

LANGUAGE PROMOTION AS A COUNTRY'S SOFT POWER INSTRUMENT: IMAGE DISCOURSE (CHINA'S CASE)



<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7334306>

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***Annotation.** This article is devoted to the study of the role of language as an effective tool of "soft influence" of states in the era of globalization. In this paper, special emphasis is placed on the consideration of such aspects of the popularization of Chinese culture as the promotion of the language abroad, which in turn has a positive impact on the construction of a favorable international image of China.*

***Key words:** soft power, country image, international rankings, culture, China, language policy, Chinese language, Confucius Institutes.*

INTRODUCTION

As it is known, the phenomenon of "soft power" was first introduced into scientific circulation by the American researcher, political scientist at Harvard University Joseph Samuel Nye in his work "Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power", published in 1990. In his works, the scientist consistently developed the concept of "soft power", in his opinion, the strength of a state lies in the ability to achieve the desired results from others [9].

Attractiveness and persuasion are the essence of soft power. In the works of J. Nye, several different formulations of "soft power" are distinguished:

- the possibility of obtaining the desired results in relations with other states due to the attractiveness of one's own culture, values and foreign policy, and not coercion or financial resources, which implies "hard power"; - the ability to influence other states to achieve the own's goals through cooperation in certain areas aimed at persuasion and the formation of positive perceptions [8].

It should be noted that the changes in the second half of the 20th - early 21st century in the world community caused the "blurring" of state borders, increased competition between countries, information and communication activities and interests on the part of all states. Under these conditions, the phenomenon of the image of a state acquires a new meaning and becomes a strategic resource. A purposeful policy of forming an attractive image of a state contributes to the protection of its national interests, the achievement of foreign policy goals and the creation of an atmosphere of support by the world community for its steps in the international arena.

It is noticeable that the end result of the research of scientists who analyzed the role of the image in politics was its definition set out in the political science dictionary, in which the concept of "image" is interpreted as follows: 1) the external image (of a person, small and large social groups) created by them in order to cause other people a certain impression, opinion, attitude; 2) a set of properties attributed to the subject by propaganda, advertising, prejudices, traditions, etc., in order to evoke a certain attitude towards the one" [10]. Consequently, the political image of the state is an opinion about it, based on the image that has developed in the representation formed purposefully by professional efforts among an internal or external audience.

The image of the state includes political, economic, social, cultural and ethnic aspects, which is explained by the versatility of this category. According to Doctor of Political Sciences, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Professor Alisher Fayzullaev: "Culture is one of the

most universal brand platforms. Although some researchers talk about the opposition and even clash of cultures, the original culture and high cultural achievements have great international appeal. It is not for nothing that tourists show a keen interest in the culture of the countries they visit and their people, and political scientists consider it as the most important element of “soft power” in international relations” [5].

Indeed, when a country's culture promotes universal values that other countries can be easily identified with, it makes them naturally attractive to others. The scope and international level of the country's cultural heritage are important for the creation of "soft power". The People's Republic of China (PRC) is no exception. As a dynamically developing country, it has made great progress in implementing its “soft impact” in the international arena, and continues to strengthen work in this strategic direction. According to Brand Finance's annual Global Soft Power Index based on the survey of national brand perceptions that collects the opinions of more than 100,000 respondents around the world on 120 national brands, in 2022, China entered the top 5 countries, ranking the 4th place after countries such as the US, UK and Germany [3]. In 2021, it was ranked the 8th in the same index [2]. It should be noted that this international rating is compiled on the basis of the following categories: "Culture and Heritage", "Business and Trade", "Governance", "International Relations", "Media and Communications", "Education and Science", "People and Values".

Positioning China as a country with a rich cultural heritage seems to be fair and justified, since the Chinese government is implementing various kinds of projects to stimulate interest in Chinese culture among foreign audiences. It is noteworthy that “the promotion of the national language outside through structures specially created for this (international organizations for language cooperation, public organizations, cultural and educational centers, non-governmental organizations, etc.) also contributes to this process” [12].

