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Highlighting the social dimension of the relationship in China's public diplomacy practice: toward a global engagement?

Zhao Alexandre Huang

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Paper for discussion

Author: Zhao Huang

Zhao HUANG, Contractual Ph.D. Candidate and Teaching Assistant in Communication Sciences, University of Paris East (UPE), Doctoral School of *Cultures et Sociétés*, Laboratory DICEN-IDF, a former journalist at *China National Radio*, Chinese freelance journalist.

Thesis supervisors: Pr. Amos DAVID, Dr. Lucile DESMOULINS (UPEM-IFIS; DICEN-IDF)

UPEM/IFIS - 6-8 cours du Danube – 77 700 Serris – France

Contacts: zhao.huang@u-pem.fr

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Introduction

At the beginning of 2018, the “two sessions” in China, Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs pointed out that the aim of China's major-country diplomacy is to foster a new type of international relations, to build a global community with a shared future and to tell China story to foreign audiences (Xinhua, 2018). At the same time, the diplomatic claim of “creating a community of shared future for mankind”, officially considered as a value, has been written in the introduction of China's constitution. If this claim is the main aim of Chinese major-country diplomacy, the term of “tell China story, spread the voice of China” which, highlighted by Xi Jinping in the National Conference on Propaganda and Ideology in 2013, is regarded as the core theme of public diplomacy. According to Xi, China's public diplomacy should to:

“innovate the way of ‘dui wai xuan chuan’ (short term in Chinese: wai xuan, means external propaganda), create new concepts, new categories and new expressions which could be accepted by both in China and foreign countries, tell China's stories well and spread Chinese voices well” (Xi, 2013).

Although the concept of “public diplomacy” was introduced into China in recent years, it has already quickly developed into the “national strategy” of China's foreign policy and occupied an increasingly meaningful position (Q. Zhao & Lei, 2015, p. 1). In China's political and academic discourses, public diplomacy is serving China's *wai xuan* strategy in conjunction with such practices as “cultural diplomacy”, “people's diplomacy”, “international public relations” and “international communication and intercultural communication”. Within the party-state's system, the term of “wai xuan” is one of the most common concepts, referring to China's global image promotion, which shows the core practice and idea of China's public diplomacy. Unlike the consensus achieved by international scholars who can be labeled as

belonging to a “moralist school of thought” that the notion of “propaganda” has a negative sense which refers to first a lack of pluralism of information sources for citizens. Then, propaganda means that the government censors information and promotes truncated or misleading presentations of political facts, or implement an institutionalized disinformation policy (Ollivier-Yaniv, 2010). Chinese academia considers the term “*xuan chuan* (propaganda)” as “*a positive connotation associated with such essentially benign activities as the release of the news, general shaping of ideology, or even advertisement or publicity*” (Yiwei Wang, 2008, p. 259). Chinese scholars see public diplomacy as the essential process and practice of external propaganda which plays the role of China’s “international strategic communication” and “public relations”(Chen & Liu, 2015; Zhou, 2010).

China has promoted the “*equality, mutual trust, inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutually beneficial cooperation*” (Hu, 2012) in its “Major-Country” diplomacy (Da guo wai jiao) to “*forging a new form of international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness, justice, and win-win cooperation*”(Xi, 2017). Even though several international critics might interpret this statement as the rhetorical expression of Chinese politicians, it nonetheless shows that Chinese party-state leaders have realized that China had already become an important country on the international scene and the promotion of this country’s image, reputation and statue seems to be the core practice to show Chinese soft power and “China’s dream” to its international audiences (Rabinovitch, 2008; Shambaugh, 2013; H. Wang, 1993). In fact, China’s public diplomacy is likely borrowed the French approach with a strong highlight of intercultural communication and influence, cultural exchange and diplomacy (McPhail, 2014, p. 75). Chinese scholars have also remarked the evolution of Chinese *wai xuan* from an “external propaganda” model to an “international spread of information” model which provides that its communicational actions focus more and more, on the one hand, on foreign audiences by using various media (traditional audio-visual media, social media, NGO, institutions, etc.) and flexible strategy in order to create a “two-way” communication and interaction between the Chinese government and its target public (Hartig, 2016, p.66); on the other, by expanding its national controlled Confucius Institute, China is “making use of the soft power of education” (Jeng-Yi, 2016, p. 425) in order to build a favorable relationships with its public and communicate and engage with its foreign public.

