China’s Tourism Diplomacy in the Context of BRI

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Abstract: In 2015, Chinese Ministry of Culture and Tourism formally put forward the official concept of tourism diplomacy, defining tourism as a “comprehensive strength with both soft and hard power”[1]. Since the launching of the China-Russia Tourism Year, the tourism year mechanism has gradually formed, and the term “tourism diplomacy” has frequently appeared in government reports and officials’ speeches. Based on the authorization, support and guarantee of the national government, tourism diplomacy generates tourism flows through the attraction of tourism to establish economic, trade and humanistic connections with the world, shapes a positive national image, serves the country’s diplomacy, and enriches the connotation of major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.

Keywords: Tourism diplomacy; Tourism year; Chinese civilization; International image

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1. The Development Concept of China’s Tourism Diplomacy

Tourism diplomacy is an important part of the diplomacy between China and the countries along the “Belt and Road”. It is necessary to improve the development concept, the legislation and supervision of the tourism diplomacy in the top-level design. Facing the realistic needs of tourism diplomacy under the “Belt and Road” Initiative (BRI), diversified tourism diplomacy activities are particularly important. The “tourism+sports” model facilitates the development of tourism diplomacy, and enhances the country’s international influence through the “culture+leisure+tourism diplomacy” model. The “tourism+sports” and “culture+leisure+tourism diplomacy” models are innovations in China’s tourism diplomacy mechanism. Tourism diplomacy has great potential for development. By optimizing cooperation between countries in tourism diplomacy and deepening the international BRI tourism cooperation, tourism development and infrastructure construction are combined to help the construction of the “Belt and Road”.
(1) In-depth implementation of the national strategy of tourism diplomacy

In 2015, Chinese Ministry of Culture and Tourism (formerly China Tourism Administration) formally proposed the official concept of tourism diplomacy at the National Tourism Work Conference, defining the tourism diplomacy as a “comprehensive strength with both soft and hard power”[2]. The tourism industry is gradually being integrated into the national development strategy and moving towards the frontier of diplomacy. The promoter of the tourism industry has been changed from tourism and other departments to the national government, which was marked by the first appearance of “tourism diplomacy” in the Tourism Development Plan of the 13th Five-Year Plan promulgated by the State Council in March 2017[3]. This shows that tourism diplomacy has been incorporated into the national development strategy. Tourism diplomacy has become a beautiful landscape in China's foreign relations. Since the mutual holding of the Chinese-Russian Tourism Year in 2012 and 2013, China-Australia, China-Switzerland, China-ASEAN and China-US Tourism Years have also been held successively. From 2015 to 2017, the “Beautiful China — Silk Road Tourism Year” has been held for three consecutive years. To promote the tourism exchanges between China and South Pacific countries and the southward extension of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, the China-Pacific Island Countries Tourism Year was held in 2019. China’s tourism year mechanism has gradually become mature. In recent years, the BRI and tourism have been important elements of China’s exchanges and cooperation with other countries. More and more countries have implemented visa exemption policies for Chinese citizens, and the importance of Chinese passports is constantly increasing. Also, the term “tourism diplomacy” frequently appears in government work reports and officials’ speeches.

In the meanwhile, although China’s tourism diplomacy has achieved many results, it still needs to be strengthened. Ahead of the increasingly complex international environment, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as the government department in charge of the country’s foreign exchanges, must be courageous and decisive, focusing on accurately grasping the characteristics of diplomacy in the current era of tourism, and timely predicting problems and developments of the trend of tourism diplomacy. It should also cooperate with the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, embassies and consulates in foreign countries and other departments to strengthen the research work on the national strategy of tourism diplomacy, and take the lead in drafting the implementation plan of the national strategy for tourism diplomacy, and submit it to the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress for deliberation in the first time. The Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress must give full play to the important role of
providing ideas and suggestions. Based on the development of the current domestic and foreign situation, it should communicate and exchange timely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Culture and Tourism and other ministries, strengthen the information integration of traditional and emerging media in the field of tourism diplomacy, and carry out consultation work on tourism diplomacy related issues, fully grasp the latest progress and in-site situation of China’s tourism diplomacy, find and analyze problems, and negotiate on and solve problems. In this way, the formulated national strategy implementation plan for tourism diplomacy can not only prevent the legalization of ministries’ interests, but also avoid interest disputes between different ministries. Besides, it could establish a medium and long-term development direction for China’s tourism diplomacy strategy. Of course, the development of tourism diplomacy should also pay attention to the coordinated role of the government and the market, especially the market’s role in resource allocation.

