Cross-Culture Diffusion Issues Under the Concept of “The Belt and Road”

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Abstract. Alongside the initiation, planning and implementation of “The Belt and Road” proposal, the culture diffusion of China under this concept should be promoted immediately. As different & diversified of culture, the only bridge to meet culture gap and facilitate cooperation of “The Belt and Road” countries and regions is cross-culture communication. Culture diffusion is the proposition and ground of “the Belt and Road” proposal. The underlying cause of communications conflict lies in core thoughts difference of culture. Based on discussion and analysis in culture dimension theory, the strategy has been raised to improve the communication performance. China is on its way to enter the world discourse power system.

Introduction

Ancient Silk Road has been the most prospering period of China history. The countries and regions along the Silk Road communicated with each other, learned from each other and supply each other’s needs, accelerated the human being’s civilization together. President Xi Jinping has pointed that countries with different races, beliefs & values, diversified culture background could co-develop and live peacefully together (2013). How could China realize the fusion of different culture beyond the geographic boundaries and revive the brilliance of traditional Silk Road? Called by the “The Belt and Road” implementation, the Chinese Culture should go out and communicate with the outside world confidently. Such culture diffusion issues should be discussed, illustrated and further explored.

The Conflict Between “Domestication and Foreignization” of Translating “The Belt and Road” in Cross-culture Communication Perspective

Since proposed in 2013, there are many different renderings, such as “the Belt and Road”, “Belt and Road” is literal translation; while “land and maritime Silk Road programs” and “a revival of the ancient “Silk Road” are free translation. As time goes on, the translation shifted under different stages. In year 2015, National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Matters, Ministry of Commerce of P.R.C confirmed translation of “The Belt and Road”, full name as “the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road”, abbreviated as “B&R, the Belt and Road”, could be flexibly rendered as “initiative” if mentioned at its proposal stage. To sum up, from proposal to planning, till execution stage the public awareness & recognition of “the Belt and Road” is increasing gradually.

The change of the translation and public awareness could be analyzed and clarified from the angle of “domestication VS foreignization”. The different rendering of “The Belt and Road” reveals the deep conflict between domestication and foreignization in cross-culture communications (Zhu Anbo 2009). Domestication is oriented by the preference of target language, attempts to use the fluent target language to express the idea of source language to facilitate comprehension of target readers in the maximum extent. Whereas the foreignization is struggling to keep the “exotic flavor” of original paper, which might make the target readers feel strange, but transmit the original style. As summarized before, from proposal to planning, till execution stage, the public awareness
The recognition of “the Belt and Road” is progressing step by step. Equally, the translation is also experience the literal→free→literal translation (B&R), expressing the strategic progress from foreignization → domestication→ foreignization correspondingly. Therefore, shall we approach the source language culture or the target language culture while confronting cross-culture communications? The decision might be figured out through exploring the original culture difference in terms of cross-cultural communication theory.

Cross-Cultural Diffusion under Concept of “The Belt and Road” in Culture Dimensions Theory

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory is a framework for cross-cultural communication, which illustrating the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members, and how these values relate to behavior, using a structure derived from factor analysis. Hofstede's framework has been applied and tested in many fields relating to international business and communication, deeply influencing culture diffusion (Hofstede, 1997). The three dimensions applied in context of “the belt and Road” are discussed as followed:

Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV)

This dimension explores the “degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups.” They emphasize the ‘I’ versus the “we.” Its counterpart, collectivism, describes a society in which tightly-integrated relationships tie extended families and others into in-groups.

Regarding the index, there is a clear gap between Western countries on one hand, and Eastern countries on the other. It seems that the western cultures and eastern cultures are on the opposing directions and these two different approaches can be traced back to their different civilization origins. Western culture is related closely with the Greaco-Roman civilization. Harsh environment such as mountain geography imposed its habitant strong individualism, stressing the people to “fight against nature and harsh surroundings, while, pays little attention to the authority. On the other hand, Chinese people consider that human being should “Make every effort to accomplish things but abide by the nature destiny. (Li Mengyu, M.H, 2011) Besides, authority should be respected and admired, people should make achievement as the member of the group.

Collective features are reflected in many aspects of Chinese culture. There are quite a lot marvelous examples of Chinese proverbs such as “A fence has three pile, a real man has three gang. “Unity is strength.”. However, western proverbs has apparent individual traits such as “the squeaky wheels get the grease”, “God helps those who help themselves.” Based on the comparison above the striking distinction could be observed.

With individual rights severely subordinated, group action has been the distinctive characteristics of Chinese society. The root cause of Collective dimension is traditional Chinese value and Confucianism over thousands year. As Founder of Confucianism, Confucius mentioned that if one wants to establish himself, he should help others to establish themselves. After China carried out the policy of reform and opening up in 1978, traditional Confucianism ideology has been challenged a lot. While the strong sense of collectivism still plays the dominant role in Chinese daily life. Most people believe or are instructed to believe they should make contributions to his/her family/group/society.

Nowadays the opposing ideas of Individualism vs. collectivism could be observed in family education as well. The distinction lies in the difference of deep-rooted values and beliefs between west and east. Children in western countries are taught to “make decision by themselves, to be unique”. In contrast, Chinese culture stresses the collective view; obey the parents and teachers instructions. Thus there are many “little emperor, little empress”, which means the parents usually overprotect the children and cater to almost every need of them.

Long-term Orientation vs. Short-term Orientation (LTO)

A lower degree of this index (short-term) indicates that traditions are honored and kept, meanwhile steadfastness is valued. However societies with a high degree in this index (long-term) views
adaptation and circumstantial, pragmatic problem-solving as a necessity. LTO scores are typically high in China. They are low in the Muslim world and Africa (Hofstede, 1997).

This LTO feature is expressed accordingly in President Xi Jinping’s Speech (2014): Confucianism thoughts cores are changing and updating in accordance with the social & economic development. Thus it possessed the flourishing power at long term. What's more, the Confucianism emphasizes the practicality of cultivating people—the so-called “keep internal integrity, cultivate the moral characters, manage the family, govern the state and achieve world peace”. This thought puts the governing management of individual, society and state into a hierarchy organically, the different elements inside promoted interactively. Confucianism functioned as cultivating people to achieve the harmony from every level of life.

Additionally, as translated as “the Central Clue, the Golden Mean”, “Zhong Yong” is key idea of Chinese life: It is this spirit of reasonableness which has given birth to the Doctrine of Golden Mean, the central doctrine of Confucianism. For a Chinese it is not enough that proposition be “logically correct, it is much more important that it be “in accordance with human nature” (Lin Yutang, 1938). Chinese scholars should not to be extreme toward anything. And the Doctrine of Mean is the solution to both academic issue and daily troubles. Thus it is corresponded with description of “the adaptation and circumstantial, pragmatic problem-solving as a necessity of high LTO index of China in Hofstede culture dimension framework.

Furthermore, with the economic and social development, contemporary Chinese culture value still keeps the culture traits, such as pursuit of life. Chinese people pay much attention on the material life. Many youth are more likely to buy cars, house and famous brand clothes to. People of China desire success and are eager to earn more money. Here we have so many “Dama”, “Tuhao”, who are popular both domestically and overseas, make investment without hesitations.

**Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)**

The Uncertainty Avoidance Index is defined as “a society's tolerance for ambiguity,” in which people embrace or avert an event of something unexpected, unknown, or away from the status quo.

Societies that score a high degree in this index opt for stiff codes of behavior, guidelines, laws, and generally rely on absolute Truth, or the belief that one lone Truth dictates everything. However, a lower degree in this index shows more acceptances of differing thoughts/ideas. Society tends to impose fewer regulations, ambiguity is more accustomed to, and the environment is more free-flowing. UAI is the high Arab countries while low in China (Hofstede, 2000). This indicates that Chinese culture has a feature of being open-minded to embrace the difference.

President Xi Jinping pointed that: Chinese civilization is the only civilization survived among the Four Great Ancient Civilizations. It has been prospering, developing with since 5000 years before and refreshing everlastingly (2014). In the Spring & Autumn period there are various schools of thoughts contending situation. Confucius, Laotze and Mencius etc...studied the philosophy of the society and nature, explored the relationship between human beings, people and society, people and nature. Therefore they raised their own philosophy thoughts and theory systems. Xi also illustrated that the core points of Chinese culture is open to the difference, absorbing advantages of other and keep adjusting. Due to this core property it has been developed thought several historical stages—from contention of a hundred schools of thought (Spring & Autumn Period)to the collaborative prosperity of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism (Sui & Tang Dynasty) to Neo Confucianism (Song & Ming Dynasty). (XI Jinping, 2014)

With the development of Confucianism, the essential property has been maintained steadily: Confucianism is conflicting, referring and fusing with thoughts of other schools and beliefs, keeping absorbing and adjusting itself.

Similar with the features of high LTO as adaptation and circumstantial, pragmatic problem-solving as a necessity, Chinese UAI index deliver the similar traits as being open-minded to embrace the difference and self-adjusting.
Discussion of the Chinese Values & Beliefs

IDV: China has strongly collectivist values. People prefer to stay in the group and holds collectivism ideas than being individualism. LTO: Countries in Eastern Asia, typical China, possesses a high degree in this index (long-term) views adaptation and circumstantial, pragmatic problem-solving as necessities. UAI: There is lower score of Chinese culture countries. This trend indicates that Chinese culture has a feature of being open-minded to embrace the difference, keep adjusting itself.

LTO means to live harmonious with difference and keeping diversified. This is the core idea of traditional Chinese culture, guided by open-minded attitude revealed in UAI. And this trend also leads to the ideal situation mentioned in IDV—live with the family or/and the group the person belonged to harmoniously, not to be individualism and personally independent because “the tree outstanding, the gaze will be off-blowing”. Therefore the three-dimension framework emphasizes on component in common, which is harmony.

From above table the common core idea of three indexes as UAI,LTO,IDV is harmony. But harmony does not mean uniformity and keep silence, under the concept of “the Belt and Road, China should step out to make its own voice on the international stage.

Conclusions: Strategies of Cross-culture Communication in “The Belt and Road” Concept

Firstly, probe the essentiality of Chinese Culture, actively approach the discourse power system of the world.

As analyzed before the typical Chinese culture element of the three culture dimension is “Harmony—be open-minded, develop with different ideas harmoniously, live & work with family/group members”. It stands for the attitude of both life and work, the ground of spiritual of Chinese people. In the absence of this spiritual base the cross-culture communications is hardly to accomplish. With the execution of “the Belt and Road”, the conflict & coordination between domestication VS foreignization show the culture identity dividing line under different culture system and crash between advantaged &disadvantaged cultures, even the confrontation of the
Eastern & Western culture & stake-holders involved in further extent. China is reconstructing its international image and this “the Belt and Road” demonstrates its closer step to the international discourse power system, gain the discourse power on the world stage. While conducting the cross-culture communications, the culture transmitter should shift flexibly under the game of “domestication VS foreignization”.

Secondly, based on the overall core elements of Chinese Culture, grasp the principal of Harmony-seeking but not uniformity.

Harmony is the profound concept, implying the unification of variety of distinctions. During the culture communications, conflicts and discrepancy are inevitable. It is supremacy to impose one’s own value and perceptions to the other people. In the procedure of cross-culture diffusion, different religions & beliefs, multi cultures co-exist together, China should undertake the introspection and achieve the uniformity in maximum degree by means of discussion, negotiation under stopping less contradictions & conflicts. The golden Mean is not no principles but fair, integrity process. The formation of culture is the long lasting process, meanwhile the spreading of culture is also the gradual progressive way in long term. With the features of keeping refreshing and always upgrading, practical to different surrounding, thoughts of Chinese culture should collide, communicate and talk with others under different value systems, co-exist harmoniously to interact effectively, and revive the brilliance of ancient Silk Road.

Reference