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China's People-to-people Diplomacy and Its Importance to China-EU Relations

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Abstract: People-to-people exchange has been a heated topic of China's foreign policy. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, China has established people-to-people dialogues with the United States, the EU, the United Kingdom, France and Russia. In 2012, China and the EU established a high-level dialogue for people-to-people exchange, making people-to-people exchanges the third pillar of China-EU relations. However, China's people-to-people diplomacy is lack of understanding while the importance of people-to-people diplomacy in China's foreign policy and China-EU relations is still underestimated. Along with the new Chinese leadership and transform of China's foreign policy, people-to-people diplomacy will play an important role in the future. This paper aims to review the history and current situation of China's people-to-people exchange and examine its importance in China-EU relations. This paper consists of four main parts. The first part will review the development of China's people-to-people diplomacy from the 1950s to the present. The second part will examine China's driven powers of people-to-people diplomacy especially in recent years. The third part focuses on the institution building of the High-Level People-to-People Dialogue between China and the EU. The fourth part will evaluate the current situation of China's people-to-people exchange with the EU in order to reveal the importance and the potentiality of it before the conclusion.

Keywords: China-EU Relations, People-to-People Diplomacy, Importance

Introduction

Speaking of diplomacy, the first scenario comes into mind is usually two national leaders shaking each other's hands and smiling to the press, which is formal, political, elegant, and a little boring to the general public. However, diplomacy is far more than just dialogues between national leaders or international summit for foreign ministers. Among all the methods, people-to-people diplomacy has been one of the heated topics especially since Joseph Nye defined "soft power" and pointed out its importance to foreign affairs (2004). All major powers in the world have devoted to the spread of their soft power through people-to-people exchanges including the People's Republic of China and the European Union (EU).

People-to-people diplomacy, a pathway of public diplomacy, has been widely used when there is obstacle to establish hard diplomacy. It refers to two or more individuals sharing a conversation in an effort to further understand what they share in common, as well as developing a mutual respect for their respective differences (Brown 2002). This approach of soft diplomacy includes various forms such as cultural events, academic exchange, and sports competition. It used to be a complementary method to hard diplomacy such as political dialogue between government officials, economic relations between nations and corporations and military practices between allies. However, it substitutes hard diplomacy to be the first choice under certain circumstances when hard diplomacy could not be conducted. Examples include South and North Korea relations (Bae 2011), Cross Taiwan Strait relations (Hickey 1994) and US-Iran relations (Chehabi 2001).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, China has been a major player on international platform and an active one to use people-to-people diplomacy. Five generations of Chinese top leaders from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping all attach importance to people-to-people diplomacy in Chinese foreign affairs. Various institutions have been established since the founding of the New China to conduct people-to-people exchange. Before the 1970s, it was mainly used to handle the Cross Strait relationship with Taiwan and relations with other Communism countries. After China's Opening and Reform, it has been expanded to cover in a larger scale. Along with the changing of the international system, China needs to master people-to-people approach in order to survive and lead the multipolar world.

The EU is a partner which China wants to get closer to through people-to-people diplomacy. The EU, with 28 member states, is the largest economy in the world followed by China as the largest economy of single country. The diplomatic bilateral relationship was established in 1975 and this year is the 40th anniversary. Chinese President Xi Jinping paid a historic visit to the EU's headquarters in Brussels in 2014, which is the first time that a Chinese President visits the EU's home. The visit symbolises that the China-EU relations is in its best condition ever. The Chinese government has added people-to-people diplomacy as a "third pillar" to the China-EU strategic partnership along with the High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue ("first pillar") and the High-Level Strategic Dialogue ("second pillar") (European Commission 2012). It is time to stop

underestimating the importance of people-to-people diplomacy in China-EU relationship.

This paper is more like a descriptive article aiming to review the history and current situation of China's people-to-people exchange and examine its importance in China-EU relations. It consists of four main parts. The first part reviews the development of China's people-to-people diplomacy from the 1950s to the present. The second part examines China's driven powers of people-to-people diplomacy especially in recent years. The third part focuses on the institution building of the High-Level People-to-People Dialogue between China and the EU. The fourth part will evaluate the current situation of China's people-to-people exchange with the EU in order to reveal the importance and the potentiality of it before the conclusion.

People-to-people diplomacy: not new to China

People-to-people diplomacy is not a new measure in foreign affairs to the People's Republic of China. Back in the 1950s soon after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, President Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai regarded people-to-people diplomacy as an important method in China's foreign affairs because China was weak in political and economic power. China as a newly born country at that time wanted to gain international recognition. People-to-people diplomacy is one of the few measures it could afford. However, due to the historical background of the Cold War, the people-to-people diplomacy of China was mainly targeted to African countries and Communism countries between 1950s and 1970s (Chen 2005, Kobayashi et al 2011).