**2) Strengthening the legislation and decision-making of tourism diplomacy**

To achieve stable and orderly development of China’s tourism diplomacy, it is particularly important to strengthen the legislation and decision-making of tourism diplomacy. As is known to all that the legal guarantee for the sustainable development of the tourism industry comes from sound tourism legislation, and the legislative power is among the important powers granted to the National People’s Congress and its Standing Committee by the Constitution. The passing of the tourism diplomacy legislation by the National People’s Congress and its Standing Committee could not only optimize and regulate the current market order of the tourism industry, but also protect the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese and foreign tourists, playing a role as a bridge that closely integrates national strategy and tourism diplomacy. In this regard, Japan has set a good example. “The Japanese Diet promulgated the ‘Basic Tourism Law’ in 1963, the ‘Basic Law for the Promotion of Tourism Establishment’ in 2006, and the ‘Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan’ in 2007. The ‘Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan’ covers a wide range of topics, including the protection of tourists’ interests, the division of labor and participation by governments at all levels, paid vacations, and the construction of tourism infrastructure, and it proposes targeted implementation suggestions to the issues above”[^4]. The National People’s Congress and its Standing Committee could learn from the advanced experience of Japan and other countries, and implement the legal system construction on tourism diplomacy through the “Tourism Law of the People’s Republic of China”, making it possible that the public have laws and rules to follow, and the goals of the Party Central Committee and the State Council on building a strong tourism country could be further promoted.
(3) Strengthening the coordination and supervision of tourism diplomacy

The effectiveness of China’s tourism diplomacy is closely related to the effectiveness of supervision. Viewing from the Constitution, the National People’s Congress has the right to supervise all foreign affairs carried out by the party and government agencies, and the party and government agencies must also consciously accept its supervision. However, restricted by many factors, the National People’s Congress’s supervision over foreign affairs is far from meeting the requirements. In view of this, once the tourism diplomacy legislation is promulgated, various measures, including making use of public opinions, will be used to carry out vigorous publicity in the whole society. Local governments and tourism management departments at all levels must consciously shoulder their responsibilities and make every effort to ensure the effective implementation of the law. At the same time, the people’s congresses at all levels should work out a transparent, scientific and highly operable supervision mechanism based on the actual local conditions, regularly inspect the work of public security, border inspection, customs, immigration, and other tourism diplomatic affairs-related departments, timely supervise and assess the implementation of tourism diplomacy laws and regulations, and maximize the effectiveness of tourism diplomacy. Besides, with the current development of diplomacy among countries in the direction of diversification, diplomatic activities have spread from the simply security and political field to the tourism, cultural, economic and education field. Subjects participating in diplomatic activities have also increased significantly, and various forms of civil diplomacy, top-level diplomacy, parliamentary diplomacy, etc., have emerged. The National People’s Congress is the highest authority in China representing the 1.4 billion Chinese people. It is naturally the best manager of various forms of diplomacy. The National People’s Congress should conduct integrated management of all foreign tourism exchanges, effectively enhance the overall effectiveness of tourism diplomacy, and ensure the national interests to the maximum. The National People’s Congress could use a variety of methods such as specific investigations, official position removals and consultations to supervise tourism diplomacy, so as to ensure that the tourism diplomacy activities carried out by all diplomatic actors will not deviate from the track of official diplomacy of the country.

