

A New Approach for Dialogue in the Post-American Era: Telling Chinese Stories with Cultural Confidence

Shanshan Bai

College of Literature and Journalism
Sichuan University
Chengdu, China

Abstract—The arrival of the post-American era means the end of American global hegemony, the reshaping of international order, and the pluralistic participation in global governance. And when the world structure changes, it is also the time for China to reshape its international image. Therefore, in the post-American era, China should change its external communication methods, change its narrative method, and adopt the path of "telling Chinese stories" to convey China's voice. This article takes "storytelling" as the core, and explains how to shape the China's image with a strong belief in cultural confidence starting from the listener of the story, the content of the story, the discourse of the story, and the speaker of the story. The maximization of the effect of external communication in the narrative will help construct the external image of China's peaceful rise.

Keywords: *story, cultural confidence, Chinese story, post-American era*

I. INTRODUCTION

On November 3, 2007, Immanuel Wallerstein, the founder of world-system theory, visited Shanghai University and gave a lecture entitled "Living in the Post-American Era". "We are in a post-american world," he said. "America is just one of many powerful nations." [1] Wallerstein does not deny that the United States is still among the great powers. With the emergence of Iraq war and US Treasury issues, the United States has clearly presented a slump and is unable to delay it. In 2008, Fareed Zakaria, who studied from Huntington, made a similar judgment. He believed, "at the political-military level, we are still living in a world dominated by the 'only superpower'. From any other perspective, the distribution of industry, finance, education, society, culture and power is shifting, and all run counters to the dominant position of the United States. This does not mean that people are entering an anti-American World, but are striving towards a post-American World, which is being shaped by many countries and individuals. All determine its direction." [2] Obviously, Zakaria does not think that the post-American era means the decline of the United States, but "the rise of the other". The "other" here not only refers to the state, but also various non-state actors such as enterprises, capital, NGOs, etc. Since then, the term "post-American" has gradually entered the mainstream. In 2017, "Washington Post" published an article entitled "Say hello to

the post-American world". In the same month, He Yafei, the former Chinese vice Foreign Minister, published the arrival of "post-American era". These theories have revealed the typical appearance of the "post-American era": the end of American global hegemony, the reshaping of the international order, and the participation of multiple subjects in global governance.

The development and change of the time background means that the way of dialogue with the world must also be updated. Firstly, the "world" has changed, and the object is not the previous object. The way of dialogue must be changed with the change of the object. Since the development of the Internet has not only stripped away the authority of traditional media, but also put a microphone for the "silent majority" in the past society, the state is no longer the single subject of the world dialogue. To talk to the world means to let more diversified subjects in the country participate in the dialogue. With the loss of American hegemony, China has participated in more international affairs on the world stage. With the help of these major international issues, this is a great opportunity to shape China's new image.

For a long time, China has positioned its external communications as "external propaganda", neglecting the narrative mode of dialogue, which has not only had little effect, but has also raised doubts. Now, Chinese officials have proposed a new mode of dialogue with the world — telling Chinese stories and introducing China's history of external communication into a new era. How to complete the dialogue with the world in the way of "telling Chinese stories" in the post-American era has become a key issue in China's external communication. Taking this issue apart, the dialogue path of "telling Chinese stories" requires a change of thinking.

II. THE LISTENER OF STORIES: FROM THE WEST TO THE WORLD

In the "American era", the main interlocutors with China are the western world led by the "United States". Due to the world pattern of "one superpower and many powers", China, as a rising developing country, is bound to seek consensus with the West as the goal of dialogue. Therefore, the discourse system of dialogue between China and the world is

based on the culture of the western world. The embrace of the concept of "soft power" is exactly in this context. As Professor Zhao Yuezhi said, "the concept of soft power is based on circular argumentation." [3] Soft power is not necessarily easier to be accepted than hard power, and soft power without hard power can't be attractive in essence. Therefore, "China's pursuit of soft power is a passive move to a large extent." [3] When the international community is hostile to China's rise and describes it as a new form of hegemony, China has no choice but to raise the banner of "soft power" and repeatedly emphasize the peaceful nature of China's rise in the western discourse system, which falls into the trap of the western discourse system. Joseph Nye put forward the concept of soft power, which is the continuation of cold war thinking and the countermeasures and suggestions to maintain the leading position of the United States in the world. He believed that it is necessary for the United States to accelerate the assimilation process of American values worldwide by building soft power. In fact, the theory of soft power has become an important basis for the global strategy of the United States. Therefore, in the report of the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the term "improving the soft power of national culture" is not directly adopted, but the word "cultural" is added in front of it, which limits the concept connotation of "soft power" in China, almost excluding the elements of values with ideological color. However, this passive response has not obtained the identification of the western society. The western media continue to carry out reports on "China Threat Theory", and regard the "cultural soft power" as the assimilation intention of global values, which is exactly the understanding of soft power in the western discourse system.

