

INFLUENCE OF MODERN RUSSIAN-CHINESE RELATIONS ON SHAPING OF V.V. PUTIN'S PUBLIC IMAGE IN CHINA

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The relevance of the problem researched is as follows: the president is not only the face of the nation but when appearing on the political arena, he forms the image of his country, which is extremely important within the framework of interstate relations and intercultural communication. The present paper aims to give a detailed analysis of interconnection between the personality of the president of Russian Federation and the image of our state in China as well as the influence of present day Russian – Chinese relations on shaping of V.V. Putin's public image in China. The leading approaches to the study of this problem have become: descriptive method, analytical method; comparative - correlating and comparative-historical methods, which allowed us to fully disclose and analyze not only external but also internal factors of shaping the image of the head of state. On the basis of numerous ratings and surveys, the main aspects of Russian-Chinese cooperation in various fields, as well as the use of the original Chinese-language sources, the present work has focused on comprehensive analysis of the gradual change in the image of the Russian president raising his rating on the territory of China. The paper may be useful to specialists involved in the study of international relations, history and politics of Russia and China, researchers and professors of Arts (Humanities).

Keywords: President's public image ; V.V. Putin ; Russian-Chinese relations ; public image of Russia ; public image

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades in the foreign humanities research there increased an interest in the study of images of different countries and nations (Hsia, 1963; Lu, 2000; Li 2009). The importance of research into the formation and perception of a country's images, its policies, people, and other aspects of their existence has been steadily increasing (Tikhvinsky, 2007; Kiryukhina, 2015).

Nowadays the growing political role of Russia and China is becoming the subject of intense study of a number of leading scientists (Wang, 2002; Ren, 2006; Ruzhentseva, 2013). President is head of state and nation. A team of professional image-makers, copywriters and political consultants are working at creating the positive image of him/her but, of course, they cannot take into account all the subtleties and nuances of social and cultural perception of the image of the president by representatives of other nations (Ten, 2012). Foreign political situation: foreign policy, bilateral relations with neighboring countries, the relations within the SCO, BRICS, the UN and others have a great influence on the formation of the image of head of state. In addition, if we talk about the perception of V.V. Putin by the eyes of the Chinese, then with high probability, we can talk about the influence of

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Confucian philosophy world - views and Chinese traditional culture (Lomanov, 2005).

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Research Tasks

To achieve the goal of understanding the influence of modern Russian-Chinese relations on the formation of V.V. Putin image in China we have formulated the following research questions: 1) to explore the bilateral relations since the year 2000, when V.V. Putin was elected President of the Russian Federation; 2) to identify the factors affecting the formation of the image of the Russian leader in China; 3) to analyze and evaluate the existing image of the Russian President over the period under research.

Theoretical and empirical methods

The methodological foundation of this study is principles of historicism, of scientific objectivity, and of systematic studies, as well as the principles of description and analysis of particular situations, international projects, their explanation, comparison and generalization. Analysis of interrelationship of internal and external political, economic and social factors influencing V.V. Putin's image shaping in the period under consideration, enables us to form an objective scientific picture of evolution of the image of the President of Russian and Russian Federation in the perception of the Chinese population.

RESULTS

Interest in political life of Russia is constantly growing in China. According to the annual polls of "In Touch Today" (news service controlled by the Chinese Internet-holding "Tencent") during the last 6 years the rating of approval of Putin's actions by the Chinese population has not dropped below 90%. Annexation of Crimea made the rating grow up to 92% (Baidu Zhidao, 2016). Since the day when Vladimir Putin has accessed to the presidency, analytical articles, books about him have been published; scientific conferences have been organized to discuss his internal and external policy. We may conclude that Vladimir Putin has a particular shaped image in China.

There are several main sources for shaping the Russian President's image.

Publications

The following data confirm the great interest in Vladimir Putin in China: scientific conferences, monographs and researches, master's theses and doctorate dissertations, many analytical and research articles. Numerous events and studies held give a full idea of what interests the Chinese scientific community at a certain

period of time, and according to their positive or neutral titles of articles or published books it is possible to trace personal attitude of the Chinese society to Vladimir Putin and his policy.