(4) Creating new pattern of all-round and multi-level tourism diplomacy

Public diplomacy and tourism diplomacy are similar in some aspects, therefore, the implementation system of the public diplomacy can be used for reference in the overall management of China’s tourism diplomacy. Till now, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Political Consultative Conference and other departments have successively established special public diplomacy management agen-
cies to promote public diplomacy. At the same time, in December 2012, the China Public Diplomacy Association was established in Beijing, and then various provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions successively established local Public Diplomacy Associations. After several years’ development, public diplomacy has developed vigorously with the support of the government and other official organizations, but there is a lack of coordination between different departments, and the participation of the broad masses of people is relatively poor. In view of this, it is necessary to create a new pattern of all-round and multi-level tourism diplomacy. First of all, the National People’s Congress, as China’s highest authority, is suggested to organize the establishment of a Tourism Diplomacy Strategy Committee to specifically response for coordinating the tourism diplomatic resources of all parties, and gradually form a tourism public diplomatic institution system with public operating, tourism enterprise participation and governmental guiding, so as to effectively guide the orderly development of tourism public diplomacy. Secondly, a tourism public diplomacy working group can be established in local people’s congresses at all levels, specifically responsible for disseminating general knowledge of foreign affairs and overseas tourism to the general public, so that tourism public diplomacy could enter the general public and effectively improve the public’s tourism diplomacy awareness. Besides, the people’s congresses at all levels could formulate targeted regulations related to tourism public diplomacy, so as to correctly guide tourism public diplomacy.

2. Mechanism Innovation of China’s Tourism Diplomacy

The mechanism innovation of China’s tourism diplomacy includes two parts: the innovation of the “tourism+sports” model and the innovation of “culture+leisure+tourism diplomacy” model.

The “tourism+sports” model has historical experience in improving or easing tensions between countries. Ping-pong diplomacy opened the ice-breaking journey between China and the US. These two countries invited each other’s sports delegations and carried out mutual visits to the travelling spots, creating conditions for the subsequent establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the US and the normalization of Sino-US relations, which marked a successful example of “tourism+sports” model. In 2008, Beijing, China successfully hosted the Summer Olympic Games, shaping China’s positive international image, through which the successful experience of “tourism+sports” model is confirmed to the world once again. Sports and tourism are interrelated, and the integrated development of the two promotes the innovation of tourism diplomacy mechanism. “Culture+leisure”
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model has attracted more and more people’s attention and has become a new development trend. Tourism is the carrier of culture and an important way of cultural transmission. Leisure tourism is to relax and purify the soul in the process of traveling, and it is the result of the enrichment and development of tourism. On the basis of eco-tourism and health-preserving tourism, leisure tourism has more pursuit of cultural atmosphere and connotative quality of travel destinations, whose specific presentation methods include: self-driving tours, self-guide travel, RV tours, cruise tours, urban and rural comprehensive leisure tourism, etc. “Culture+leisure” has become an important model for shaping China’s new tourism image of a “cultural power”, implementing the overall tourism strategy and the BRI tourism diplomacy.

(I) The impact of the “tourism+sports” model on international relations

The Sino-US ping-pong diplomacy in the 1970s opened the door to the Sino-US relations which has been freezing for more than 30 years. Although China and the US mainly promoted the official diplomacy through sports exchanges, after the ping-pong diplomacy, China and the US invited each other’s sports delegations to visit main cities, which also strengthened the cultural exchanges between the two sides. Former US President Nixon’s visit to China and the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two marked the beginning of the normalization of Sino-US relations and created a new situation in China’s diplomacy. To some extent, this is the first appearance of the “tourism+sports” model in China. In fact, the reason why the connection between tourism and sports is inseparable, on the one hand is due to the comprehensiveness and openness of the tourism industry that can play a connecting role, because the tourism industry involve many fields and industries; on the other hand, it is also due to the attractiveness and influence of sports events. Especially international and professional sports events are usually held in different countries and accompanied by corresponding tourism activities. Sports events such as the World Cup and the Olympic Games are not only large in scale and engineering, but also often take a long time to be held, which will have important impacts on the economic, social, environmental and tourism development of the host country and host city.

The “tourism+sports” model includes two types: tourism for sports and sports for travelling. Tourism for sports refers to tourism activities for sports related reasons, including the Olympic Games, Asian Games, World Cup football matches, etc. