

Public Diplomacy and Its Functions in the Regional Governance of China and Southeast Asia

Zhao Yonglun^{1*}, Zhang Yinsong²

¹ Public Administration College, Yunnan University of Finance and Economics, china 650221

² College of Foreign Languages, Yunnan Agricultural University
(yy105788@163.com)

Abstract

In the age of globalization, the trend of public strength participating in global governance is becoming increasingly obvious, which means public diplomacy, including non-governmental economic and cultural exchanges as its main contents, comes to be an important method of regional governance in global society. Therefore, an active leading role and positive participation in surrounding regional governance is an indispensable precision for China, a rapidly rising power, to move forward on the global stage. Due to historic and realistic reasons, for China public diplomacy plays an irreplaceable role different from official diplomacy in developing a harmonious relationship among neighbor countries in Southeast Asia, as well as in conducting regional governance.

Keywords: Public diplomacy; Southeast Asia; International relations; Regional governance

1. Introduction

In this age of globalization and information, the main way of international competition is comprehensive national power while international regional governance and cooperation is an important method of participating in global competition for world powers. Public diplomacy, featuring civil diplomacy as its main content, plays a significant role in China's cooperation with surrounding countries and regions. Due to historic and realistic reasons, Southeast Asia pose vital influence on China's peaceful rise, and public diplomacy plays an irreplaceable role in the regional governance among China and Southeast Asia countries.

2. Public Diplomacy and Its Role in The International Regional Governance

2.1 Definition of the concept

Public diplomacy is a form of international diplomacy emerging in recent decades, an international governance form emerged associating with the variation of main participants of international communication, which is a result of the

rapid development of global governance and global civil society. The practice of public diplomacy actually existed long before though theoretic understanding lagged behind. Early in 1965, Profess Edmund from Tufts University firstly used the word *public diplomacy* to conclude those international publicity behaviors based on various non-governmental resources, stated that the aim of public diplomacy is to deal with the influence public opinions posed on the forming and implementation of government diplomatic policies, including international relation filed exceeding traditional diplomacy, government's exploitation on other countries' vox populi, certain country's private interest group's interaction with other countries', and diplomatic envoys' communication with foreign journalist, etc^[1]. Profess Edmund took public diplomacy as a kind of propaganda activity to promote the country's diplomatic policies and ideas to the global society. HansN•Tuch, an U.S senior diplomatist, considered public diplomacy from the perspective of the diplomacy object, and pointed out that public diplomacy is a governmental process of

communicating with foreign public with its target as making foreign people know about this country's idea, ideal, regime, culture and the government's objective and current policies,^[2] which indicated that the main diplomatic audience belongs to foreign people.

This paper argues that public diplomacy is a form of international communication dominated by the government, and participated by the civil force through various forms of activities such as economic and cultural exchanges, with its aim to realize the information communication with other countries' public and consequently influence them, promoting other countries' people's understanding of this country's foreign policies and values, leading to a good national image and creating a favorable international environment of public opinion, realizing and improving the national interest.

2.2 Special function of public diplomacy

People still hold different opinions upon the function of public diplomacy in academic circles. The author thinks that public diplomacy is hierarchical: firstly it is a kind of planned and organized diplomatic activity in the framework of the official diplomacy. This kind of public diplomacy is actually part of the official diplomacy, except that the performing subject is non-government or semi-official organizations. It is a kind of conscious diplomatic behavior. Secondly, it is a kind of communication and connection with foreign public people and civil groups held spontaneously by the civil organizations for the purpose of their own aim and values. No matter which level of public diplomacy it is, its functions are irreplaceable by the formal official diplomacy.

2.2.1 The guiding role of public diplomacy

The diversity of public diplomacy in information transmission has provided a guide to the official

diplomacy, beneficial to a preliminary mutual understanding of each other's appeals and demands. As the executive subject is civil people, it makes the international association less political and ideological factors, thus easier to eliminate defensive psychology of both sides and have a better understanding of each other's true intentions. Especially in a circumstance where both two sides don't have normal communication channels and in a state of confrontation, public diplomacy can often play a special role. In the early 1980s, Indonesia Chinese Economic, Social and Cultural Association actively communicate between China and India, promote bilateral economic and trade links, which directly contributes to the reestablishment of diplomatic relations five years later, which had interrupted for 23 years, between the two countries.^[3] It also directly proved that public diplomacy plays a guiding role to formal diplomatic.

