

China's Diplomacy in a New Era of Confronting Challenges

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Abstract

The current international situation is changing rapidly, and various variables are intertwined, so China has contributed to Chinese wisdom and demonstrated its role as a great power by taking pragmatic diplomatic actions to solve global problems. However, China's diplomacy still faces several challenges as it continues to move forward. And the implementation of diplomatic actions is constrained by the current difficulties in external communication. To break the current dilemma, it is crucial to identify the root causes of the existing challenges and propose solutions accordingly. Although the road ahead is full of unknowns and bumps, as long as the international understanding and interaction among countries are strengthened, a synergy in favor of global governance will be formed, which will bring a favorable environment and new opportunities for the world's development.

Key words: China's diplomacy; Confronting challenges; Chinese culture; International understanding and cooperation; Global governance

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1. THE BACKGROUND OF CHINA'S CURRENT DIPLOMACY

1.1 Chinese Foreign Policy and Actions Foreign Policy and International Initiatives

As a positive and backbone force for international peace and development, China firmly adheres to an independent foreign policy of peace, an open strategy of mutual benefit and win-win cooperation, adheres to the development of friendly cooperation with other countries based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, takes the construction of a new type of international relations as the basic support, and takes a community with a shared future for mankind as the lofty goal of China's diplomacy as a major country in the new era. China deeply participates in the reform and construction of the global governance system and works hand in hand with countries around the world to resist and break down challenges.

In recent years, as China gradually moves towards the center of the world stage and becomes an important force in the southern countries of the world, China has participated in global governance with a positive attitude and pragmatic actions, to voice its voice and propose Chinese solutions to promote the reform and innovative development of the global governance system, and to promote the development of global governance towards a more just and reasonable direction. In response to changes in the world, times, and history, China first proposed the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind to the world in March 2013. As a major practice of

building a community with a shared future for mankind, the circle of friends of “the Belt and Road” has expanded over the past decade, and more than 150 countries and 30 international organizations have joined it so far. From concept to action, from vision to practice, “the Belt and Road” Initiative focuses on infrastructure construction, trade, and investment, strengthens economic cooperation and exchanges with countries along the Belt and Road, and makes greater contributions to promoting common development and prosperity of all countries and building a community with a shared future for mankind with new cooperation concepts and models. In addition, from 2021 to 2023, China has successively proposed three major global initiatives to the world, they are the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative, emphasizing cooperation and common development as the core, providing strong support for promoting the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind. These initiatives reflect China’s responsibility and contribution to global governance, aiming to promote global economic growth, maintain international order stability, and push the world onto the right track of peace and development.

China’s Diplomatic Actions in Recent Years

Currently, China has taken the implementation of the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative as its strategic leadership, and the high-quality co-construction of “the Belt and Road” as its practical platform. It has adhered to global diplomacy, actively carried out bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, enhanced international exchanges and understanding, and strengthened friendly relations and strategic cooperation with countries around the world through state visits, international meetings, and talks with leaders of other countries.



Figure 1
Countries or Regions of Concern during the Talks in Head-of-State Diplomacy

In reporting and describing the diplomacy of the head of state, a total of 80 countries or regions were mentioned, with Africa being the most mentioned (22 times), followed by Vietnam (9 times) and South Africa (6 times). It is worth noting that the countries holding diplomatic talks with China and the countries mentioned

in the meeting are mostly from the southern regions of the world. China’s attention to the development of global southern countries reflects the current shift of its diplomatic strategy from limited diplomacy focused on its development to diplomacy as a major country actively assuming international responsibilities.

Table 1
Partial Diplomatic Documents Released by China in the Last Two Years

Diplomatic instrument	Release time	Countries involved
Joint Statement between the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Chile	2023.10.17	China, Chile
Green Joint Work Program Between the Government of the People’s Republic of China and the Government of the Kingdom of Denmark (2023-2026)	2023.08.18	China, Denmark
Joint Statement on Establishing a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Featuring Mutual Respect and Common Development for a New Era Between the People’s Republic of China and Solomon Islands	2023.07.10	China, Solomon Islands
Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction	2023.09.21	China, multiple countries of the United Nations
The Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of Honduras	2023.03.26	China, Honduras
2nd Five-Year Plan for Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation between the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria and the People’s Republic of China for the years 2022-2026	2022.11.08	China, Algeria

In the past two years, China has signed a series of cooperation agreements and joint statements with countries such as Chile and Denmark, covering multiple fields such as economy and trade, science and technology, education, and culture. These actions not only deepen China’s bilateral or multilateral relations with other countries but also provide new cooperation platforms and opportunities for solving regional and global problems.