After entering the "post-American era", the hegemonic position of the United States gradually disintegrated. Taking Trump's "American supremacy" as the boundary, the United States began to evade the responsibility of global governance as a superpower, and its discourse power also tended to disintegrate. What follows is that the western discourse system, which has long dominated global values, is also facing fragmentation. The establishment of a discourse system with Chinese characteristics has become an important basis for the dialogue between China and the world. This means that the Chinese story people are going to tell must be a new story under the discourse system with Chinese characteristics. The first thing is to establish an academic discourse system with Chinese characteristics. Academic thought should provide forward-looking guidance and theoretical guidance for the development of a country. However, China's current academic development is still at the stage of "introducing Western research to the East". A large number of scholars are still committed to the localization of Western disciplines in China, and have not developed a set of theories with Chinese characteristics that can truly solve Chinese problems. Chinese academics have no discourse. The Chinese can only use western theories to explain Chinese issues. Therefore, the urgent task is to establish the academic confidence of Chinese scholars, and the premise of academic confidence lies in cultural

confidence. Whether it is the long-standing traditional culture of China or the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics today, they are rich in academic deposits, in which the "Chinese theory" will inevitably emerge. Therefore, the academic nobility comes from the firm confidence in Chinese culture. Only when people firmly believe that Chinese culture has the ability to stand in the forest of world culture, can the Chinese establish a discourse system with Chinese characteristics on this basis.

However, it should be noted that the Chinese discourse system people are going to establish is not opposite to the western discourse system, but a concept that transcends the binary opposition between China and the west. What the Chinese are going to establish is a dialogic discourse system, an inclusive and non-assimilative system, and an open field that can meet and know other countries' cultures. The reason why this point is emphasized is that in the post-American era, the audience of Chinese stories is not the western world, but the whole world. Bakhtin said that "dialogue is the purpose". Only in dialogue can people construct self-consciousness. The more diverse the objects of dialogue are, the more clearly people can understand themselves. Therefore, it is necessary to give a place to all the cultures that used to be in a special position, and then every culture can find its place. Only in this way can the countries have an equal dialogue with different cultures. At this time, the dialogue doesn't refer to the "assimilation" of western culture, but is a really open communication, which is to show sympathy and help each other in the same boat.

III. THE CONTENT OF STORIES: FROM RESONANCE TO PARTICULARITY

Todorov, a French structuralist narrator, puts forward the distinction between "story" and "discourse", in which "story" refers to the story as a text, discourse is the act of telling a story, and the significance of narrative comes from the interaction between story and discourse. Under the influence of structuralism, early narratology mainly focused on the story as a text. From Propp, Levi Strauss to Graemes, they are all devoted to the study of the universal structure in the story. Although their theory has attracted a lot of criticism, its value lies in naming the eternal propositions, whether fairy tales or myths. These propositions have a long-standing consensus in the western world. Therefore, in order to tell the Chinese stories that the whole world is willing to listen to, it is required to jump out of the basic proposition of Western stories and look for the main materials of Chinese stories from two subtle points.

One is to find the universality of the world story from the most basic commonness of human society — simple emotional resonance. In today's world, the main body of differences and conflicts is the community, and the creation of the community is doped with too much ideological color, which artificially divides the harmonious world into different camps. Therefore, in order to resonate with the world, it is necessary to start from the most subtle, universal and individual human emotions. Chinese and foreign cultures have their own roots. No matter their nationality, everyone

will cry because of separation and be sweet because of love. In human history, the emotional stories of individual under the conflict of national interests are common. Therefore, the core of Chinese story should have its basic emotional elements.