2.2.2 The consolidation functions of public diplomacy

The characteristics of continuity, universality and flexibility of civil diplomacy make its influence possibly go deep into the foreign countries from all levels of the social class to every corner of the nation. After the official diplomatic relation established, the further enhancement of mutual understanding and the enforcement of people from different social classes' feelings become multifarious and complex. It is hard for the official diplomacy to deal with those alone, there for the participation of civil is indispensable. In addition, due to the political philosophy and ideology of the object country, as well as the influence of other countries' diplomatic activities, there is a lot of variable factors which are hard to control. The official diplomatic achievements will be badly affected if the ruling corpus changed. On the other

contrary, as public diplomacy played down the political ideology and other factors, the exchanges are in line with the principles of mutual recognition. Therefore even there come divergences, it's still easy to adjust and realize mutual understanding. Therefore, the achievements of official diplomacy still need the coordination of extensive and sustained civil diplomacy to integrate and consolidate the basis of its sustainable development.

2.2.3 The crisis relieving function of Public diplomacy

When there happens a crucial diplomatic crisis event, as the official diplomacy of both sides have maintain the interests of their own, both sides would be initiative and hard to compromise. Especially when dealing with the crisis events such as domestic people's emotion problem, official diplomacy tend to be affected by its people and pressure groups and therefore lack of flexibility. On the contrary, civil diplomacy emphasizes on communication, discussion and coordination instead of direct interest, and therefore unlikely to be emotionally affected when dealing with crisis. Under the circumstance where the governmental diplomacy fell into impasse and cannot work smoothly because of crisis events, the civil diplomacy didn't stand by. Instead it still keeps working and possibly leads to a restart of communication between two countries' official diplomacy.

3. The necessity of Conducting Public Diplomacy in Southeast Asia Regional Governance

Civil diplomacy, especially civil diplomacy with neighboring countries has always been an important part of China's diplomatic activities. Southeast Asian countries are not only China's neighbors, but also an important channel for China to move towards the

world. It is also the main oil imports channel for china, holding an extremely significant geopolitical position. In addition, Southeast Asian nations all belong to the developing countries, which means they share many common interests with China in pursuing equal international status, and therefore constitute an important driving force to the multi-polarization of international order. Actively developing relations with Southeast Asian countries and promoting regional cooperation is of great necessity to the stability and harmonious development of the whole Asia.

3.1 Public diplomacy is an essential means to improve the public opinion environment of Southeast Asian nations towards China

Since the 1950s, China and Southeast Asian countries have leaped from confrontation to cooperation. The development of bilateral relations is generally positive, but there are also many problems. Long-term confrontation and the lack of a systematic and thorough people-to-people exchange mode during the cold war time, have made people in southeast Asian countries failed to fully accept and adapt to the fact that China has risen rapidly while distortion and misunderstanding of China's development still exist. Therefore, letting Southeast Asia people, especially the younger generation know more about and understand China through public diplomacy, helping them accept China's peaceful rise, is of great importance for China and Southeast Asian countries to achieve regional governance.

3.2 Public diplomacy contributes to cope with the squeezing upon China's international space during the big powers games

Southeast Asia has always been a hotly-contested spot targeted by big powers due to its important geopolitical strategic position. Southeast Asia's

important international strategic position is convincingly proved by Japan's control of the southeast Asia during world war ii and the United States and the Soviet union's fight on Vietnam, Philippines and other countries during the cold war. Neighboring to China, India, Japan and other countries, just a few hundred miles of ocean away from the heart of the world Middle East, Southeast Asia is the world's hot spot with many hot issues concentrated. America is most worried about Southeast Asia as it may become the weakest link to break its blockade chain for China. After President Obama took office, the U.S. government has actively promoted diplomatic strategy featuring returning to Asia. In addition to continuing to consolidate the traditional Asian Allies such as Japan and Korea, its strategic also focused on the Southeast Asia. High officials including the President of the United States and secretary of state have frequently visited Southeast Asia countries, which reflected that the U.S. attaches high importance to the region. In addition, the United States has also encouraged Japan and India to join in the contend competition of Southeast Asia and extended its *dollar diplomacy*. These activities have posed a serious impact on China's international space construction in Southeast Asia. Though since the 1990s, China has kept a close relation with the ASEAN politically, economically and diplomatically, the diplomatic relations is not strong enough. The basis of bilateral relations is mainly based on the traditional friendship among and economic and trade exchanges take a larger percentage than political and diplomatic exchanges. As many countries in Southeast Asia are still in the phase of social transformation, the domestic political stability remains to be seen; therefore the official diplomacy is still under a lot of uncertainty. Hence,

developing public diplomacy actively, consolidating the emotional foundation with Southeast Asian people, and promoting civil society's understanding and approving of China, is an effective way to build a sustainable and stable relationship between China and Southeast Asia countries.