Besides, there are many popular science books about the Russian President published during the last years. There are not less than 66 books published in Chinese with Putin's name in title, the first ones were published in China in 2001 and they are still being published. One of the most popular and favorite genres is biography. Not less than a dozen of Putin's biographies were published in China. The most popular book about the Russian leader is "Putin Biography —Born for Russia" (普京传-他为俄罗斯而生) (Zheng, 2012). One week before the visit of Vladimir Putin to China in May 2014, there was published a collection of the President's speeches and interviews titled "Putin. Selected Works. 2012-2014" (普京文集 2012—2014) (Putin, 2014). Publication of selected works of a foreign leader happens rather rarely in China. In the days of friendship between China and the USSR, selected works of Lenin and Stalin were published in China but since that time, none of the Soviet or the Russian leaders has been honored of being published. The book contains 43 Putin's speeches from different occasions, including talks at universities, meetings with journalists, speeches dedicated to memorable events. Publication of such books is a clear indication of acceptance of Putin by the Chinese government and public, but it is only one of the reasons of his popularity in China.

Looking at dynamics of publishing books about Putin in China, one can find some specific features. During Jiang Zeming's ruling (1993-2002), only one book about Putin was published. During Hu Jintao's term in office (2002-2012) and almost two Putin's presidential terms since 2000 to 2011 around six books were published, and since 2012, when new General Secretary Xi Jinping came into power, books about Putin were published in large quantities – about 10 books of different author per year. Obviously, rather reserved relations between Putin and Hu Jintao changed into creating a real cult of Putin under Xi Jinping.

Mass media

Generally, the publication tone varies from neutral ("人民日报", "Renmin Ribao") (Renmin Ribao, 2016) to respectful ("环球时报", "Huanqiu Shibao" (Huanqiu Shibao, 2016) or "Global Times" (Global Times, 2016)). The official newspaper of the People's Liberation Army of China ("解放军报", "Jiefangjun Bao" (Jiefangjun Bao, 2016)) underlines the peacemaking character of the Putin's policy towards Ukraine – in contradiction to Washington strategy on export of "color revolutions".

Official pro-government mass media is opposed by satellite TV-channels and online-media that speak about putinism (普京主义), which embodies the authoritarian power of corrupted bureaucracy.

Some people dislike what others are fond of. Maybe Putin's "strong hand" is a reason why the Middle Empire people respect him; they are intrigued that Putin is brave enough to stand against the West to protect the core interests of Russia. He gave a shelter to fugitive CIA employee Edward Snowden, playing, thus, a role of a democratic powerful institute, a usual role of the USA. For the Chinese who were so much depressed by the West since the days of Opium Wars in XIX century, Putin is a "symbol" of struggle against the Anglo-Saxon hegemony (Phoenix Weekly, 2016).

Internet

The Chinese users often hot discuss both the biggest Putin's talk-shows: a live call-in show and a big press-conference. Analysis of search queries about Vladimir Putin demonstrates the strong interest of the Chinese in private life of the President, e.g. ordinary Chinese are interested in the already mentioned version of kinship between Putin and marshal Ling Biao, possible new Putin's girlfriend and what phone Putin presented to General Secretary Xi Jinping. The key point for the Chinese is Putin's policy towards Japan. As a rule, in the Chinese press, the Russian leader criticizes Japan's actions, particularly, concerning the Kuril Islands, and undoubtedly, it adds to the image of China's ideal friend.

Russian Influence on Shaping of Putin's Image in China

Last year the Russian International Affairs Council founded by the President published a plan how to improve the image of Russia in China. According to it, the image of Putin - "undoubtedly the most recognized Russian in China" - "has traits of a charismatic strong leader and also an Indiana Jones-hero: photos "Putin with a tiger", "Putin fishing", "Putin steering" and "Putin and cranes" were very popular in China" (RIAC, 2016).

