

#ISA2021 #ICOMM

## WC18: Methods and Methodologies in Public Diplomacy

# Understanding the China's conceptualization of Public Diplomacy: a historical institutionalism approach

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# The need of a methodology for understanding China's current public diplomacy institutionalization

## The changing of China's public diplomacy rhetoric

- From external propaganda to external publicity
- From external publicity to public diplomacy
  - Highlighting the importance of “communication capacity” (Sun 2015, 404);
  - Underling a public-centric approach of international communication (Xi, 2017b).
- Towards the “major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics” (*zhongguo tese daguo waijiao*) (Xinhua 2014, para. 8).
  - Employing new rhetoric: “China stories”, “China voices”, “Chinese dream”, and “community with a shared future for mankind”
  - Formulating the strategy of “discourse power construction” (Tan, 2016, p. 3): applying a more proactive approach to promoting China's rise as a global power.

## Existing works on China's public diplomacy studies

- Analyzing strategy formation (cf. Thussu 2016; Rawnsley 2009; Q. Zhao and Lei 2015)
- Interpreting policies through discourse analysis (cf. K. Zhao 2015; 2019; Yiwei Wang 2012; d'Hooghe 2005)
- Studying the meta-narratives of political leaders (cf. Y. Wu, Thomas, and Yu 2021)
- Conducting case studies to understand the diverse aspects, representations, and communication instruments of China's public diplomacy (cf. Hartig 2016; D. Wu and Wang 2018; Huang and Wang 2020; Zhang, Wasserman, and Mano 2016).

# Public diplomacy is a supplement to and expansion of traditional diplomatic behaviors.

## Cognitive analysis of public policy: Decision making and positioning

- Public policy: a “research construct” (Muller 2018, para. 34)
    - Public diplomacy strategy, an integral part of foreign policy, regulates the framework for managing international relations to defend and promote national interests (Merle 1984).
  - Cognitive analysis of public policy sheds light on “a process in which the society bestows its own understanding and manifestations of action on reality” (Muller, 2018, para.5)
  - Cognitive analysis of public policy should reveal a “*référentiel*” (Muller 2014, 555) of the government’s decision making.
  - Analyzing the cognitive frames of public policy underlines “the importance of the dynamics of the social construction of reality in the shaping of historically specific and socially legitimate frames and practices” (Surel 2000, 495).
- Methods: historical institutionalism (Hall, 2015) / discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008).

# The lesson from the historical institutionalism

## In the framework of historical institutionalism, institutions are...

- variables of political effects (e.g., processes, rules, habits, and models anchored in a political system or in an organizational structure) (March and Olsen, 1983)
- a “structuring variable through which battles of interests, ideas, and power take place” (Steinmo 2019, 384).

## Thus, using historical institutionalism approach allows to...

- understand the accumulation effects of historic, continuous, and small-scale reform (i.e., “positive feedback process”) (Pierson, 2000, p. 251)
- focus on the sequence of events, separating the “critical juncture” before institutional formulation from the positive feedback stage after formulation (Pierson, 2000, p. 252).

## Historical institutionalism limitations:

*It constrains the analysis of the role of various agents (whether political or non-political) when exploring the dynamics of institutional change.*

# The “discursive turn” in cognitive analysis of public policy

## Objective:

To expose, within the framework of institutions, the interactive processes of discourse and the substantive meaning of ideas.

## Discursive approach...

...uses a “logic of communication” to “put ideas into their ‘meaning context’” (Schmidt 2008, 354).

## Using discursive approach...

...can address institutional change and political discourse dynamically, highlighting the role of ideas in the formation and evolution of institutions (Sikkink,2012).

- Discourse is the exchange of ideas in the construction of meaning;
- Discourse is “a more versatile and overarching concept than ideas” (Schmidt, 2008, 309);
- “Discourses set the parameters of what is sayable and indeed thinkable in a given social order” (Panizza and Miorelli 2013, 305).

# China's public diplomacy institutions corpus

## Framework:

Major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics

## A “Chinese methodology” of public policy analysis (Shi, 2012, 8)

- Taking care of “local, historical, and international environment factors” (X. Zhao 2013, 68)
- Analyzing the “political discourses (the discourses of leaders) and academic discourses (the discourses of Chinese scholars)” (Tian 2017, 31)
  - The corpus of China’s public diplomacy includes not only foreign policy texts and institutional regulations but also the relevant speeches, thoughts, and ideas of CPC leaders that constitute the theoretical system of Chinese socialism (K. Zhao 2005).
  - “Some Chinese researchers participated in the working groups of various ministries and PCCs in the name of think tank scholars to inspire the formulation of Chinese diplomatic doctrines and strategic planification” (Huang 2020, 161).

# Case study: Public diplomacy institutions at Xi's era

## **“Chinese Dream”: The abandonment of previous public diplomacy institutions**

- ...broke with the low-key and patient doctrines that China's diplomatic system had long promoted, instead emphasizing “China's status as a global power” (Y. Wu, Thomas, and Yu 2021, 30).
- ... is a nationalist enthusiasm to promote the transformation of China's public diplomacy from passive to active.
- ... aims to rejuvenate “the Chinese nation” on the global stage(Xi 2014a, 57).

## **“Telling China Stories”: A public-centric practice and subtle rhetoric of CPC doctrine**

- This public-centric model and practice reflects Xi's inheritance and development of the “people's diplomacy” under the framework of Maoism (Huang 2021);
- The institutional motivation for China's current public diplomacy stems from the CPC government's efforts to enhance socialist cultural confidence;
- “Telling China stories” is a subtle rhetoric for reconceptualizing and re-institutionalizing external propaganda of the CPC.



# Conclusion & further studies

**Through the perspective of cognitive analysis of public policy, by using a historical-discursive analysis method, we can...**

...inspect China's public diplomacy institutional change;

... perceive and interpret social and rhetorical phenomena related to Beijing's foreign policy implementation, mediatization, rationalization and legitimization.

## **Further studies : “warrior-wolf” diplomacy**

... is an important way for China to construct and enhance its global discourse power, providing opportunities for Beijing to promote a new international order in the context of international political uncertainty (Le 2020).

RQ1: What is the true meaning and significance of “warrior-wolf” public diplomacy?

RQ2: What are institutional roots of this emerging China's foreign policy, and how did it take shape?

RQ3: What is the relationship between “warrior-wolf” public diplomacy and the nationalist idea of “Chinese Dream”?