In order to handle people-to-people diplomacy between China and other countries, institutions were established soon after the founding of the New China. One of the most famous cases is the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA) which was established in 1949. It was led by the then Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai and was the first organisation in China in charge of people-to-people exchanges. It also carries out research on international affairs and foreign policies. Today the CPIFA is still one of the major actors in Chinese public diplomacy. According to China's State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan, the CPIFA should "know more about situation

in grass roots and play the role of a bridge between the people and the government” (Xinhua 2004).

In the 1970s, people-to-people diplomacy played a key role in the normalisation of the bilateral relationship between China and the US. In 1971, during the World Table Tennis Championship held in Nagoya, Japan, Glenn Cowan, an American player missed his own team’s bus and accidentally got on the bus full of Chinese players. Both Glenn and the Chinese players were embarrassed until one of the Chinese players Zhuang Zedong stood up and welcomed Glenn to have a seat. This dramatic encounter is called “Ping-Pong Diplomacy” and is a household story in China now. It paved the way for the US President Nixon’s historic visit to China next year (Zhu 2015).

After Deng Xiaoping’s Opening and Reform Policy launched in the late 1970s, China’s people-to-people diplomacy has entered a new era. Due to the trade with western countries and investment from foreign corporates, Chinese economy started to boom. More government funding could be allocated to conduct people-to-people diplomacy while some non-governmental organisations also appeared to facilitate people-to-people exchanges. When the Cold War ended in the 1990s, the international environment turned to be more favourable to China’s development. Since China’s population and potential as world largest market, the US, Japan and European countries needed to understand China as well as China’s curiosity to the outside world. Chinese people-to-people diplomacy expanded from Communist countries and developing countries to the whole world.

As mentioned above, there have been a lot of institutions being built in China in order to conduct people-to-people diplomacy. Besides the CPIFA, some other institutions have been established after the launch of the Opening and Reform Policy. These institutions and organisations participating in people-to-people diplomacy such as the Confucius College and the China Scholarship Council as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and National Bureau of Tourism and Ministry of Education as government bodies. Both NGOs and government bodies are actors nowadays in people-to-people exchanges. Foreign NGOs are also coming to China for certain

targets. For example, Green Peace has set its China office and contributed to the environment protection and sustainable development of China (Green Peace China 2015).

In recent decades, China has stressed the importance of people-to-people diplomacy in China's foreign affairs. During the last administration led by Hu Jintao, China attached importance to "non-governmental diplomacy" so as to "give full play to the advantages of the people-to-people exchanges with other countries" (Xinhua 2004). China has tried its best to host 2001 Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation conference in Shanghai, 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, 2010 Shanghai World Expo and 2013 Nanjing Youth Olympic Games encouraging more foreigners to visit China and better understand the country. Number of international students coming to China to have degree or short-term study is substantially increasing while Chinese students have already become one of the largest groups of overseas students in the US, the United Kingdom, France and many other European countries (Jiang 2014).

Chinese new leadership has inherited the direction of foreign policy to further develop people-to-people diplomacy. For example, High-Level People-to-People Dialogue has been established as a major compound of strategic partnership between China and the United Kingdom, China and France, China and Germany as well as China and the EU. In July 2015, Beijing was named as the host city of the 2022 Winter Olympic Games becoming the first city to host both summer and winter Olympics (International Olympic Committee 2015). Although the bidding result arouses controversies (Capps 2015, Pramuk 2015), it reveals China's ambition and confidence to use people-to-people diplomacy as a major tool to influence the world in the future. As Chinese President Xi Jinping mentioned in a speech that "we should strengthen inter-civilisation exchanges and mutual learning" and "people-to-people diplomacy represents the most profound force in promoting such exchanges and mutual learning" (Xi 2014).

Plus or must: Motivations of China's people-to-people diplomacy

China is facing a new international structure with two characteristics: a multipolar world and an intense Asia. The first characteristic is that the American unipolar system after the collapse of the

former Soviet Union is giving place to a multipolar system. The five BRICS countries, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa are becoming engine of world economy substituting the western powers. Other fast growing economies include Turkey, Indonesia, Nigeria and etc. Among these developing countries, it is no doubt the significance of China to world economy and trade is vital. Europe, the US and even other BRICS countries are depending on China's import and export. Meanwhile, China could no longer be a free-rider of the international order and avoid shouldering international responsibility. Its foreign policy focus should not be limited to Asia or neighbouring countries but rather the entire world. The second characteristic is an intense regional situation especially between China and neighbouring countries on South China Sea. In recent years, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam and other countries have conflicts of territory with China on South China Sea. Although China has maintained harmonious relationships with South Korea, Russia and Central Asian countries, the conflicts in the South prevents China becoming the dominant power of East Asia. Also, the US is backing its allies in territory claims against China which even worsen the regional situation from the Chinese perspective.

Facing such an international and regional environment, is people-to-people diplomacy a plus or a must for China? There have already been discussions among Chinese scholars (Wang 2008, Zhao 2015). Apparently, it is a must, especially when China needs to deal with the ever deteriorating neighbouring relations. There are three main reasons for China to take people-to-people diplomacy as a necessary measure in foreign affairs.

First, people-to-people diplomacy is good measure to improve China's international image. In the past, China tried to use political or economic power to improve its image but in vain. For example, China has sent more soldiers to participate in the United Nations peacekeeping troops than any other countries. However, this contribution has been hardly mentioned or appreciated by the international society. Thus, China needs new methods to reach the goal, in this case, to improve its national image. People-to-people exchange provides China a new method. In recent years, China has tried its best to host international events such as 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, 2010 Shanghai World Expo and 2014 Nanjing Youth Olympic Games. Holding these eye-catching international events, China has attracted hundreds of thousands of foreign people to visit it. In

addition, China has not only held events inside its territory but also overseas. In the recent decade, China has held Chinese language year or cultural year in other countries such as Russia, the United Kingdom and France with support of the local government. Through series of activities during the special years, China exports its language, culture and history to more foreigners via people-to-people exchanges.

Second, people-to-people diplomacy is a complementary to Chinese diplomacy. As one of the major powers in the world, China needs plenty of tools in its diplomacy box. People-to-people should be one of the tools since almost all major powers have been using it for a long time. Before the “Ping-Pong Diplomacy” and the normalisation of China-US relationship, people-to-people diplomacy was only conducted between China and non-western countries and mainly African countries. Since the 1980s, China has much more contact with the outside world. Its diplomatic tools are also transferring from politics and ideology to economics and trade. Becoming key economic partners of almost all countries in the world and the largest exporter, China has become more confident when dealing with negotiations. Yet, the economic growth of China will not always be at 10 percent each year. It needs to find another way when economic power is shared by more emerging markets such as India, Turkey and Brazil. Owing five thousand years’ history and culture, China is still a mysterious Asian country to the West. Western people are eager to know more about this country, which proves that people-to-people diplomacy is valuable and necessary for China. Therefore, enhancing the influence of people-to-people diplomacy in Chinese foreign affairs is vital in order to complement Chinese diplomatic tool box.

Third, people-to-people diplomacy could influence the future generations of both China and the world. People-to-people exchanges involve activities which mainly target at young people such as academic exchange and international tourism. For example, more and more international students are coming to China to study. However, comparing to Chinese students in the EU and the US who mainly study degree programs, international students in China are normally enrolled in short-term programmes such as language programme and culture programme. Although it is effective for them to grow interest in China and learn the basic knowledge about China, it is far

from letting them to understand China better. Instead of Chinese language and culture, the politics, economic and society are more useful to them. Through people-to-people diplomacy, the younger generations could acquire more information about China and not be biased due to the influence of western media alone. If China wants to change its image in the world, it needs to cultivate the next generations when they are still forming their impression of the international society.

For the new generation of Chinese leaders, there is no choice but adding people-to-people diplomacy to Chinese diplomatic strategy. It is not just a plus to the traditional diplomacy but a necessary new method the government should take in order to improve China's image and provide more diplomatic options. After the new administration took office in 2012, new institutions of people-to-people diplomacy have been established. The most eye-catching institution is the high-level people-to-people dialogue between China and the EU.

Institution building: EU's motivation

EU-China High People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD) is a newly built institution between the EU and China since people-to-people exchange has been defined as the third pillar to their strategic partnership. Before 2012, there were only two pillars in the China-EU strategic partnership, the High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue ("first pillar") and the High-Level Strategic Dialogue ("second pillar"), although both sides had been working closely in the areas of education and training, culture, multilingualism and youth. Cooperation consisted of regular policy dialogues at government level, as well as concrete outputs in terms of joint projects and events (European Commission 2015). Since 2012 all these activities have been integrated under the HPPD.

"China and the EU will expand the opportunities for mobility in education, and increase the number of exchanges between students and scholars, particularly in higher education. The two sides will work together to improve the mutual recognition of academic qualifications" (European Commission 2012). From the European side, the funding for people-to-people dialogues with China is critical to support China's transition towards a more open society based upon the rule of

law and respect for human rights. As many global problems can no longer be solved by governments and the private sector alone, citizen diplomacy is central for the China-EU strategic partnership to thrive.

The HPPD is the overarching mechanism which accommodates all EU-China joint initiatives in the field of people-to-people exchanges. According to its introduction, the HPPD “should help build mutual trust and consolidate intercultural understanding between the EU and China” (ibid). Up to now, there have been two rounds of the EU-China HPPD resulting in HPPD Joint Communique and follow-up actions documents. In 2013 during the 16th EU-China Summit, the two sides launched EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation in which people-to-people exchanges was one of its four chapters (European Council 2013).

A particularly effective way to encourage the rise of an open society in China is the establishment of a new EU-China People-to-People Dialogue Support Facility (P2PDSF), modelled in part on the successful EU-China Policy Dialogue Support Facility II (PDSF). The Chinese government is more likely to embrace this if it can reasonably assume that such dialogue is aimed at social and cultural exchanges. Topics of mutual interest include the eight fields of education, environment, culture, civil society, public sector reform, disability, gender and LGBT, and youth. By supporting people-to-people dialogues financially, the European Commission could strengthen the “third pillar” of its dialogue architecture, thus allowing for both a critical and constructive dialogue across civilisations.

How would a P2PDSF work in practice? It would run for five years, from 2015 to 2020, to ensure results. It needs sufficient resources to implement a minimum of twenty dialogue forums and ten study tours in Europe and China. As in the EU-China Civil Society, these study tours would be embedded in an ongoing dialogue and be action-based. This would require an estimated budget of five to eight million Euros.

The P2PDSF has the potential to renew the tradition of citizen diplomacy based on the key principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, reciprocity and sustainability. These principals were

developed during the implementation of the EU-China Civil Society Dialogue Programme and helped foster a climate of constructive communication and collaboration among intercultural groups. Solidarity postulates that societal self-organisation in China is an ongoing historical process which deserves attention and active support by European civil societies. Subsidiarity is about European civil society playing a supporting role for Chinese civil society rather than the role of advocate. Reciprocity emphasizes that cooperation between European and Chinese civil society should be based on burden and benefit sharing. Finally, sustainability is understood as long-term partnerships between European and Chinese civil societies which require appreciation, joint effort, trust and friendship among individuals. In order to be truly sustainable, such bridge building should be supported with the help of European funding.

Since EU regards itself as a normative power, people-to-people dialogue has been used as a measure not only to accelerate European integration but also to influence neighbouring regions and the world. Inside the EU, Central and Eastern European countries have been attracted by its civil society, respect of constitution, rule of law and democracy. Enlargements of the EU in the east owes to the people-to-people exchanges among citizens. Outside the EU, it uses people-to-people exchange to win recognition and support of its legitimacy as well as export its norms. China is one of the most important actors on global platform. The goals to win Chinese people's recognition and influence Chinese civil society can both be achieved through people-to-people diplomacy.

New channel to improve China-EU relations

China-EU has established bilateral relations for four decades. In 1975, the European Community and China built bilateral diplomatic relations. Since then, China and EU have been cooperating in numerous areas including politics, economy, trade, technology, education, and etc. and have achieved great success owing to both parties' efforts. Besides, although China experienced leadership change in 2012 to 2013 and the EU in 2014 to 2015, both China and the EU attach great importance to their bilateral relationship. After Chinese new President Xi Jinping took office, he has reformed China's foreign policy strategy and put China-EU relations as equal importance

as China-US, China-Russia and China-neighbouring countries relations. His historic visit to the headquarters of the EU in Brussels in 2014 symbolises that China-EU relations is in its best status ever.

People-to-people diplomacy is not a new comer to China-EU relations. Back to the 17th century, early Ming Dynasty China and early modern Europe have already communicated via people-to-people diplomacy (Zhang 2014, Jiang 2015). Hundreds of European missionaries came to China and brought the dynasty modern knowledge and technology. However, Chinese people did not embrace the European culture until they lost the Opium War in 1842 against the British. Concessions were built afterwards in major cities such as Shanghai, Tianjin and Qingdao. Chinese people started to have direct people-to-people exchanges with the Europeans. Some of the European cultures and languages successfully integrated into local culture and languages especially in Shanghai, which is the main reason why it became the economic centre and most international city of China until present.

Yet, during the colonisation century from the end of the Opium War to the end of the WWII, Chinese people struggled to regain independence and terminate the colonisation. The United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy and other European countries were interested in China's raw materials, culture heritages and large market to export their own goods. Economics and trade were the motivations behind European colonisation. During the WWII, China was allies to the Anti-Fascism countries. Without its resistance in Asia, the Russian would need to invest more troops in Far East against Japan and weaken its military power against Hitler in Europe resulting in European Allies having a longer period of war time. After the two world wars, all European countries eventually gave up their concessions in Mainland China.

The end of the civil war of China in 1949 changed its relationship with the European countries dramatically. When the New China was founded in 1949, all European countries still had diplomatic relations with the Republic of China's government in Taipei. France was the first major European country to recognise the People's Republic and established diplomatic relationship with it under President Charles de Gaulle's command. But the ideology fight between the Communism

led by the Soviet Union and Capitalism led by the US divided China and European countries into two camps respectively. The “Iron Curtain” between the East and the West prevent the two continents from communication. This situation was changed after the People’s Republic became the legitimate representative of China in the United Nations in 1971. The European Community also established diplomatic relationship with China in 1975 which encouraged more European countries to follow.

After launching the Opening and Reform Policy in the 1980s, China has welcomed overseas investment especially European countries and corporations. The normalisation of political relations between China and European countries paved way for economic and trade cooperation. European investment and corporates started to enter the Chinese market while Chinese products began to be sold in Europe. In the past 30 years, the trade between China and European markets have been boosted. Almost all major European corporates have started their businesses in China. In recent years, Chinese businessmen started to buy European companies due to the economic and Euro crisis. The investment is moving towards a more balance and healthy status. In 2003, China and EU upgraded its relations to strategic partnership. Nonetheless, the reality is not as sound as the appearance. Economy and trade have been emphasized while other areas’ potential are still underestimated (Hoslag 2011).

The strategic partnership’s main question is: politics, economy, trade, technology, and then what? Although China and the EU has maintained a relatively healthy relationship in recent years and celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2015, there are few fields which China and the EU could use to improve their bilateral relations. In political and economic areas, China and the EU are already Strategic Partners and become each other’s most important trade partners. Yet, the EU still has not recognised China’s marketing economy status and lifted sanctions on arms embargo. In other fields such as military and technology, cooperation between China and the EU has been limited on a low level due to the sensitivity of this area. Therefore, both sides are eager to find a new way to improve their bilateral relations and people-to-people exchange is the most doable measure.

People-to-people diplomacy is a new and maybe the only channel for both China and the EU to improve their relations further. China as the main economic engine of the world is playing a more and more important role in international politics. However, the Western world still holds biases in several areas towards China such as human rights, rule of law and political system. People-to-people diplomacy is a smart way to avoid leaving the impression of assertiveness and ambitious. The EU sees itself as a normative power in the world (Manners 2002, Diez 2005). Its core values are its power and attractiveness to other regions. Trying to become an international normative power, it has to have more contact with countries outside of Europe. People-to-people exchange is an effective measure to influence Chinese civil society.

Conclusion

This descriptive paper reviews the development of people-to-people exchanges in Chinese diplomatic history and its significance in current relations with the EU. China is not a new comer to the technique of people-to-people diplomacy. Back in the early days of the new China, Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai have paved way for future people-to-people exchanges. It has played a vital role in China's foreign affairs. However, comparing with political, military and economic measures, people-to-people diplomacy's effectiveness was underestimated. Until recent decades, China reconsidered its international strategy and valued the importance of people-to-people exchanges. When dealing with strategic partnership with the EU, HPPD has been established to boost bilateral cooperation in culture, education and youth. It even becomes the "third pillar" of the strategic partnership. In the near future, new policies and initiatives in people-to-people exchanges will accelerate the cooperation process.

Facing a multipolar international structure, China has to use people-to-people diplomacy and to cooperate with the EU. It is no longer the era when countries competed with each other by ideology. Rather, politics, economics and people-to-people exchanges are measure more commonly used. If China only use political, economic and military power, its international image will be worse. People-to-people diplomacy is a good choice for China to improve its neighbouring environment and images abroad. In addition, since China has taken the EU as a partner to

balance the power of the US, it needs people-to-people exchanges alongside political and economic dialogues to influence the European people.

Under the new leadership China and EU have great potential for closer bilateral cooperation in economics and security issues. However, beyond the economic and political aspect, the need for mutual understanding and further cooperation in other fields such as higher education, energy and environment and civil societies still exists. People-to-people exchange is a good way for both sides to have deeper understanding of each other and narrow the gap caused by misunderstanding in the past. If this “third pillar” could be strengthened, a healthy and fruitful China-EU strategic partnership is foreseeable in the future.

Notes

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