The Ph.D. thesis investigates China’s Confucius Institute, its role, and its communicational practices in China’s public diplomacy. The study mainly focuses on Confucius Institutes in Africa because of its successful results (cf. the interview of with Hanban’s core officials). The thesis will discuss three sections: first, the conceptual framework section will argue the public diplomacy from a communication perspective, its definitions, approaches and practices. In French academia, the PD is considered principally as a political term, it is rarely being discussed in communication science. The first aim of this section is to “introduce” the concept of PD in French communication research field. This Ph.D. dissertation will not presume to build a new public diplomacy theory; it intends to highlight the relationship and differences between public diplomacy and its associated concepts. It is indispensable to conceptualize public diplomacy further. Next, the dissertation will discuss the importance of the Chinese social dimension in its public diplomacy practice; this point will be addressed in

this discussion paper. Second, by showing briefly the empirical data collected from the Confucius Institute of the University of Nairobi and the *Hanban*, we plan to demonstrate the concrete practice of the Confucius Institute in daily communication and to confirm its position, strategy and effect serving to China's public diplomacy. Third, this dissertation will also underline research method issues. During our investigation within China's public institutions, we have met various limitations and difficulties, in this last part of the thesis, the investigation strategy, limitations and ethical issues will be focused.

Conceptual framework – China's public diplomacy

The hybrid concept of public diplomacy is frequently mentioned in textbooks on political science, international relations and public relations. As an expression, public diplomacy is quoted all along politicians' discourses and newspaper articles. Diplomatic communication practices are however varied and changing. Moreover, they contain a misleading ideological dimension. According to political science approaches, public diplomacy can be described as "one of the most salient political communication issues" (Snow & Taylor, 2009, p. ix), and as a translation of political communication on the world stage (Hartig, 2016, p. 5) which participates in nation-states' soft power consolidation (Keohane & Nye, 2012; Melissen, 2008; van Ham, 2008). Public diplomacy is further considered as "an instrument that governments use to mobilize soft power resources (culture of country, political ideology and policies) for communicating with and attracting the foreign publics" (Nye, 2008, p. 95). The most quoted definition of "public diplomacy" sees it as a strategic communication that intends to affect foreign publics' thinking, and the attitude of their governments in the longer term (Malone, 1985, p. 199). The theorists of the cognitive analysis of public policies (in French: *l'analyse cognitive de l'action publique*) consider the exercise of public diplomacy as a process aimed to set and frame national thinking frameworks. The concept of *référentiels* for instance describes "a set of meanings that help understand and act" (Muller, 2014, p. 555).

If Malone's explanation on public diplomacy emphasizes its strategic goals, then Tuch clarifies the actor and contents of the strategy, he views the public diplomacy as that a government sends information to foreign publics for promoting its ideas, ideals, institutions and cultures and government's policies and objectives in order to obtain a better understanding (Tuch, 1990, p. 3). The public diplomacy brings a set of discourses, images and practices together by which a government seek to influence the public opinion of foreign countries in a very gentle and hidden manner; as well as to manage the nation's diplomatic environment and to enhance the Nation-State's image on the international stage which implies developing mutual transcultural and transnational understanding. Public relations theorists find the similar goals and tools in public relations and public diplomacy, they conceptualize public diplomacy as "the way in which both government and private individuals and groups influence directly or indirectly those public attitudes and opinions which bear directly on another government's foreign policy decisions" (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992, p. 138). By borrowing the competitive intelligence approaches, Zhong and Lu (2013, p. 543) argue that public diplomacy "involves relationship management and public relations tactics intended to effect change in foreign publics" to build a favorable political and social environment.