The second is to find the particularity of Chinese stories from the perspective of Chinese characteristics. The particularity of the Chinese story lies in the historical materialism that man can conquer nature. The "man" here is not only the broad sense of the Chinese nation, but also every Chinese. Personal destiny is closely related to national destiny. Therefore, to tell the story of every Chinese is to tell the story of the Chinese nation. In other words, a personal story is a national story. The individuals here can't and shouldn't be the elites, but the little ones. The struggle history of the little man is isomorphic with the rise of the Chinese nation. Therefore, it can still explain the significance of China's development in the story of the little man. In addition, the particularity of the Chinese story lies in the concept of peace that benevolent people love others, have no action or fight, and love non-offence. China's concept of peace has existed since ancient times. To constantly emphasize this point is to reveal the gene of peace of the Chinese nation. This requires that every person who tells Chinese stories should have cultural consciousness, be good at discovering the cultural thoughts applicable to today from traditional culture, and emphasize the necessity and possibility of peaceful rise in the fusion of Chinese and foreign cultures. This is the expression of true cultural confidence. This is not a passive response to Western accusations, but an active declaration, which not only provides a historical basis for cultural confidence, but also adds a strong historical connotation to Chinese stories.

The combination of these two subtleties is just the integration of universality and particularity. "Particularity is not a concept of rejecting others, but a symbol of communication by condensing and highlighting its own particularity, that is to say, particularity is a concept of communication and dialogue." [4] Therefore, only by shaping Chinese stories as special ones can China obtain the subjectivity of dialogue with the world. If the Chinese do not emphasize the universality of emotional resonance, it will lack the basic space of dialogue. Therefore, the core of Chinese story should start from small characters, emotional resonance, and profound historical accumulation, so as to complete the meaning transmission of dialogue with the world.

IV. THE DISCOURSE OF STORIES: FROM "EXTERNAL PUBLICITY" TO STORY

As mentioned above, "the discourse of story" involves the study of "discourse" in narratology. Different "discourse" point to different meanings for the same "story". For a long time, China's external communication emphasizes the consciousness of "external publicity", which is regarded as a one-way communication. The narrative form is simple and rough, and adopts linear method rather than three-dimensional, repetitive or diverse communication methods,

making the image of China divorced from the reality of China. In "Mythological rhetoric", Roland Barthes believes that the language of proletarians is transitive, real and transformative, which makes the language straightforward, tedious and uninspiring. Barthes thought that proletarian language could not create "myth" from the standpoint of criticizing capitalism. In the "post-American era", the correctness of this thesis is questionable. Firstly, in the dialogue and exchange of world culture, the binary opposition structure of capitalism and socialism is gradually replaced by the "constellation community" of multi culture, and the attempt to divide the party in the name of ideology will be ignored. Secondly, Roland Barthes believes that the left-wing myth has too few subjects and never entered the vast realm of human relations, which obviously overlooks the historical dimension of proles' language. In fact, for a socialist country with a deep historical foundation, China has never had less cultural resources than others. Barthes believes that revolutionary language is not a mythical language, but revolution also needs to create "myth". However, the "myth" created is not like the whitewashing and smoothing of ideology in the bourgeois myth, but to seek the commonality with other cultures on the premise of shelving ideology.

The reason why stories are chosen instead of other genres is precisely because the narrative mode of stories is most in line with the cognitive mode of human beings. Herman, a cognitive narrator, said: "stories exist in all cultures and subcultures, and can be regarded as a basic strategy for human beings to coordinate with time, process and change." [5] That is to say, the way of story itself is a universal way of narration, which is the basic way for all human beings to know and understand the world. Anthropologist Mary Catherine Bertson holds the same view: "humans think by metaphor and learn by story." [6] It can be said that story is also an important way for human beings to experience the world, so the adoption of story as a universal genre helps to strengthen the communication between Chinese culture and other cultures. The act of telling a story requires the participation of both the listener and the speaker, so the narrative mode should adopt different forms with the changes of the listener's identity, context and time.

