and Central Asian countries.

B. *Communication of Chinese Media in Central Asia and the Construction of China's National Image*

With the advent of globalization, the issue of national image has increasingly become a research hotspot in the field of international communication and international relations. In 1996, Chinese scholar Xu Xiaoge studied the national image in the news reports of Chinese and American newspapers and made a research on the definition of national image for the first time. He pointed out that national image is "the image formed by a country in the flow of international news, or the image of a country shown in the news and speech reports of other countries' news media".[7]

In the researches on the construction and communication of China's national image from the perspective of media, some viewpoints point out that the media's shaping of the national image is divided into three forms: self-shaping, other-shaping and joint-shaping, namely the domestic media

constructs the image of the country, and the foreign media builds the image of other country, the domestic media and international media jointly build the image of a country. [8] Due to the unique geographical advantages, overseas Chinese media has its own unique advantages in the shaping and communication of China's national image. Studies have shown that overseas Chinese media plays a role of co-constructing China's national image. [9]

Against the background of the Belt and Road Initiative, China's communication with Central Asian countries in economy and culture become closer. In this process, Chinese media, as a communication link and bridge, also constantly conveys the development course of China to the Central Asian overseas Chinese community and Central Asian society. Many major events relevant to China such as the Import and Export Expo, the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China can form a common concern in the Chinese media in Central Asia.

VI. CONCLUSION

In 2015, Cheng Manli, a scholar who has long been committed to overseas Chinese media research, proposed that in order to recognize the function and status of overseas Chinese media, researchers should make research from a global perspective based on strategic communication, "adjust the concept and strengthen their acquaintances consciousness [10]", let new immigrants and the media run by them "play a role and create synergy" in the Chinese government's global strategic thinking. This view is precisely the logical basis for this research, and also provides a new research perspective for overseas Chinese media research under the new situation.

The new international political pattern and the overseas Chinese ecological environment, new communication concepts and strategic thinking, new media and cultural environment have injected new vitality into the development of overseas Chinese media. As the communicator of Chinese story and the loudspeaker of Chinese voice, Central Asian Chinese Media has shaped and disseminated the national image of China to Central Asian region and even the international community based on its unique geographical advantages and communication context.

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