As public opinions play an increasingly essential role on the international stage, communication becomes a vital lever and medium of influence. Like Foucault (Foucault, 2013, p. 233) puts it, “to communicate is always a certain way of acting on the other and on the others,” and no matter how subtle, euphemistic or well-meaning this communication is, it remains a power relationship. Therefore, Huyghe emphasizes that “communication is an influence,” (Huyghe, 2008, p. 5) and the extent of influence is firstly achieved on the premise of attraction and sympathy. He points out that the influence is further to persuade, to promote social development, to shake the target public’s decision, to obtain a favorable policy behavior, and even to change the mind of an audience (*ibid.* pp.8-10). The official version of the public diplomacy definition proposed by the Chinese government directly reflects the essence of the governmental strategy for spreading international influence. First, public diplomacy focuses on the use of different angles to express and clarify the national conditions and national policies face to foreign audiences, the domestic governmental departments, corporates, NGOs, and the public are considered as the communicators. Second, public diplomacy concentrates on the explaining foreign countries’ incompatibility and misunderstanding, at the same time listening and communicating internationally. Third, the purpose of listening is to understand other party’s viewpoints and opinions, and to reorganize the narrative in order to enhance the country’s image and improve the foreign public’s attitude and perception toward the country. The long-term objective is to affect international governments’ policies toward the country.

The purpose of this part is to discuss the form and content of China’s public diplomacy. The importance of Chinese “relations” in public diplomacy practice will be highlighted. In the end, the goal of communication engagement in China’s public diplomacy will be sorted out.

H1. The strategic latitude of China’s public diplomacy is fed by the concept of traditional Chinese philosophy to favor the “public-centric” model for establishing relationships as the precondition for communication.

China’s public diplomacy blueprint, based on national scholars’ arguments, depends on the construction of cultural attraction as the main body, and then achieves the following goals: “promoting traditional culture and value and acting as a responsible great power on the world stage; advocating a harmonious world and Peaceful rise; demonstrating the virtues of the Chinese path of economic development; expanding its foreign assistance; and developing own discourse in world affairs.”(Yanhong Wang, 2006, pp. 134–140). Besides, the Chinese government is proud of the “people’s diplomacy” at the grass-roots level (Q. Zhao & Lei, 2015). “Personal diplomacy” at the elite level rely on people-to-people exchanges, scholarships, bilateral and multilateral cultural projects, and increasing contact, leads to build a “high level of trust” (Yu , 2009, pp. 10-11, 18), good relationships, and mutual understanding.

In fact, public diplomacy has always been guided by the strategy to achieve the influence goals of a country, especially in the context of globalization. As Melissen pointed out the “new” public diplomacy, “building relationships with civil society actors in other countries and about facilitating networks between non-governmental parties at home and aboard. (...)In order to safeguard their interests in a globalized world, countries need ‘permanent friends’

in other nations”(Melissen, 2008, pp. 22–23). The relationship building, and management are particularly important in China’s public diplomacy practice, as the White Paper published by China’s State Council, China’s peaceful development relies on “the dialogue and exchanges among civilizations; (...) in-depth exchanges and cooperation with parliaments, political parties, localities, and civil society in various countries; expansion of exchanges in the humanities field; mutual understanding and friendship building between international public and Chinese people” (Information Office of the State Council, 2011). The “people to people model” communication reflects not only in the strategic inclination of China’s public diplomacy, but also represents the Chinese “relationalism” in diplomatic communication practices.

As Zaharna argues: “the relational constellation shapes communication for all individuals” (Zaharna, 2018, p. 321). China’s public diplomacy is based on a “relations-as-communication” model which stresses relational structure before the influence implementation (ibid, p. 321). Most of the traditional Chinese ideas focus on tactics to influence people’s way of thinking in given social context. Chinese Confucian idea and social practice of “guanxi” (relation) could be mobilized to analyze Chinese public diplomatic communication. As China’s initial social structure is based on a “differential mode of association” (*chaxu geju*), that means the society basically “composed of distinctive networks spreading out from each individual's personal connections”(Fei, Hamilton, & Wang, 1992, p. 71). This special character of “rural” (ibid, p.37) also reflected in the system of Chinese Confucian philosophy.

