

The Current Situation and Strategy for the Building of State Leaders' Public Image: Based on the Investigation for College Students' Identification Degree on the Building of State Leaders' Public Image

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Abstract

Globalization has triggered a holistic change in today's world, and the emergence of new media has also broken the closed system of political communication in China so that it is altering the political communication environment to a certain extent and colonizing the effective mechanism for the communication of the state leaders' public image, which creates specific and stereoscopic image of the state leaders vividly from all-around and multiple directions, making college students deepen our understanding about the state leaders in the common social world. And it is invisibly narrowing the distance between the state leaders and college students in order to realize the two-way interaction between state leaders and the public. Therefore, college students' individual development and the building of the state leaders' new image proceed simultaneously, which is bound to produce unexpected interaction, so we need to encourage the reconciliation between college students' self-identity and social identity. It is regarded as the new measure to establish a new image of the state's leaders.

Key words: State leaders; Public image; College students' identification degree

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INTRODUCTION

In the crucial period of social transformation, with the continuous development of China's democratic politics, politicians, especially the public image of the state leaders are becoming an important symbol in a democratic society, so the building of specific and stereoscopic image of the state leaders is conducive to enhance people's cohesion and identity, which leads to strengthen the political legitimacy and improve the country's soft power to some extent. In *the Strategy for National Image Building and Communication*, Fan Hong pointed out that state leaders are the important spokesmen for the national image, and national image and state leaders' image rely on each other. Namely, the cognition of the public and media abroad about one country mainly originates from the command of leaders. The influencing factors of state leaders' image depend on decision-making process, responsibility, professional quality and personal charm. In *the Multiaspects of Chinese Leaders' Image*, Niu Xiaowu made a research on the leaders' sports image during the Beijing Olympic Games, and pointed out that Chinese leaders' image has been changed from oneness to stereo. And when the state leaders' image is becoming more and more stereo, the public's trust to the leaders also will be strengthened, and the gap will be narrowed as well. However, many foreign countries have already carried out research on "state leaders' image", and have achieved a lot of useful results, but they mainly concentrated in the view of state leaders' media image. In 1970s, the western formed modern trait theory of leadership, trying to study for a series of characteristics of the leaders which are accepted by the public. In 1977, Robert J. House put forward, there are three kinds of charismatic leaders' personal characteristics: high self-confidence, a tendency to dominate others and firm belief of their own faith. The scholars of political communication have carried out some related research on state leaders' image. In *An Introduction to Political Communication*, Brian McNair has comments

on the relationship between contemporary social media and democratic politics of Britain and the United States. The author cited a large number of classic cases of Britain and the United States's state leaders, which aims to shape and improve their image by the media, and pointed out that today's all political actors, from president to the prime minister, and even to the union leader and terrorists head, are aware of the rich, the stereoscopic image through media is the prerequisite that they are involved in political discussion and government decision-making. This article is based on the investigation for college students' identification degree on the building of state leaders' public image, from the perspective of some related sociological theories, analyze the current college students' recognition about the building of state leaders' new image under the background of globalization, to seek the breakthrough and innovation of state leaders' image, and promote China's international image recognition.

1. THE FERTILE FIELD FOR THE STATE LEADERS' NEW MEDIA IMAGE UNDER THE BACKGROUND OF GLOBALIZATION

The arrival of the globalization is an important historic mark, which marks the radicalization and generalization of modernity, and the new stage of the modernity from simplicity to reflexivity, representing the formation of the risk society, the emergence of post-traditional order and the transformation of the daily life (Zou, 2004). Therefore, globalization has triggered a holistic change in today's world, making the presence and absence intertwined. Moreover, media such as newspapers, television, new media and the rapid development of communication technology, also make the social events and social relations over a long distance and local life scene intertwined, leading to the increasing abstractness of social relations. As an important part of the national and government image, the party and state's leaders which is a special group, need to present public images in different levels through various means, mobilize all positive factors to great extent, condense strength, arouse vitality, so as to realize the benign interaction between multiple subjects and enhance the public recognition and trust.

The sweeping of new media in the "micro age". In recent globalization, “

we came to a new human watershed, thus to make the diversification of agricultural civilization, centralization of industrial civilization fused in the big data, so as to integrate the essence of the collection livelihood, and release enormous energy, to achieve the "bright summit" in the information age. (Jiang, 2012).

It is worth mentioning the emergence of new media has also broken the closed system of political communication

in China so that it is altering the political communication environment to a certain extent and colonizing the effective mechanism for the communication of the state leaders' public image, which creates specific and stereoscopic image of the state leaders vividly from all-around and multiple directions, making college students deepen our understanding about the state leaders in the common social world. And it is invisibly narrowing the distance between the state leaders and college students in order to realize the two-way interaction between state leaders and the public. "Media is rooted in the society. Its interaction with the political process is not decisive. On the contrary, it depends on the strategy of political actors and the specific interaction between society, culture and politics" (Castells, 2006). It is worth mentioning that new media, which are born politically, reestablished communication channels of politics system, and accepted by both government and the public, thus they have got their own social status. For example, *New Weekly's 2010 Annual Inventory* commented on micro blog as the following,

Radio took 38 years to be familiar to 50 million people. Television took 13 years and micro blog only took 14 months. Because micro blog makes dialogue between stars and common people, so reposting promotes the spread. "Micro revolution" is raised by and "micro power" and "microbe" aggregates "micro life". It's gradually becoming the largest field in Chinese words. (Duan, 2011)

The strong appeal to the social interaction under the self-suffering "the process of deprivation is a mature part and phase of modern system and, because it not only gets into the field of daily life, but also enters into the core of self" (Guo, 2005). Faced with the individuals in the social life, the social risks brought by the development of modernity is so enormous so that it is completely beyond the range to resist and sort out the risks personally, so the individuals form a sense of "impotence" and "deprivation" and have the desire for an open, transparent and responsible leader's image of the big country to be presented, to eliminate the uncertainty in the process of social transformation and maintain the public trust to government behaviors, giving unlimited power to modernity. Therefore, the government needs to build modern trust model reflectively, namely a kind of "individualization" in triple-out of self, self-suffering, self-re-embedding, in order to eliminate self-anxiety caused by the "acquaintance society" into "strangers society". And we can't ignore that basic trust needs to be taken for granted that everything and activities in the society are absolutely "correct and suitable", so that the individuals will feel at ease for social arrangements; moreover, the individuals and social subjects will dare to trust each other, so as to guide a stable social order. As Zhu Lijia pointed out, who is the professor of National School of Administration, "The main symbol of modern politics and government operation is the process of openness, including the conditions of self and the family,

which would make citizens know more about him/her, more easier to establish trust relationship with each other.”

To highlight the practical needs of global voice. In the context of globalization, the development of new media all over the world has gradually promoted political focus transferred from “realpolitik” to “image politics”, making our government realized the importance of the building of leaders’ image. It is because that “the leading role is not isolated; on the contrary, it is closely related with national image, party image and class image, so it expresses the national image in a certain level” (Dou & Guo, 2014). With the progressive enhancement of China’s comprehensive national strength, Chinese leaders also have a strong will to show a new national image to the international community and improve China’s appeal for global voice. For example, in recent five years, among the news about Wen Jiabao reported by international media, the percentage of “direct speech” is up to 56.5%, which is closely related with frank and pragmatic style as a premier. Especially in “5.12” earthquake, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Times*, *The Sun* and other media all cited Wen’s words: “A minute earlier to arrive, the trapped people will have a hope of survival”, “Hold on a minute, all troops are coming to save you” (Wu, 2013). These words broke through the psychological distance and the gap between state leaders and the public, stabilizing the public’s sense of security. In addition, through the international media, the world knows more about China, so it is beneficial to inspire Chinese people at home and abroad influenced by state leaders’ practical and sincere working style, and even has an effect on the international community.

2. THE INTERPRETATION AND DEDUCTION OF STATE LEADERS’ NEW IMAGE

The term “Soft Power” was proposed by Professor Joseph Nye who is the director of Kennedy Center for public policy research of the Harvard University and the former assistant minister of the US Defence in 1990. According to his definition, “Soft Power” is a kind of ability, namely by attracting, rather than by means of forcing or bribing to achieve the purpose. It comes from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, values and policies to other countries (Guo, Zhao, & Wang, 2009). Whereas, the building of the international leaders’ new image is one of the important channels to improve the states’ “Soft Power”, and its guidance for public opinion at home and abroad is embedded and subtle.