The Chinese government regards the language as an important part of the national heritage. No wonder today the study of the Chinese language and culture has become an actual trend. According to the latest published the Ethnologue guides to the languages of the world, which are published by the international organization SIL International (Summer Institute of Linguistics), Chinese takes the first position in terms of the number of speakers [11]. Today, Chinese is spoken not only by more than 1.3 billion people in China, but also by about 40 million foreigners [14]. Moreover, Chinese is one of the main working languages of international organizations such as the UN and the SCO, and also actively competes with English in the Southeast Asia region and is the main language of trade in the Asia-Pacific region.

It should be noted that the language policy, which includes not only an internal, but also an external component, is becoming an increasingly effective way to solve the country's foreign policy tasks. The main components of the language policy of the PRC are the solution of domestic language issues (preservation of dialects of national minorities), as well as the achievement of foreign policy objectives (dissemination and popularization of the Chinese language outside China) [ibid.].

The Chinese language is a valuable source of "soft power" of the state. Teaching Chinese as a foreign language has been repeatedly identified by representatives of the Ministry of Education of the PRC as a factor of strategic importance for strengthening friendly relations and mutual understanding with other countries, as well as a tool for strengthening the influence of the PRC on the international community. To date, Chinese language learning is promoted through the National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, Confucius Institutes, volunteer and state sponsored teachers and the Chinese Bridge Chinese Proficiency Competition for foreign students.

Established in 1987, the National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (NOCFL), also known as the Office of Chinese Language Council International and in Chinese as Hanban, is the main organ for the promotion and spread of the Chinese language [6]. Its main

initiatives are the creation of a network of Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms in primary and secondary schools. Confucius Institutes are non-profit scientific and educational centers, the main tasks of which are to organize courses in the Chinese language and culture, as well as holding scientific and practical conferences and consultations on issues of education in the PRC. Another important initiative of the Chinese Language Council International, as mentioned earlier, is the international student competition "Chinese Language Bridge", first organized in 2002 [7]. The initial stages of the competition are held in the participating countries, after which the finalists are invited to China and tuition scholarships are given as a reward.

First established in 2004, Confucius institutes provide Chinese-learning-related courses and programs, such as Chinese language teaching at all levels, professional training for university, secondary and elementary school Chinese teachers, tests for a certificate of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, Chinese competitions, consultations for further Chinese studies in China and introductions to Chinese culture [6]. Each Confucius Institute is set up through a partnership between a Chinese university and a university in the host country. For example, the Confucius Institute in Tashkent also operates at Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies. It was established in 2004 on the basis of the "Agreement on Cooperation in the Establishment of the Confucius Institute in Tashkent" between the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Education of the PRC and in pursuance of the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PP-2228 dated September 3, 2014 "On the establishment of the Faculty of Sinology at the Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies" [13].

The Chinese government considers the development of this network as a long-term and targeted program to strengthen the national identity and position of the state. In February 2013, the Ministry of Education formulated the Confucius Institute Development Plan (2012-2020), which required that by 2015, the number of Confucius Institutes all over the world shall reach 500, accommodating 1.5 million students, and that by 2020, the global communication system of Chinese language shall be targeted to cover a wider range of industries, enabling Chinese language to be one of the most widely used language by foreigners [1]. Indeed, there are currently about 550 Confucius Institutes around the world, of which approximately 100 are in the United States alone [4].

CONCLUSION

Thus, we can conclude that today, the linguistic aspect of culture is rightly regarded as a sphere of state policy, and acts as one of the key areas for creating a successful image of the country in the international arena. In turn, the Chinese language, being an integral part of the country's culture, is the most important tool of the PRC government for the implementation of "soft power" in foreign policy, with the help of which China creates an attractive image abroad. It can be noted that China's active language policy abroad has opened up broad prospects for raising the status of the Chinese language and increasing its competitiveness in the international arena.

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