The listener also has the ability of shaping the story, which can interpret the story as a cognitive meaning. Therefore, it is necessary to adjust the story telling according to the listener's cognitive framework to build a common interpretation space between the listener and the speaker. The speaker needs to mobilize the experience and emotion of the listener to participate in the interpretation actively, which can arouse resonance at the maximum level. Secondly, the context is an important factor that influences the meaning of a story beyond the text. The listener is fully capable of building a context that meets his expectations. Context is not an objective existence independent of human will. The listener is fully capable of constructing the desired context in the narrative. Through the selection of stories and narrative methods, he can decide which elements are included in the context field. Individual or collective, rational or emotional

factors determine the meaning of each story. Telling time refers to the choice of time nodes. Significant time nodes are the best time to tell a story. Second is the choice of time series. From the perspective of the story itself, the narrative is basically linear. However, in the "second narrative" of "story telling", multiple time series can be selected to construct multiple story scenes in an all-round and three-dimensional form, forming an overlapping story system.

V. THE SPEAKER OF THE STORY: FROM STATE TO MULTI SUBJECTS

According to Zakaria, the post-American era means the rise of multiple "others". In other words, at the national level, many countries that were originally marginalized in the world discourse system are also on the stage. At the meso level, diversified actors are also participating in the construction of the world order, and these actors are what Zakaria calls enterprises, capital, non-governmental organizations, etc. In addition, the micro level includes social groups and even individuals empowered by the Internet. These multi-level and diverse modes of dialogue have changed from point-to-point in the "American era" to diffuse dialogue at present. In order to make these multiple subjects participate in the telling of Chinese stories, it is imperative to establish the cultural confidence of different groups.

The cultural confidence at the national level is the most ideological confidence, emphasizing the particularity of Chinese culture and the superiority of socialism and Chinese road. Therefore, the nation needs to ensure the story orientation, clarify the story core and ensure the particularity of "China" in the "Chinese story". The cultural confidence at the meso level comes from the unity of universality and particularity, which is the combination of the particularity of China's road and the universality of adapting to the law of economic construction and development. And then, it can bring confident capital for China's capital and enterprises, and realize the expansion of their discourse power in the field of world economy. Therefore, the subjects at the meso level need to emphasize not only the determination and efforts of China's integration into the world and dialogue with the world, but also the particularity of the socialist road with Chinese characteristics. The cultural confidence of social groups and even individuals at the micro level is the most powerful and fundamental cultural confidence, the more universal cultural confidence, and the cultural confidence that is the highest ideal of all mankind in pursuit of what Marx called "the comprehensive and free development of all people". Therefore, at the micro level, the subject should pay more attention to the universality of "story", and tell the Chinese story as a universal story to pursue individual value, realize individual dignity and explore individual happiness.

It is said that in the practice of telling Chinese stories, it needs the joint efforts of multiple subjects. However, it has to be said that the subjects at the micro level can bring the best dialogue effectiveness. The reason is that the narrator identity at this time does not have too much ideological color, is not easy to bring the resistance interpretation of the

listener, and has more human resonance with the listener. Therefore, it can bring Chinese stories more advantages. However, how to encourage the subjects at the micro level to participate in the practice of "telling Chinese stories" is a difficult problem in the dialogue between China and the world. Among them, the most important thing is to make ordinary people really get a valuable and dignified life in the era of national development, help them to create their own Chinese story materials, provide them with rich cultural resources, make their Chinese story attractive, and truly make their cultural confidence have substance and reason. In addition to the core, it is also necessary to provide voice channels for these subjects at the micro level, respect individual voice at home, let the people voice, and voice for the people. And then, people can truly have confidence to stand on the international stage, closely connect the development of the nation with the fate of the individual, tell the Chinese story of ordinary people, and shout for the nation and themselves at the critical moment of time change.

Storytelling is also an important intermediary of subject identification. No one answers the question "who am I?" without narration. Therefore, storytelling, as a secondary narrative, also establishes the subject cognition of the speaker. Therefore, the cultural confidence is not only to be able to have the resources and materials of Chinese stories, but also to be able to withstand the counter view of the subject when telling.

VI. CONCLUSION

On the surface, "post-American era" is more complicated and disorderly, lacking the voice of control. Many of the more assimilated cultures have emerged to express their views. Isn't this what Bakhtin called "miscellaneous noise"? In such an era, it is required to be optimistic. After all, this is an era in which differences replace opposites. As long as there are differences, people will not be afraid of the loss of subjectivity. As long as there is space for dialogue, people will always prove the existence of universality. As long as the Chinese firmly grasp the opportunities of the times and form a benign mutual construction of cultural confidence and Chinese storytelling, it can show the charm of Chinese culture in the process of dialogue with the world.

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