Brief Terminological Analysis of the Russian-Chinese Humanitarian Cooperation

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Abstract

The relevance of the study of this problem stems from the fact that in the past decades the Russian-Chinese cooperation in the humanitarian sphere has been developing so actively that this served as a reason to classify it. The goal of this work is to study the key notions and terms related to the Russian-Chinese humanitarian cooperation. The leading approaches to research this problem are the historical-systematic, the comparative-historical and the retrospective methods. Particular attention is paid to Confucian philosophical notions such as humanity, stratagem thinking and flexibility (softness). Strategic plans of development in culture and education for several decades have been developed both in Russia and in China; government organizations and committees have been involved in the promotion of national cultures and the public image of the countries abroad. In the academic discourse there arose a necessity for a more detailed research and analysis of tools and mechanisms of international influence in the humanitarian sphere, because this aspect has not been paid enough attention to previously. These categories show the profundity of foreign policy strategies within public diplomacy. The materials of this paper can be of use for researchers of Chinese international relations, history and politics, academics and university lecturers of social sciences and humanities.

Keywords: Russian-Chinese humanitarian cooperation, cultural diplomacy, soft power, stratagems, public diplomacy.
1. Introduction

Presently the political role of Russia and China becomes more prominent, as both countries exert more influence on international processes, which often becomes an object of many leading scholars’ research (Ma, 2009; Larin, 2005; Kissinger, 2014; Alikberova, 2015). The bilateral relations between the two countries are also developing in many different directions. At present we can positively talk about the rising role of the humanitarian component of the Russian-Chinese relationship. Several large-scale Russian-Chinese cooperation projects started being carried out in the second half of the 1990s: annual cultural festivals, National Language Years, close cooperation in the spheres of sports, tourism, theatre and music. All the events that were organized as a part of intergovernmental agreements had strong political, social and cultural effect, the attitude of the nations to each other changed, the amount of authentic information about these countries increased, and this had a favorable effect on the public image of both states (Alikberova, 2015). Whereas on the verge of the 21st century the government of the People’s Republic of China and the administration of the Communist party of China clearly realize that in the conditions of growing economic globalization and cultural unification the cooperation in the humanitarian sphere is of key importance. State plays a huge role in forming the cultural policy and developing long-term humanitarian strategy. China not only purposefully reforms its cultural system and develops international humanitarian relations, investing a significant amount of funds into it, but also makes an active use of widely known instruments of foreign policy, one of them being cultural diplomacy (Regzenov, 2012; Nye, 2005).

2. Methodological Framework

The principles of historicism and scientific objectivity, systematicity, description and analysis of specific situations, international projects, their explanation, comparison and generalization are the methodological basis of the present work. The analysis of external and internal political, economical and social factors which influence the Russian-Chinese relations in the period in question, allows presenting an objective academic picture of the development of the bilateral cooperation.

3. Results

3.1. Humanitarian Cooperation

For the more detailed and complete research of the Russian-Chinese partnership in the humanitarian cooperation sphere it is necessary to study the existing term base and the theoretical basis of this problem. The key notion for us here is ‘humanitarian cooperation’, this notion having several meanings. Political dictionaries offer the following explanation for it – “one of the central areas of the modern international relations; is aimed at the preservation of life on Earth, the creation of favorable conditions for a lifestyle deserving of a human being, facilitating the development of talents and capabilities of the people of all countries, regions and continents…” (Political Dictionary On-line). This definition is often used in international law and generally in international society. However, in Russia the term ‘humanitarian cooperation’ is understood more widely and includes the cultural relations, the dialogue between civilizations and civil societies, as well as the relations with fellow countrymen abroad. For instance, in the “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation” approved by the President of the Russian Federation on July 12th, 2008 it is mentioned that the term ‘international humanitarian cooperation’ includes the relations in the spheres of culture and art, science and education, mass media, youth exchanges, publishing, libraries, museums and archives keeping, sports and tourism (The Official Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2008). In his monograph “Russian-Chinese Relations in the Regional
Dimensions” Russian orientalist V.L. Larin uses the term ‘humanitarian’ in the meaning of ‘human’, i.e., speaking of humanitarian relations, he means human relations, individual contacts between representatives of the two nations (Larin, 2005).

In Chinese the meaning of the term ‘humanitarian’ is rendered by the two characters ‘人文’ (rén wén), which separately mean ‘human’ and ‘culture’. So, as we are familiar with the Chinese worldview, traditions and culture, we can assume that the Chinese term ‘人文’ is a wider and more extensive term than the Western notion ‘humanitarian’. All three Western definitions fit well into its framework because it includes both human and cultural components.