The Chinese “guanxi” equals to five similar attributes: 1) the subjects of the guanxi share a group status; 2) the subjects of the guanxi has common acquaintance; 3) the subjects of the guanxi remain interaction frequently or infrequently; 4) the common background (job, education, family, etc.); 5) the common topics (interests, hobbies, lifestyle, etc.) (Tsui & Farh, 1997). In Confucianism, people are fundamentally considered as social or relational beings. China’s idiomatic expression could explain this relation: “everyone has cousin three thousand miles away”, it shows that the Chinese people’s relationship network is like a “spider web.” It is at the center of its own and people-to-people connections are continually spreading. The frequent contacts and exchanges are called as the cornerstone of strengthening the relationship. The construction of guanxi could be seen as a process of mutual relation and trust building: firstly, the connection is established on the basis of friendship, and then, this type of relationship is potentially based on mutual benefits, and an expectation of reciprocity (Hwang, 1987; Tsui et al., 2000, p. 231).

In Chinese society, the “guanxi” often associated with “renqing”, if “guanxi” includes a system of interpersonal exchange of service or a favor (Liu & Boutin, 2013, p. 127) and a system of emotional dependence between each part of relations. The term “renqing” refers to a form of “social capital” that could be considered as a balance for interpersonal exchanges of services and favors. Hwang describes that “renqing” could not be calculated objectively, as well as the “guanxi” and “renqing” interact each every, when a Chinese uses its “guanxi” (relations or networks) to ask a favor, he must repay in this favor for restoring the balance in relationships.

“Guanxi” is described as a participatory and interactive process in interpersonal communication, this idea seems further to be integrated in China’s people to people communication practice in public diplomacy. Like Chen and Liu say in their research paper on Chinese public diplomacy strategy: *“the diffusion of cultures and values must be integrated into social life and create direct communication with the intended audience, so that people at the grass-roots level can perceive and understand”* (page 25). The preliminary of Chinese public diplomacy is to establish close *guanxi* (relationship) with “foreign citizens (grass-roots), people who are interested in Chinese issues, opinion leaders, social elites and political elites” (Chen & Liu, 2015, pp. 29–31).

H2. The process of China’s public diplomacy in the Confucius Institute is also the network process of constructing and reconstructing strategic narratives.

While public diplomacy regards the foreign public as a target of influence, and it is considered as the main channel of the nation-State’s soft power resources diffusion, its process shows the characteristics of strategic communication. In an unrestrained sense, strategic communication was broadly defined as communication activities that allow organizations to reach their objectives (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič, & Sriramesh, 2007, pp. 3–4). In practice, it encompasses “coordinated actions, messages, images, and other forms of signaling or engagement intended to inform, influence, or persuade target audiences in support of national objectives” (Paul, 2011, p. 3). To summarize, three aspects of strategic communication could be detected: 1) connecting with information or knowledge; 2) practicing communication and bringing influence; 3) political participation. French competitive scholar, François-Bernard Huyghe identifies five national communication strategies in public diplomacy process (Huyghe, 2010, pp. 103–108): 1) a fortress strategy to prevent information breaches to keep high-value information secure; 2) a strategy based on propaganda and personal beliefs as crucial factors of mobilization; 3) a strategy based on image framing through the worldwide promotion of a given cultural model more basically said of a given way of life; 4) a vector strategy which focuses on strengthening both new and old ‘channels’ of communication; 5) the access strategy that focuses on the profusion of messages.

Most of the Chinese philosophy emphasizes the tactics to influence the consciousness and the human brain. It involves various strategic deployments applied to communication as well as is reflected in the Confucius Institute’s public diplomacy services. In “The Art of War”, Sun Zi underlines “hence to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting” (Sun, 2000, p. 8). The war theorist points out that the influence on the thoughts, brain, and emotions of the enemy is far greater than the conquest of force itself in most wars. The moral restructuring shaping (Jullien, 2010, p. 41) allows achieving strategic goals by influencing the “mind” of enemies. Sun Zi underlines as well, in the traditional Chinese culture, the strategic value of the balance between “indirect” and “direct”, “roundabout” and “access”: “Thus, to take a long and circuitous route, after enticing the enemy out of the way, and though starting after him, to contrive to reach the goal before him, shows knowledge of the artifice of deviation” (Sun, 2000, p. 25). Sun Zi’s warfare philosophy uses the strategies of “indirect influence” in the field

of strategic communication and the efforts to influence through long-term strategic, persuasive narratives.