3.3 Public diplomacy helps to solve the sea disputes between China and Southeast Asian countries effectively

Since the 1970s, the South China Sea sovereignty dispute among China and some Southeast Asia countries has lasted for a long time, which negatively affected the development of relations between China and Southeast Asian countries. While the sovereignty dispute has to be solved by the official diplomacy, the political characteristic of government diplomacy determines that when come to resolve bilateral disputes, both side will enhance the demands to get the initiative, which will consequently lead to a divergence hard to be resolved. Civil diplomacy, on the contrary, taking negotiation and understanding as its method, which fades out political differences and be able to untie the fast knot sides incrementally and with flexibility, bridging the gap between the two sides gradually and finally contribute to the solution of the problem.

4. The Advantages of Public Diplomacy in The Exchanges Among China and Southeast Asia Countries

At present, cooperation between China and Southeast Asian countries mainly remains at the government level while civil level's communication is still very weak. As the Southeast Asian countries have a unique link with China in history, ethnic, religious, culture, and economy, people-to-people exchanges can establish a long-term and stable support for

bilateral relation. Especially communications among youth and teenagers of both sides, is the key to build a continuous good-neighborly and friendly relations among China and Southeast Asian countries.

4.1 A common identity of Chinese traditional culture has provided the premise of understanding to public diplomacy

Due to the thousands of years of Chinese civilization, Confucian culture was widely spread in the neighboring countries through a variety of forms. The core values of Confucian thoughts have posed a deep impact on east and southeast Asian countries. Chinese traditional culture had provided two kinds of resources for the public diplomacy in China and southeast Asian countries: One is providing basic connotation and concepts to Southeast Asia people so that they can better understand when China presents its value to them; Second, through various forms of cultural exchanges, Chinese traditional culture can subtly shape the style and idea of China's diplomatic strategy. The concept of "*harmony but without uniformity*" in Chinese traditional culture reveals great inclusiveness in bilateral exchanges; the philosophy of *generous and benevolence* is in accordance with the principle of dealing with national relations in international diplomacy; ideas such as "*deny self and return to propriety*", "*do as you would be done by*" are consistent with the principle of *compromise*, which is commonly used in international exchange. All above must call a strong sympathy in Southeast Asian countries, which had ever suffered long-term colonial rule by west and was at the mercy of hegemonism during the cold war. With the development of world political multi-polarization and pluralism, concepts such as democracy and peace, equal diplomacy have deeply rooted in people. Consequently, there more

requirements for the interests of both sides in the international communications, seeking common ground while putting aside differences to achieve win-win co-prosperity, promote the exchange of civilizations. Based on the association of south-east Asian nations (ASEAN), South-east Asian countries demand to send out their own independent voices upon regional affairs. A common identity of Chinese traditional culture has creates favorable conditions for people-to-people exchanges on both sides.

4.2 China and Southeast Asian countries' historically long-term non-governmental exchanges has paved the way for the public diplomacy in the new period

As early as the Qin and Han dynasties period, the non-governmental communication between China and southeast Asia had initialized, which gradually formed three major traffic channels---the southern silk road, maritime lane through China and southern area (maritime silk road)and, the"Eastern Danube", LanCang - Mekong river waterway. Zheng's seven voyages to "XiYang" even opened a new page in history of spreading Chinese culture to southeast Asia. During 1405 to 1405(28 years totally) ,Zheng leading over 27000 soldiers conducted seven ocean-going missions, 160000 nautical miles in sum, that extended to Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea and East Africa and other regions.^[4] Among them, South Asia was the main destination of the former 3 voyages and in the track of the later four where Zheng spent most time of staying and composing activities, which promoted the friendly communication between China and southeast Asian countries and deeply influenced on goods, agricultural production technique, culture and art, medicine and health care etc, in southeast Asian countries. Zheng also played a special role of people-

to-people communication on religion through the missionary. The long history created favorable conditions for the NG contact of China and Southeast Asia. The cultural heritage of historical association and its various nominal celebrations and commemorative activities have become the important content of people-to-people communication on both sides.

4.3 The large number of overseas Chinese provides convenient condition for folk diplomacy between China and Southeast Asian countries

The Chinese in Southeast Asia accounted for more than 80% of overseas Chinese all over the world. They are not only the catchers in rye of China culture, but also the communicators of it that build a bridge for different cultural ideologies and enforce the cultural influence on local people. With China's peaceful rising, the ethnic pride of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia improves. They put more emphasis on the inheritance of ethnic culture and promote contact of Chinese and foreign culture more actively. In recent years, they made great contribution to the contact with their China and their inhabitant countries that increasingly number of outward association in culture and corporation in economy and trade was the consequence of their positive effort and advice. After the reform and opening up, along with China's economy take-off, the confidence of the Southeast Asian Chinese on integrating into that society and the consciousness of participating in politics was strengthened, and their social affect is also growing, which, surely, provides the good environment for promoting regional cooperation and management through the contact with Southeast Asian countries and Chinese NG diplomatic enhancement.