In addition to some of China’s diplomatic actions mentioned above, China also actively participates in international and regional multilateral governance mechanisms, such as the BRICS countries, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Organization, committed to promoting the reform and improvement of the global governance system, enhancing practical cooperation in the Global South, continuously enhancing the ability and discourse power of

southern countries to participate in global governance, and thereby enhancing their international influence.

1.2 Challenges of China's Diplomacy in the International Situation

The current international situation is complex and ever-changing, and the global political and economic landscape is undergoing profound adjustments. At the same time, the world is developing towards multipolarity, economic globalization, social informatization, and cultural diversity. Global challenges such as climate change and public health crises are becoming increasingly prominent, and the destinies of people around the world are closely linked. In this context, China's diplomacy is facing the challenge of urgently breaking through the dilemma of the surrounding security environment, dispelling rumors and slander in the international public opinion field, and maintaining international peace and national cooperation.

In recent years, with the continuous enhancement of China's comprehensive national strength and the continuous improvement of its international status, Western public opinion has also been highly concerned about China. Some malicious foreign media and anti-China forces maliciously attack, and defame China's image, fabricate false news, create division in China, and curb its normal development. These actions seriously endanger China's national sovereignty, security, and development interests, causing misunderstandings and biases among the international community towards China's politics, economy, culture, and society. Through sorting out 100 news reports about China obtained on the VOA official website, we found that "free" has been a hot keyword in recent years, appearing in 35 reports. Among them, 8 reports criticized China's backwardness in news freedom with so-called democratic values. Overall, most of the news held a negative attitude towards China.

In today's era of globalization and informatization, the international public opinion environment has an increasingly negative impact on the smooth development of China's diplomatic work. On the one hand, negative public opinion undermines China's international image, affects its diplomatic relations with other countries, increases diplomatic costs, challenges foreign policies, hinders international cooperation, and stimulates nationalist sentiment. On the other hand, these public opinion attacks may also use Western values such as democracy, human rights, and freedom to criticize China's values, further exacerbating China's challenges in the international public opinion arena.

2. REALISTIC CHALLENGES FACING CHINA'S DIPLOMACY

2.1 Language and Cultural Barriers

With the sustained rapid development of the Chinese economy and the continuous strengthening of national

power, cultural exchanges between China and the West are becoming increasingly frequent and profound. Chinese classical poetry, as a precious component of Chinese culture, frequently appears in China's diplomatic occasions due to its unique cultural charm. These classical poems not only vividly embody the long-standing cultural traditions of China but also serve as carriers of the wisdom and emotions of the Chinese people, showcasing China's soft power to the world. As China's influence on the international stage continues to expand, these classical poems have also become important links in promoting cultural exchanges between China and the West, deepening mutual understanding and friendship. However, due to the rich connotations and difficult-to-understand characteristics of poetic culture itself, increasing the difficulty of understanding China's diplomatic rhetoric, China's diplomacy also faces certain challenges in terms of language and culture, weakening the effectiveness of language and culture as a means of communication.

For example, at the opening ceremony of the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2019, President Xi Jinping quoted the poem "春秋多佳日，登高赋新诗" to express the beauty of the season when the conference was held. The official translation of this poem is "Spring and autumn are lovely seasons in which friends get together to climb up mountains and write poems." Although the translation itself conforms to the mood expressed by the poem and conveys the information, for foreign audiences unfamiliar with Chinese poetry, it may instead raise questions such as "What is the relevance of this information to the conference?" and "Why mention mountain climbing and poetry suddenly?" This not only fails to accurately convey the information but also leads to unnecessary misunderstandings.

2.2 Negative Impact of International Public Opinion

International public opinion plays a crucial role in today's era of globalization. It is not only a medium for disseminating information but also a significant force in shaping national images and influencing international relations. However, due to the long-term dominance of international communication resources by developed Western countries, external forces occasionally utilize media and other means to smear and distort China, leading international public opinion and continuously affecting the international community's perception and opinion of China, further negatively impacting China's diplomacy.