Nye proposed “international affairs has become a matter of ‘whose story wins’” (Roselle, Miskimmon, & O’Loughlin, 2014, p. 71). The importance of storytelling is self-evident in public diplomacy. With the diversification of communication methods, new public diplomacy practices have increasingly emphasized: “two-way communication such as cultural and educational exchanges” (J. Wang, 2006, p. 94). The network communication approach has further strengthened the exchange of information in the process of public diplomacy communication, allowed the co-created content practice, and create the soft power through organizational communication achievement (Zaharna, Hubbert, & Hartig, 2014, p. 12). China’s new diplomatic blueprint proposed by Xi Jinping highlights the necessary of storytelling and public participation for creating a harmony relation that Chinese scholars consider as constructing an ecosystem between organization – publics – environment (political, diplomatic, economic, social, cultural, natural and technological contexts) (Chen, 2004, p.37). This ecosystem could conclusively establish relationships with foreign publics, strengthen the country’s image by communicating its ideology on the international stage and influence target publics subtly. The core of this strategy is to reach some certain common interests with the target audience. In practice, the procedure includes the formulation of language elements, storytelling, the valorization of the national heritages, the communication of great stories of origins, the propaganda in the sense of a controlled diffusion of images and *clichés*, the organization and mobilization of interpersonal links, the development of exchange programs. It, therefore, requires working in a long-term perspective. This activity motivates the audience to change from a passive message receiver to an active co-creator of information and is affected subtly in participation.

Implantation of strategic and social aspects in China’s public diplomacy: towards a global communication engagement?

Today’s public diplomacy practice is gradually strengthening “building relationships” and “telling stories” in order to reinforce public engagement in the communication practices. In fact, many Western scholars (Fisher & Lucas, 2011; Fitzpatrick, Fullerton, & Kendrick, 2013; Zaharna, 2018) have outlined the close relationship between “public diplomacy” and “engagement”. They even complement each other and transform each other in the exercise of communication. Since the economic reform in 1978, China has been actively strengthening the legitimacy of the Communist Party as the ruler of China’s central government (d’Hooghe, 2005, p. 93). It looks forward to seeking the global understanding of its political systems and policies in order to create a favorable international perception and positive global image through the efforts of public diplomacy, at the same time, the government intends to reduce the traces of “the government’s excessive lead to external communication and propaganda” in its public diplomacy. To this end, the Chinese government has put forward the principle of “*qu mi zeng mei*” (our translation: excluding secrets and increasing charm) in public diplomacy practice, namely, strengthening information disclosure, telling policies in plain language, emphasizing two-way communication and enhancing China’s image. In addition, the

government and scholars have also proposed to develop China's multi-track diplomacy (L. Wang, 2018) to develop the engagement of both Chinese and international public: except the government-government diplomacy, the Chinese government promotes think-tank diplomacy, corporate diplomacy and NGO diplomacy under its international cooperation framework on the one hand, on the other, the "people to people" model in "non-governmental communications" has been actively mobilized by China (L. Zhao & Huang, 2015, p. 250).

As Zaharna (2018) has confirmed, China's public diplomacy has not only emerged from a purely individual model or a relational model but can also be described as a holistic and networked strategic model. This model requests preexisted complex interpersonal relations, so to say, engagement relies on relationship networks and is based on the assumption that relation building equals to communication. "The relational structure is based on inherent connections to others (rather than separate individuals), engagement in the holistic logic includes the features of the relational logic (contact, nonverbal communication, emotion, perspective-taking, and symbolism), plus additional ones" (Zaharna, 2018, p. 321). As Chinese public relations scholars underlined, in the oriental culture, people consider society as the reference background. Being a kind of social resource, the relationship building and maintenance are crucial to "reinforce the emotion of each every and to pursuit the harmony of people" (Chen, 2004, p. 38). The long-term relationship building is more important than communication and influence. Strategically, through a various storytelling and continuous search for intercultural or interpersonal common grounds, the mutual relations, mutual understanding and recognition with the target audience will be established, the common interests will as well be found. This process may change the opinion, perception, and attitude of global publics during a long-term influence.

In the public diplomacy process of the Confucius Institute led by the Chinese government, the "people-to-people" model has become the flagship of China's global communication engagement. This model could be seen as a form of global strategic communication that could be endorsed by organizations mandated to do so and to work within the constrained framework of one country's public diplomacy, this interconnected communication and relation form has relied on the subtlest model of soft power to achieve national diplomatic goals. The dynamism of so-called people to people activities of public diplomacy stems from significant investments which as well "reflect in this respect the challenge of influencing strategies in contemporary security policies" (Heller & Persson, 2009, p. 246; Pahlavi, 2013, p. 564). The people to people model of public diplomacy seems to be another form of track-II diplomacy that actors from one country's civil society aim to interact, seduce and influence consciously or unconsciously citizens of foreign nations and defending and/or promoting their proper national interests.

Preliminary findings: the case study in Confucius Institutes

As a Chinese language teaching institution supported by the Chinese government, the Confucius Institute has a tight network structure which facilitates the exchange of information and the implementation of a strategic narrative.

1. The organizational structure of the Confucius Institute facilitates the engagement of its employees and collaborators as stakeholders.

The objectives of funding Confucius Institute are to internationalize Chinese culture, promote inter-social and intercultural understanding and initiate educational cooperation with foreign countries (Kurlantzick, 2007; Lo & Pan, 2014, p. 512; Ministère de l'éducation de la République populaire de Chine, 2013). Indeed, all Confucius Institutes are run by the Confucius Institute Headquarters – known as *Hanban*, which under the direct financial and managerial umbrella of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. Hanban's chair, Liu Yandong, member of the Chinese Communist Party's Politburo since 2007, is former official on the ideological and propaganda missions for the "united front".

In 2004, *Hanban* established its first educational institution abroad named Confucius Institute in Seoul. In fact, the Chinese language and culture promotion platform is made up of two different poles: the training centers located in foreign universities are labeled as "Confucius Institute" for the college students and adults; the language laboratories in primary and secondary schools are labeled as "Confucius Classroom". In only 13 years, *Hanban* has opened 525 Confucius Institutes and 1,113 primary and secondary Confucius Classrooms had been established in 146 countries and regions.

The rapid development benefits from its unique Sino-foreign cooperative organizational model and the backing of the massive resources of the Chinese government behind it: the foreign branches of Confucius Institute are almost always built in partnership between a Chinese university and a foreign university. The institution usually located in a foreign university or public school and it uses the host institution's material, immaterial and human resources: classrooms, offices, college housing for teachers, administrative staff, etc. Host institutions commonly receive a grant from the Chinese government of between \$ 100,000 and \$ 150,000 per year for a 3-to-5-years-incubation period until the new-built institute has the auto-financing ability (Hubbert, 2014; Starr, 2009). Besides, *Hanban* also provides human resources (full-time teachers, part-time teaching volunteers) and educational resources (pedagogical materials, audiovisual contents, etc.) to facilitate the development of its foreign branches. New recruited Chinese teachers are necessary to participate in a particular training program proposed by *Hanban* for a period of 3 – 6 months. This program includes not only pedagogical courses but also communication techniques and ideological contents. Besides, the daily management of Confucius Institute is entirely in line with the Sino-foreign cooperation, namely the Chinese director chosen by the *Hanban* and the Chinese University who collaborates with the local director for pedagogical affairs, administrative and cultural activities, social and international as well as intercultural communication. The Chinese teachers' management in the overseas Confucius Institutes adopts a "collective life" approach, in which Chinese nationality teachers live in the same community and have a strict management system in their daily lives. In addition, the Confucius Institutes hold a variety of team building activities to enhance teamwork, members' feelings and connections. This "Chinese-style" approach to group life will also affect daily work and affect foreign colleagues.