4.4 Trade and economic cooperation of China and Southeast Asian countries provides the motivation for folk diplomacy

Developing countries like China and Southeast Asian countries have a very strong willing to improve economic and trade contacts. China and Southeast Asia are both huge markets with the large population and the rapid development attracting private capital to invest in. Nay, China and Southeast Asia countries economies are highly complementary, so that the space of the economic and trade contact is extremely promising. Motivated by such interests, the folk organizations on both sides will automatically seek for understanding the politics, economy, culture, ideology, legal system, etc of each other and enhance mutual comprehension and identity in the process, eventually achieving the diplomatic purposes without consciousness. For instance, Brunei-China friendship association set up in order to introduce China market to Brunei business and the its China ASEAN Expo has turned into the best platform for Brunei companies to invest in China. In April 2005, during President Hu's state visit to Brunei, the BCFA participated in part of the reception setting a precedent that a folk institution receives nation heads.^[5]

5. The Several Questions That Should be Warily Handled With in Development of Public Diplomacy Between China and Southeast Asian Countries

Despite the public diplomacy enjoys a special role in dealing with foreign countries, the public diplomacy mainly consist of folk diplomacy has its limits that even shows a negative impact on the official one. To develop public diplomacy in Southeast Asian

countries well, the author's suggestion is as the following:

5.1 Balance the relation with official diplomacy and public diplomacy

The official diplomacy and public one is closely linked. Either has its own relatively independence and is intergraded in the whole national diplomatic system at the same time. Official diplomatic should play a leading role in the diplomatic system, but this doesn't mean that it should control the folk diplomacy in the interests of making it a puppet. In different diplomatic environment, the cooperation extent between governmental diplomacy and non-governmental one should be distinguished. When that the fundamental environment caused by frequent non-governmental communication is promising, folk diplomacy should be more emphasized while the official diplomacy should majorly occupy the part of guidance and correction. This is what the diplomacy between China and southeast Asia countries should be that the majority of diplomatic missions are charged by to folk diplomacy, meanwhile, the official one is responsible for planning the core diplomatic strategy, monitoring the non-governmental communicators, preventing the objects damage the nation's interests in the pursuit of its.

5.2 Dealing with the relationship between methods and purpose, short-term interests and long-term interests in folk diplomacy

The main content in public diplomacy of China and Southeast Asian countries is folk culture and contact with economy and trade. In the economy and trade communication, provided that too much emphasis is put on self short-term interests indicating the tend of "le moi de roi" or the official and folk diplomatic result is over consumed without considering other

side's interests, the national interests will be damaged. The effect of diplomacy and its effort is not always positive related, however, in the recent strategy to Southeast Asian countries. Foreign effect is proportional to the input is not only accept and identity by communicating with foreign is effective diplomacy. However in the current Chinese civil diplomatic strategy in Southeast Asian countries, the way we are popularized to each other we think is a good thing, regardless of whether to accept each other. This is based on subjective preferences according to their standard folk diplomacy; it is easy to be understood as a kind of cultural hegemony, and unable to achieve good diplomatic strategy. Therefore, the focus of China's civil diplomacy should not only be on people-to-people exchanges itself, but also on studying how to improve the effectiveness of the people-to-people exchanges.

5.3 Give an accurate understanding and positioning of the so-called *soft power*

Although the "*soft power*" diplomacy is a very fashionable word both at home and abroad, it is still not out of western realism in international relations theory. The concept of power such as the power is everything, runs counter to China's original intention of "*harmonious world*". China as an emerging regional power, if too much emphasis on "power" in the governance of Southeast Asian nations, it will give a sense of inequality, which will provoke others. Moreover, even if we really show "soft power" in civil diplomacy, still is not necessarily leading to our diplomatic purposes. A Singapore scholar ChengLiJun thinks that "soft power" has different levels. High level of "*soft power*" includes politics, social system and ideology, and low levels of "soft power" includes culture, language and ethnic relations. Only the high level of "soft power" will

help to form a strong alliance between sovereign states; "Soft power" between China and southeast Asian countries diplomacy still stay on the culture, language level. It is a transition process for China to play "*soft Power*" in Southeast Asia from low level to high level.

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