2.3 Lack of Interactive Communication with Audiences

In the era of digital public diplomacy, social media has become an important platform for countries to conduct diplomatic propaganda and communication. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also established official accounts on globally renowned media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to carry out

promotional work. However, when using social media for propaganda, China's diplomacy often lacks interactive communication with audiences. For a long time, China's diplomacy has been more inclined to adopt unidirectional communication, mainly by releasing messages and viewpoints through official channels, and less actively interacting and communicating with audiences. This traditional mode has led to the singularity and rigidity of diplomatic information, making it difficult to arouse the interest and participation of the audience.

For instance, tweets posted by the Chinese Embassy in the United States mainly fall into the following categories: advocacy of official policies, such as China's policies on issues related to Xinjiang, Sino-US trade, and military affairs; cultural diplomacy, showcasing and promoting Chinese culture; international news, re-tweeting official tweets from CGTN, Xinhua News Agency, and others; and interactive tweets, engaging with the public by posing questions. However, among these, interactive questions account for less than five percent of all tweets, and most of these tweets do not involve soliciting opinions or feedback. The embassy also rarely responds to comments from users, indicating a lack of interactive communication with the audience.

3. REASONS FOR THE CHALLENGES

3.1 The Specificity of Chinese Culture and the Lack of International Exchange

Foreigners often misunderstand China's use of quotations in diplomatic situations. This phenomenon may be attributed to the specificity of Chinese culture and the lack of related international exchanges.

To a certain extent, differences between Chinese and foreign discourse systems lead to bias in foreigners' understanding of China. The differences between Chinese and foreign discourse systems can be summarized as differences in the use of written language and cultural differences. These two differences seem like a solid wall between the communicator and the receiver, hindering the flow of information. Chinese culture is affected by the differences in thinking habits and cultural psychology of different countries and regions, and the lack of a part of the adaptive discourse of Western society in the process of international communication practice makes it difficult for foreign audiences to form an accurate cognition of China.

Against the backdrop of globalization, cultural exchanges among countries are becoming more frequent, and ideological collisions are becoming more pronounced. Different politics, religious beliefs, social structures, and economic systems may profoundly affect how one culture is understood and accepted by another. Under such circumstances, ideological confrontation makes it difficult for foreigners, especially those in Western countries, to accept the positive spread of Chinese culture and resist

corresponding exchange and dialog activities. Therefore, ideological differences do often become an important obstacle in cultural communication.

The Global Civilization Initiative, an international public good recently proposed by China to the world, responds to the international community's common need to enhance dialogue and exchanges among civilizations and to promote the prosperity of culture. However, China seldom had a systematic program to promote international exchanges previously. Relevant initiatives and measures were seldom put into concrete action, lacking practical experience in international exchanges.

3.2 Low Media Presence and Limited Distribution Channels

With the development of new media, China's influence in both traditional and emerging media is lower than that of Western countries, and there are few mediums with a global reach that can provide people around the world with a channel to learn about the reality in China.

In recent years, some U.S. and Western countries, which have long been in control of international public opinion, have taken advantage of the "asymmetry of information" to further strengthen the "stigmatization" of China, leaving no stone unturned to disseminate negative news about China, magnify China's problems and shortcomings, and even impose their standards on China. They even impose their standards on China. This kind of manipulation of public opinion to deliberately smear China has also led to a very poor impression of China among Westerners. A high percentage of international audiences obtain information about China through Western media, while a relatively low percentage obtain it through Chinese media. China is still in a passive state of "the world translates China", and the world learns that is not the real China. However, China is constructed based on ideology and value standards that are processed by foreign media. China learned from such channels is crippled and false, and runs counter to China's foreign philosophy and behavior.

In addition, the transmission of Chinese culture has been limited by the fact that in the past there was a single channel of communication, with the official media usually being the mainstream communication channel. However, the international communication of these mainstream media is often viewed in the West as a more "politically charged" form of communication and is considered political propaganda, which limits the effectiveness of China's foreign exchanges and international communication. China's attention to non-national journalists and civil society communication is less focused than the U.S. efforts to train non-government media journalists abroad and to provide financial and technical support for their activities. The lack of a single channel and the lack of a grasp of officialdom have resulted in a lack of foreign media with a strong

international presence in China. At the same time, the lack of authentic reporting on China by overseas self-published media to complement the official media has limited the scope and extent of the spread of Chinese culture. This also makes it difficult for foreigners to truly understand and comprehend the emergence, development, and application of Chinese culture. What's more, the cultural gap brought about by channel limitations has become an obstacle to international communication. It also becomes an important reason for "not understanding China's diplomacy and Chinese stories".