2. The daily teaching process as a process of strategic narrative

Overseas Confucius Institutes often form a working network with other Chinese-funded agencies and embassies in the countries to conduct China's public diplomacy. The data in this part issues mainly from the first phase of our fieldwork study in the Confucius Institute at the University of Nairobi between March and April 2018 and the second phase of our query at the *Hanban* in Beijing between June and July 2018.

The overseas Confucius Institute primarily considers five aspects of the strategic narrative. 1) Attributing different image and roles for Confucius Institute teachers for the relationship-building; 2) Cleverly designing messages, seeking common ground while reserving differences, and changing the attitude of the target audience through long-term daily communication; 3) Organizing rich and diverse cultural and recreational activities; 4) Through the network in between Confucius Institutes, Chinese Embassies and local Chinese-funded enterprises, they provide scholarships and local employment opportunities for local students; 5) Organizing "excellent students" and "elite students" to visit and study in China to enhance the impact. By organizing a series of shared activities, Confucius Institutes expect to establish a shared emotion and intimate relationship with their target audience, and then maintain relationships as well as integrate and affect different individuals through daily communication and strategic message penetration.

Further research

By showing the first feedback from the fieldwork at the Confucius Institute at the University of Nairobi in Kenya and the Confucius Institute Headquarters, we discover that The Chinese government used the Confucius Institute's practice of public diplomacy to re-enable the communication logic led by "relationship building" – "network construction" – "global engagement". Its purpose is to establish good relations with ordinary people in the country through the "people-to-people" model of public diplomacy. Based on the literature review and the first empirical findings, we formulated the concept of "people to people" model of public diplomacy. The practice so-called "people to people" public diplomacy is not destined to affecting political decision-making. It is more like an influence mechanism of voters' attitudes. It happens during the daily life, as an interpersonal communication and two-way communication model, the actors are trying to manage and hold a good relationship with their audiences, based on establishing a maximum consensus, by using informational penetration, cultural attraction and influence at the long-term, in order to change the audience's attitudes and opinions on some issues so as to serve the public diplomacy strategies of the country represented by the actors.

In the next step, we will follow the "summer camp" of African Confucius Institute students in Shanghai, we intend to observe this special summer camp in order to discover how the Chinese government organizes the visit for African students and how it communicates with these students intensively for 15 days, this observation allows to understand how the Chinese government has "secondary influence" on overseas visiting students in China.

Ethical issues of the fieldwork study

According to the negotiation of the communication contract, all staff interviewed at the Confucius Institute in Nairobi and the Confucius Institute Headquarters have agreed to be quoted by name in the context of my Ph.D. dissertation in France. When I publish scientific articles and communicates during conferences, I have chosen to anonymize the quotations and to designate each interviewee by a code. This problematic choice comes from an epistemological and ethical reflection on my relationship to the fieldwork study.

First, my fieldwork and research happened in the Chinese public institutions, because of the strict censorship, in order to obtain research permission, I am not able to put all my inspection intentions and plans out; Second, the interviewees could have accepted my interview request as one of their former contacts in China; Third, I have socialized with all interviewees who live in the local community, and they have given me rich gray information .

I also wanted to preserve critical interviewees who allowed me to access this field of investigation with a favorable bias (former teachers, former contacts). I cannot ignore the fact that the critical dimension of my research could have been difficult to conceptualize for my interlocutors.

During this Ph.D. seminar, we are waiting for your remarks and feedback on our theoretical framework concerning the mix of (new) public diplomacy, soft power, strategic communication, Chinese characteristics of communication. According to you, which part has to be improved? What kinds of other concepts have to be considered? Furthermore, we hope that you can give us some advice on the field-work strategy, especially about the ethical issues of field research. In fact, our third and last phase of fieldwork has already planned by the end of 2018, for interviewing in China's educational institutions. We are wondering how we can get more useful information during our empirical research? And what kind of survey methods could be more practical and useful in public relations research? We really would like to exchange all of these questions with you.

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