On the whole the notions of humaneness and humanism, mercifulness and benevolence, that all constitute ‘humanitarian relations’, are key notions for Chinese culture. Professor of Northwest Technological University Lu Suge (陆肃革) points out that the traditional Chinese culture pays a lot of attention to the notion of rén (仁, ‘humaneness’), that it implies merciful and humane treatment of other people, fighting despotism and helping the weak. Such principles as “honesty is the basis for everything”, “trust is the most important thing” are key principles in the traditional Chinese set of values and are highly viable in solving international problems (Lu, 2007).

3.2. Public Diplomacy

The international humanitarian cooperation is one of the spheres of public diplomacy (cultural diplomacy) whose goal is promotion and strengthening of the “soft power” of the state. In relation to this let us examine the second key term of our study – ‘public diplomacy’ (公共外交). In spite of receiving wide recognition it still is one of the most debated and controversial terms in modern social sciences. This definition was first introduced in academic discourse by the dean of Fletcher school of law and diplomacy E. Gullion back in 1965. Originally the term was presented as a substitute to the term ‘propaganda’ but soon underwent considerable evolution and reevaluation. For instance, M. Egner, in one of his works (Egner, 2010), discovered over twenty different definitions of ‘public diplomacy’ that emerged within the period from 1965 to 2008. For instance, the author of the term E. Gullion defines it as “exerting influence on the perception of your country’s policy by the society, forming the public opinion in the foreign countries...”.

3.3. Soft Power

The notion of ‘public diplomacy’ is inseparably associated with another widely circulating category – ‘soft power’ (软实力). Moreover, it is thanks to the emergence of this term in the early 1990s that a new interest to public diplomacy arose at that time, with public diplomacy suffering a setback after the Cold War because the issue of “conquering minds”, which had been so relevant during the period of the Western bloc vs. Eastern bloc confrontation, became of secondary importance. The emergence of new threats of the 21st century predetermined the need to return to the detailed research into this topic with new international relations realities. In 2004 J. Nye suggested a detailed study of ‘soft power’ in his monograph “Soft Power: How to Succeed in World Politics” (Nye, 2005).

The very term ‘power’ can be translated into Chinese differently, with some researchers using the word ‘力量’ (lìliàng) – power, force; others use ‘权力’ (quánlì) ‘power’ or ‘国力’ (guólì) ‘state power’, however, most often the term ‘soft power’ is rendered by the characters ’实力’ (shìlì), which means both power and influence. In other words, the term ‘软实力’ (ruǎn shìlì) is presently used as the main term in modern Chinese historiography to denote such a phenomenon as ‘soft power’.

Wide used in Western academic literature, the problem of ‘soft power’ and public diplomacy was, however, unpopular with Chinese researchers for a long time. The first attempts to define public diplomacy can be dated as belonging to early 1990s (one of the first mentions was in
the 1990s monograph “Foreign Diplomacy” by Professor of the International Relations University Zhou Qipeng (周齐礽). Since then the debates about the essence and nature of public diplomacy in the Chinese academic community have passed through two stages: from the attempt to understand and interpret this foreign loan word in the early 1990s to active research and development of proposals for adapting it in China in 2000s. Several features became apparent and formed during this period, and these features defined the peculiarities of the Chinese approach to ‘soft power’ and public diplomacy.

Hence, the second important term for this research, ‘soft power’ (软实力), despite having appeared only in the 20th century, is deeply rooted in Chinese Confucian culture, where softness is pitted against strength and stability. Another unique feature of the Chinese philosophical thought that largely reflects the specifics of the ‘soft’ approach to foreign policy is the attempt to avoid the use of force and to apply a humane approach instead, with some cunning stratagems whenever such are needed to build a relationship. In accordance with the primary ideas of Confucianism, an ideal leader must rely on morality (德, 德) or humanity (仁, 仁) rather than on physical power. The “Meng Zi” treatise (孟子, 4th – 3rd centuries BC) contraposes a “true ruler” (王) to a “hegemon” (霸). Whereas 王 uses benevolent force (德) and humanity (仁) in his governance, 霸 “uses force but disregards humanity” (Intellectual Culture of China: Encyclopedia, 2006). Under the influence of these value systems the traditional foreign policy doctrine of China proceeded from the premise that when interacting with “barbarians” (peoples that inhabited the outskirts of the Celestial Empire) the emphasis must be put on the “all—merciful influence of the Emperor” and only in exceptional cases it should be put on the use of force (Intellectual Culture of China: Encyclopedia, 2009).