In *The Prince*, Italian thinker Machiavelli pointed out the importance of leaders’ image communication: “People’s judgment, generally rely on the eyes rather than hands, because everyone can see you, however, few people can contact you; Everyone can see your appearance, but

few people are able to familiarize you” (Lang, Hou, & Tang, 2013). The author thinks that the contents of image, mainly is measured in the following three aspects. First, state leaders’ personal traits (i.e., “visual image”), such as appearance, clothing, hairstyle, manners and behaviors. Secondly, the qualities related with state leaders’ political performance (i.e., “leadership image”), such as scientific decision-making ability, crisis management capabilities and political expression ability of leaders. Thirdly, the inner quality of state leaders (i.e., “ethical image”), such as self-cultivation, justice and fairness, loyalty to the family. Good public relations’ image can not only reveal the leaders’ mysterious veil in order to show their real life state, narrow the distance between the public and themselves, making their politics and opinions more easily accepted and understood by the public, but also it is the showing of state leaders’ confidence, open-minded performance and political mind, to mobilize the political atmosphere lively political atmosphere and enhance the public’s trust to the country and government.

After the third plenary session of the 18th CPC Central Committee, the interpretation and deduction of state leaders’ image present the following new features: “The personalized image.” Western is good at depicting the state leaders’ characteristics and charisma in a humor. In recent years, Chinese leaders are discarding their rigid, serious image, no longer be reachless as their predecessors. For example, while everyone is resonated with a famous song named “Where is my time,” Qianlong Website which is holded by Beijing Civil Propagandistic Department published a comic serious about “state leader’s daily life” to tell the public how he spent his time every day. Through these vivid comic figures, the public could know president’s timetable directly. Except meeting and visiting, state leader also enjoys relaxation, entertainment and sports activities as common people do. Thus, state leader has showed an animate and dynamic image to the society.

“The image of Man-of-the-people.” With the rapid development of economy, government’s public service function needs to be enhanced to guarantee the construction of social order. First of all, under the condition of information technology, accelerating the construction of service-oriented government is the requirement of higher-caliber to lead cadres at all levels and government workers. They should effectively change their working method and establish a style of man-of-the-people. So, the way how state leaders manage the state makes government and national image more practical, open and transparent, with “a spirit of reform, a style of practical working and a feeling in touch with people” (Liu, Wang, & Li, 2009). However, a study found that the general attention of state leaders’ image transmission is still on the low side in China. Let’s take three events, “Qinfeng Steamed Stuffed Bun”, “state leader’s New Year Speech,” “state leader’s Comic Figures” as examples. The

event “Qinfeng Steamed Stuffed Bun” got most attention as much as 13%, over 10% more than both event “state leader’s New Year Speech” and “state leader’s Comic Figures”. However, later on February 25, 2014, state leader got more attention compared with the former three events when he inspected Nanluogu Street without a gauze mask. So it can be inferred that once the building of state leaders’ image and public issues get closely related, it is easy to get the public attention and recognition, and then to win the basic trust.

“The intelligent image.” In front of the public, how to present themselves better, is not only the use of tactics and means, but also the reflection of the art. As spokesmen for the national image, the state leaders need to show a strong side duly in order to show the country’s power. BBC reported “Chinese top leaders’ speech had showed the new style.” At the critical phase of the present increasingly deepen reform, state leaders have sharply pointed out the present situation and countermeasures of corruption within the party, formalism, bureaucratism rather than beg the problems, and paid more attention to the livelihood issues like people’s education, jobs, income, health, highlighting their statesmanship in social governance and intelligent image.

China’s broad and profound culture has nurtured the humanities quality and political talent of Chinese politicians. Some of them are good at literary works; some of them are intelligent and talkative; some of them have the sharpest wit. Presenting these manners and personality traits, is helpful to narrow the psychological distance between state leaders and international the public, thus to promote China’s national image. (Wu, 2013)

As a symbolic sign of national image, Chinese leaders have shaped extraordinary qualities and statesmanship on the stage of the domestic society, presenting a low-key, cherishing people and intelligent image in public so that it plays a positive role in forming the college students’ value; In addition, on the international stage, Chinese leaders with the new image of easy grace, mild attitude, self-confidence and powerfulness have conveyed the Chinese government’s reform direction and firm belief, mastered the global voice and improved the international status.

3. THE COUNTERMEASURE TO IMPROVE CHINESE NATIONAL IMAGE: THE BREAKTHROUGH AND INNOVATION OF THE BUILDING OF STATE LEADERS’ IMAGE

Castells think that identity is the origin of people’s meaning and experience. So identity which is established through the process of individuation is the source of the meaning of the actors. To be mentioned, identity organizes significance, role organizes function. In Castells’

opinion, identity is divided into three types: legitimizing identity, resistance identity and project identity (Castells, 2006). However, social development follows the law of legitimizing identity to resistance identity to project identity, and then to legitimizing identity, which is like a screw. However, the building and breakthrough of state leaders’ new image are constructed gradually in the interaction between legitimizing identity which represents affinity and project identity which represents mysticism. Now our country is in the planning stages of project identity, so the author focuses on the project identity and puts forward some thoughts on the construction of state leaders’ new image:

From the perspective of sociology, state leaders are essentially a kind of social role, and acted by some social actors. The public’s identity to the role of state leaders, plays a vital role in shaping the state leaders’ image. Goffman, who advocated the successful shaping of a role is indispensable to the director actors/actresses, and some supporting players. So state leaders’ new image is carefully arranged by the team behind them and the team members act as the supporting players (Goffman, 2013). Therefore, a successful performance of the members who have close relations with the state leaders benefits the building of their impressive image. Take the building of national leader’s image as an example: For college students, the state leader as a husband, he has shown the tenderness through thoughtfulness care for his wife. For example, on September 17, 2014, the state leader and his wife paid a three-day visit to India, and the media released some photos of them, like playing swing. This photo was widely spread, and won the compliments of the public. So he won the different social groups’ good sense again, and deliver the spirit of Chinese traditional culture, conform to the social psychological expectation to the masses. Another example is about the events that on the evening of November 10, 2014, the state leader and his wife attended the photo session during APEC welcome dinner, we found that politicians from other countries smiled and shook hands at the camera. And China’s national leader and his wife’s tacit agreement caused the attention of the college students’ group, because this kind of interaction is similar to the contact with their family members (such as parents). Therefore, the state leader’s building for the role of “husband”, not only shows the leaders’ tenderness in their daily life, but also narrows the distance between him and the public, which has been widely accepted by college students, and strengthen the building of state leaders’ image.

It goes without saying that the wife of the Chinese president, is the rising star behind the team of Chinese dream and a new card of Chinese image called by some media in the process of building Chinese state leaders’ new images. The magazine “Time” has adapted the articles about the compliments on the state leader wife’s

diplomatic image from different sectors of the society, which described her as “Modern Woman”, “Diplomatic Idol”, “The person who increases the national confidence.” According to the article, the state leader’s wife always appears in the public with a good image of openness, wisdom and gentility, presenting the quality of the first lady, which is conducive to promote China’s national image and soft power to some extent. Therefore, Peng’s success building of the “first lady”, improve Chinese leaders’ new image effectively.

Among the different social strata in China, the college students are very important group. From the point of lifecycle, they are the most creative group who represents Chinese intellectuals and the former white-collar group, so their attitudes toward the new image of the state’s leaders are very crucial. College students’ attitudes toward the new image of the state leaders are as the following: Like it very much; like; it doesn’t matter; don’t like; don’t like it very much (see Table 1):

Table 1
College Students’ Identification Degree on the New Image of State Leaders

	Like it very much	Like	It doesn’t matter	Don’t like	Don’t like it very much
Do you like your country’s state leader?	23.3% (208)	56.3% (502)	18.9% (169)	1.1% (10)	0.2% (2)
Do you like to call the state leader’s nick name?	27.9% (249)	43.4% (387)	23.5% (210)	3.9% (35)	0.9% (8)
Do you like the state leader’s wife?	25.6% (228)	53.1% (474)	19.7% (176)	1.0% (9)	0.2% (2)

As the dominant force in social development, the attitude of college group for new-generation leaders and his wife is: 23.3% of college students said they like the state leader very much, 56.3% of them said like, and the attitudes of “it doesn’t matter”, “don’t like”, “don’t like very much” are 18.9%, 1.1% and 0.2%. For “state leader”, “love” is 27.9%, “like” is 43.4%, and said “no”, “don’t like”, “very don’t like” are 23.5%, 3.9% and 23.5% respectively. In addition, for new-generation leaders lady, the students also were at sixes and sevens, 5.6% said “very like”, 53.1% said like, and “no”, “don’t like”, “very don’t like” were 19.7%, 1.0%, 0.2%. Therefore, we can generally draw a conclusion: The contemporary college students hold a favourable attitude towards new-generation leaders’ new image, looking forward to further improvement of the new image. Giddens thought modernity has control-oriented tendency associated with the production and self-identity in the society, and these two kinds of orientation have certain special effects on the level of morality and experience. In western’s “post-modern” society, the individuals formed self-reflectivity through the inward force and the internal reference system, and thus people formed self-identity. Social identity is reflected in the beliefs shared by social members, values and action orientation. Among the two groups who strongly agree and agree on state leaders’ new image, their self-identity and social identity are closely related. It means that their belief, value orientation and action orientation are consistent with belief, value orientation, and action orientation shared by social groups (such as China), so they agree with China’s top leaders’ new image. Giddens call these consequences as the seal of experience. College students hold an ambiguous attitude