Against the background of the intensifying Sino-American game, the control ability of the American public opinion field is becoming more and more prominent. The United States of America's strength is stronger with the growing media manipulation ability, which has a set of perfect communication systems and mechanisms within the world system, the discourse weight is heavier, and the public acceptance is higher. China, on the other hand, does not have a complete set of communication channels. The influence of national discourse is only limited to developing countries, and the enhancement of national strength is not proportional to the enhancement of discourse power, and the two are not compatible with each other. External communication channels are mostly limited to the official mainstream media, making it difficult to form timely interactions with foreign recipients and open up the double-circle mechanism for domestic and international communication. The path dependence of the audience in international communication has also weakened China's effectiveness in telling good Chinese stories to foreign countries and telling Chinese stories that can be understood.

3.3 Monolithic and Entrenched Modes of Communication

The singularity and solidity of communication methods have led to a lack of two-way interaction between China and its audiences in the process of international communication. From 2004, when the first Confucius Institute was inaugurated in Seoul, South Korea, to 2024, China has opened 492 Confucius Institutes and other physical language institutions around the world. However, with the development of the times, the dissemination effect of physical institutions is not as effective as it used to be, which is limited by the constraints of space and time. When foreign recipients have some resonance with Chinese culture or have some questions, it is difficult for these institutions to respond promptly. Meanwhile, in contrast to the mainstream official media in China, the official media in the West usually "come down" to interact with domestic and foreign people on social media platforms, utilizing the timeliness of social media to deliver relevant information and cultural concepts, which is more likely to achieve the purpose of positive communication.

In the age of the Internet, the inertia of the dissemination of Chinese culture, which continues to be dominated by physical means of communication, needs to be broken. Failure to design different communication methods for different groups also makes it difficult for foreign recipients to form deep-level interactions with Chinese culture. At present, China lacks a large number of websites, radio stations, APPs, and other information technology communication methods, leading to a deficiency in timely responsiveness and interactivity with recipients. With the rising trend of pan-securitization, the state has carried out a certain degree of screening and control of information, which also makes the information obtained by the audience is not true and comprehensive and may be misinterpreted and taken out of context. Perhaps it is information that has been processed many times, and this information often causes them to misunderstand as well. Due to the single-mindedness of the communication method and the lack of timely response to the public's misunderstanding by the Chinese official media, the public's misunderstanding deepens and their impression of China becomes even worse.

4. PROSPECTS FOR CHINA'S DIPLOMACY

4.1 Necessity of Gaining International Understanding

International understanding places greater emphasis on respect, communication, and understanding, and is an inclusive and effective way to promote peace and win-win situations. If we compare the earth to a heart, international understanding is the wall between the left and right heart, and only by breaking down this barrier can we make mutual exchanges and communications smoother. Therefore, international understanding plays an important role in China's diplomacy and the deepening of global governance.

Communication consists of speaking and listening, and the effectiveness of communication lies in whether it is spoken and whether it is listened to, i.e. received and understood. Diplomatic discourse usually releases strategic signals to the outside world, but miscommunication leads to a lack of access to China's signals or strategic miscalculation, which hinders communication at the national diplomatic level. Similarly, China's diplomatic action is also a language expression. As China's comprehensive strength continues to improve, it is gradually assuming a more important role in global governance, while China, which is moving towards the center of the world stage, is facing an overwhelming siege and suppression of international public opinion. Seen through tinted glasses, China's diplomatic actions are

perceived as politically conditioned and ill-intentioned. However, due to the fundamental differences between Chinese and Western cultures and the lack of international understanding of China's diplomacy, most of China's diplomatic actions are reported by the international media as offensive and destructive political actions, fabricating and exaggerating the negative impact of China's foreign actions, and reinforcing the "China threat theory" and "China conspiracy theory". "China's conspiracy theories". This is inconsistent with the facts. However, it has become a source for foreigners to form perceptions of China.