However, it is rather difficult to obtain fondness of the Chinese intellectuals by good photos. The RIAC divides the Chinese intellectual community into "liberals" and "conservatives". According to the Council analysts' opinion, it is complicated for Russia to promote its image among liberals: many of them were educated in the West and they criticize Russia from point of view of America and Europe. Feeling sympathetic to it in 1990s, they are critical to modern Russia and considering the close intergovernmental relations with China, it is more logical for Russia to look for support among conservatives.

"Russia Beyond the Headlines" (RBTH, 2016), "Rossiyskaya Gazeta" project that is characterized in the RIAC as a "conservative" newspaper has already concluded a cooperation contract with "Huanqiu Shibao". The Council also plans to keep publishing books and disks with Putin's speeches (in addition to two volumes of the President's speeches published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 2002 and 2008) in China.

If referring to the comments on the news about the Russian President, it becomes obvious that the majority of his fans are fond of not so much himself but of his traits of a “leader with a character” and that he “strikes back when the country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity is invaded». Their fondness for Putin is rooted in something deeper. In many comments on the online-forum “Phoenix Weekly”, it has been said that China is on the route of peaceful development now, its foreign policy has been deemed by many Chinese as too weak, especially concerning the settling of territorial disputes (Phoenix Weekly, 2016). According to users, this weakness contrasts with the country’s hardline diplomacy before the opening up and reform policy. “Chinese people approve of Putin for the same reasons that they reminisce about Chairman Mao,” remarked author of a comment (Phoenix Weekly, 2016). Another of Putin’s achievements applauded by the Chinese people has been his anti-corruption campaign. In recent years, Russia established the declaration system, so that the government officials shall declare their property – it is a measure that has been discussed in China but never set up.

Such perception of Putin proves, at first, the fondness of the Chinese for his hardline image, and, secondly, reflects the mood of the Chinese society about their country policy, which needs to be released. Analyzing popularity of the Russian President, it is often underlined that China is a country with a long history of feudalism and people have just get accustomed to a “strong hand”. This is what they are fond of in Putin.

DISCUSSIONS

Studying the Russian and foreign historiography concerning this issue (Hsia, 1963; Lu, 2000; Lukin, 2007; Li, 2009; Bokova, 2011; Kiryukhina, 2015), it can be noticed that scientists have performed the huge work, there were found many theoretical and factual evidence demonstrating the principles of image shaping and factors influencing on positive or negative image shaping, as well as enabling to further study this topic. Special attention should be given to the monograph “Perception of Image of Russia in China” by S.L. Tikhvinsky (2008). Theoretical questions of studying the image of Russia in China were to a certain extent highlighted in a multi-author monograph “Main Peculiarities of Modern Internal and Foreign Policy of the Chinese Government and their Influence on Image of Russia in China” by scientists of IFES RAS (“Main Peculiarities, 2008). It also must be said that factors of the Chinese-Russian relations influence on shaping the Russian leader’s image are studied to a lesser extent and the terminological part is not covered enough in the scientific literature.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, Russia aiming to enlarge its influence both on regional and on global levels broadly uses the borrowed concepts of state power strengthening in

combination with traditional diplomacy. Now the “soft power” concept (soft power) becomes more popular, it means using of immaterial power resources of culture and political ideals to influence on perception of modern Russia by the world. Countries use different instruments to accumulate the soft power. One such instrument is cultural diplomacy that includes promotion of the national culture and the positive image of state. Shaping of Vladimir Putin’s image as a strong leader in the perception of the Chinese society is one of the key directions of the Russian cultural diplomacy and the soft power accumulation. We can surely say that experts have carried out titanic work to create positive impression of Russia and its President within the People’s Republic of China.

Besides, we can suppose that the image of ideal Vladimir Putin serves for internal propaganda in China and his successful actions strengthen the positions of specific anti-American groups of the Communist Party of China. Putin’s image serves for two functions – praising success of the Russian leader, it demonstrates, from one point, that China and the anti-American group have an ideal foreign ally; from another point, it creates a vector according to which a country leader “as Putin” will build his policy. Studying the subject we have made a conclusion that attitude to Vladimir Putin can be considered as a reflection of social and political moods of the Chinese society, and his positive image serves for promotion of the Russian culture in China, as well as ensures the favorable climate for the Chinese-Russian relations.

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