towards state leaders’ new image: It doesn’t matter. This is also a kind of the seal of experience. And their self-identity and social identity, has relatively independent correlation and barely influence each other. Based on reference group theory, college students have a variety of reference groups, so it is necessary to encourage college students to join some positive communities, such as those identified with and identity state leaders’ new image, so as to play their positive function, encourage and drive the shaping of self-identity and social identity, and thus to consolidate the state leaders’ new image. In the post-traditional context, in the process when self-realization triggers political issues, the impact of globalization will deeply invade into self-reflectivity, in turn, self-realization will also affect the globalization strategy. This is just what life politics about (Giddens, 1998). There is no doubt that we cannot escape the impact of globalization, likewise, when the self-identity produced by self-realization is inconsistent with social identity, political problems will then emerge.

From Table 2, talking about college students’ attitudes toward the state leader’s clothing, manners, conversations, the first Lady, and overall conditions’ statistical process from 1 to 10, we found that the average score are closed related in several aspects, namely, the team of Chinese dream members’ new image, which has made a good impression on college students and got accepted. In addition, it is worth mentioning that we focus on “the first lady’s image and leaders’ conversation and manners” that has not been paid attention to during the previous leaders’ politics life, which becomes a new topic pursued by the media and the public. First of all, to the style of conversation and behaviors of the state leader, the

statistics show that the average score was 8.28 and 8.42 points respectively, and the high score indicates that leaders' body language is endowed with a certain political connotation. Secondly, in the pointview of gaining scores of leaders image by first lady, statistics show that the average score was 7.91 points, similar with other points' options. Because of non-involved in comparison with other first lady, it is difficult to highlight its unique role. But in the specific descriptions of domestic media and foreign media for the first lady

can reflect that the quantity and quality of the state leader's wife has played significant role in promoting socre's rising. Whether small details such as holding hands, smiling and assistance, or description of the appropriate dressing, the public see the leaders' political role at the same time, as if can see his life in many good facets of the vivid image, let a person feel kind. These problems are emerged in the process of image's building of state leaders, providing a new perspective to understand image of state leaders' building.

Table 2
The Statistics of College Students' Attitudes Toward State Leader's Clothing, Manners, Conversations, the First Lady, and Overall Conditions

		A23	A24	A25	A26	A27
N	Efficiency	880	889	889	888	889
	Deficiency	12	3	3	4	3
Mean		7.89	8.28	8.42	7.91	8.56
Mode median		8.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00
Mode		8	8	10	10	9
Sum		6,945	7,363	7,484	7,026	7,608

Note.

- a) A23 If using the score 1-10 to evaluate state leader's clothing, which score will you give () to him?
- b) A24 If using the score 1-10 to evaluate state leader's manners, which score will you give () to him?
- c) A25 If using the score 1-10 to evaluate state leader's conversations, which score will you give () to him?
- d) A26 If using the score 1-10 to evaluate state leader's wife, which score will you give () to her?
- e) A27 If using the score 1-10 to evaluate state leader's overall conditions, which score will you give () to him?

From the state leaders' point of view, how to shape the role of state leaders well and other characters at the same time, such as husband and wife, intellectuals, is conducive to the building of their new image. From the point of lifecycle, the self-identity of college students has been constructing; in the constructivist phase of identity, project identity also will be constructed into legitimacy identity. College students' individual development and state leaders' new image build simultaneously, and it is bound to get interaction, so it becomes an effective measure to build state leaders' new image by encouraging the reconciliation between college students' self-identity and social identity.

construction of state leaders' new image, which interprets the new characteristics of the shaping of a new generation of leaderships' image in the new media age, analyses college students' thoughts and identification about the new image shaped by the team of Chinese dream which is headed by state leader. The author thinks it has vital and practical significance to promote college students' identification degree on state leaders' new image, so as to realize the organic unity of self-identification, social identity and national identity, which is conducive to the success building of state leaders' new image, and then it is beneficial to promote the overall image of the country and its soft power.

CONCLUSION

In the wave of globalization, to shape the national image is a complicated and systematic work, so the national image and state leaders' image maintain close ties. Therefore, the success building of the state leaders' public image, also needs to build the multiple operation system which focuses on the government, organizations and citizens so as to fully mobilize the enthusiasm of the party, government, organizations and citizens, and integrate superior power. Therefore, this article selects the universities in Shanghai as the research objects to carry out the research on the identification degree on the

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