In addition, international understanding plays an indispensable role in the solution of global problems. In meetings and solutions to global problems, it is often pointed out that there are obstacles to current action, the most common of which is the lack of synergy in international action. The most common obstacle is the lack of international synergy. The source of this is the lack of mutual understanding between countries. This lack of understanding leads to strategic mistrust and biased perceptions of operational strategies, which can lead to security dilemmas and a vicious circle that none of us would wish to see. Therefore, an international environment of mutual tolerance and understanding is essential. Thinking from the perspective of the constructivism of international relations, international cooperation, and international mechanisms are constructed with consensus, and the important role of international understanding is once again emphasized. However, the current pan-securitization between countries and the rise of protectionism has made it more difficult to implement international understanding, while differences and misunderstandings between countries will increase day by day. Enhancing international understanding was an endeavor that required the concerted efforts of all countries, not the unilateral behavior of any one country or group of countries. In this regard, all countries should carry out the contemporary theme of peace and development, rationally judge security risks, balance security dilemmas with international understanding, promote cultural exchanges, communication, and understanding among countries, promote the establishment of trust mechanisms, positively implement the Global Civilization Initiative, solve global problems with pragmatic actions, and promote the establishment of a community of shared destiny for mankind. The establishment of a community of human destiny should be promoted.

4.2 Recommendations for Chinese Diplomacy

China's diplomacy adheres to the path of peaceful development, has long upheld peace, openness, and inclusiveness, encourages two-way cultural exchanges,

promotes bilateral and multilateral communication and exchanges through responsible international action, implements the United Nations 2030 Strategy for Sustainable Development, and steadily pushes forward the fair, inclusive and sustainable development of global governance. In recent years, recognizing the shortcomings of its international communication capacity compared to that of Western countries, China has taken a series of actions to strengthen its capacity building to make up for these shortcomings, including actively promoting overseas exchanges of Chinese culture, encouraging and cultivating talents for cross-cultural exchanges both at home and abroad, promoting China's official media to go to sea, and focusing on building its discourse system.

Although we have continued to promote capacity building in this area in recent years, we have achieved little. The dilemma China faces in international understanding is that those who don't want to understand want everyone to not understand, and those who do want to understand are even less able to find a way to do so. In this regard, action is far better than fantasy.

In light of the above, we would like to offer a few suggestions. Firstly, the most important thing is to explain the cultural expressions in diplomacy promptly, promote the wide dissemination of Chinese culture, and endeavor to break down the barriers and barriers to international exchange brought about by cultural uniqueness. For example, the classical diplomacy used in diplomacy can be released through overseas official media accounts, which can not only effectively explain the diplomatic behavior, but also enhance the dissemination of Chinese culture, and play the role of two-way propaganda of politics and culture. In addition, for the consideration of the perspective of media platform use, people tend to have path dependence. Therefore, speaking diplomacy in a small internal circle will always be limited, and it is necessary to actively broaden the path of real foreign propaganda and form a diversified and multi-level international communication mechanism construction, such as increasing the rate of Chinese official media accounts on overseas social media platforms and improving the degree of China's interaction and interconnection with the world. In addition, it is necessary to break away from single and inherent ways of communication and open up more innovative and attractive ways of international communication, including increased interaction with netizen users, timely clarification of the truth of the matter, and necessary explanations and clarifications of misunderstandings. This approach will promote a wider international understanding of Chinese culture and lead to the formation of correct strategic perceptions and judgments about China, thus making Chinese diplomacy more effective.

5. SUMMARY

As a force for peace, stability, and progress, China, as a force for change in the world landscape and multiple challenges to the destiny of humankind, has been actively taking responsibility for addressing global challenges with Chinese wisdom and proposals, and working hand in hand with other countries to make progress. However, due to the uniqueness of Chinese culture, the limitation of media influence, and the single mode of communication, it is always difficult for China's stories to meet the people of other countries in a real way, and they are gradually distorted in communication. Furthermore, China's diplomacy finds itself in a predicament of being misunderstood, or even misconstrued, due to obstacles stemming from language and cultural barriers, vicious cycles in international public opinion, and constraints on international communication methods. This situation runs counter to our original intentions of engaging in international cooperation and global governance.

Differences and struggles inevitably exist in today's world, and despite the current rise of regionalism and the resurgence of trade protectionism, international cooperation remains a major trend. At this time, "deepening international cooperation and confidence-building mechanisms" are not just slogans, but require the attention of all countries and their practical advancement. Although the process is progressing slowly and painstakingly, we believe that the hope for a better future and the vision of a peaceful world is the constant driving force behind our actions. So far, we have endeavored to tell the world a story that can be understood, so that China's diplomatic actions can ride on the winds of international understanding, and effectively contribute to the smooth progress of international cooperation and the innovation, reform, and better development of the global governance system.

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