When commenting on the ‘soft power’ concept, modern Chinese researchers referred to the famous philosopher Laozi (老子) as well. In his treatise “Tao Te Jing” (道德经) he repeatedly emphasizes the advantage of the soft over the firm: “All living things, grass and trees, while alive, are soft and supple, when dead, become dry and brittle. Thus that which is hard and stiff is the follower of death. That which is soft and yielding is the follower of life. Therefore, an inflexible army will not win. A strong tree will be cut down. The big and forceful occupy a lowly position, while the soft and pliant occupy a higher place” (§76, Laozi, 2015).

Even in the classic military treatise “The Art of War” (6th – early 5th centuries BC) by Sun Tzu (孙子, 武术) ideal victory is defined as bringing other states under submission via diplomatic methods, without any military actions: “fighting and winning a hundred times is not the best; the best is conquering without fighting” (Sun Tzu, 2012). Besides, the following ‘soft power’ stratagems can be found: “use soft means of overcoming force”, “avoid your opponent’s strengths, use his weaknesses”, “the best of the best is to conquer an enemy’s army without fighting”, etc. Sun Tzu put soft, i.e. intangible, psychological action on one of the most important places in a military conflict. He believed that “…in any war, as a rule, the best policy is conquering a country in its untouched state; destroying it is much easier. Taking an enemy’s army captive is better than destroying it... Securing a hundred victories in battles is not the ultimate art. Defeating the enemy without battling him – that is the pinnacle of art...”. Sun Tzu mentions other basic means of ‘soft power’ influence as well – in a certain combination, these means form the mechanism of the coercion of the enemy to certain directed actions.

3.4. Stratagem and Strategic Plan

Another specific trait of the Chinese civilization is also closely related to the soft approach to achieving goals – thinking in stratagems. The first Russian sinologist to research the phenomenon of stratagem thinking was Member of the Academy V.S. Myasnikov (Myasnikov, 1977). He defined a stratagem as “a strategic plan that contains some sort of a trap or a ploy for the enemy”. In
her work “Historical Experience of Using Stratagems and the ‘Soft Power’ Principle in the Social-Economic Reforms in China” D.O. Regzenova (Regzenov, 2012) analyzes various periods of Chinese history and points out that using manipulative, ‘soft’ methods to achieve one’s goals is a specific feature of Chinese people’s psychology.

Sun Tzu called war “a matter of life and death” and repeatedly stated in his works that a skillful military commander is able to achieve his goals without resorting to violence: “War is the way of deceit”, “The best of the best is conquering another army without fighting” (Sun Tzu, 2012). Classic Chinese treatises state that an indirect route allows one to manipulate one’s enemy and the one who “knows the tactics of the direct and the indirect routes beforehand, wins”. In his treatise Sun Tzu emphasized that the one “who wins before the battle by a preliminary calculation, has more chances to win the battle”.

4. Discussions

Russian-Chinese relations in the humanitarian sphere are the constant object of research for both Russian and foreign scholars. Having studied Russian and foreign historiography of the humanitarian cooperation between Russia and China (Lu, 2007; Larin, 2005; Egner, 2012; Nye, 2005; Allabert, 2008; Myasnikov, 1977; Alikberova, 2015), we can conclude that these scholars have done a lot of work in this area, they have accumulated a significant amount of theoretical and empirical materials that sheds light on the positions of the two countries in their foreign policy, the scale of Russian-Chinese relations in the cultural sphere, as well as gives an opportunity of further work on this subject. It should also be noted that the theoretical aspects of the bilateral cooperation have been researched to a lesser degree, and the terminological component has also not received sufficient coverage in academic literature.

5. Conclusion

Having studied the term definitions related to Russian-Chinese relations in the humanitarian sphere, we can conclude that the Confucian philosophical basis that was constructed back in ancient times, has served as a fertile ground for the introduction of the ‘soft power’ concept at the modern stage and has influenced the nature of Chinese public diplomacy. Firstly, the serious cultural potential that was successfully utilized when interacting with neighbors in ancient times, has under modern conditions become a starting point for the construction of the public diplomacy strategy of China. Secondly, centuries of experience of using ‘soft’ means of influencing enemies and the focus on diplomatic methods as opposed to open conflict have turned out in tune with the idea of conquering the leading positions by peaceful methods. Thirdly, tools of public diplomacy have proved to be relevant when solving issues related to the public image of the country worldwide. However, from the Russian side we observe the absence of accurate term definitions to be used in the public diplomacy sphere, as well as the absence of a universal government strategy in the humanitarian sphere. This fact shows that after the collapse of the USSR this issue has not been given sufficient attention, and many key notions of international cultural cooperation require further detailed research.

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References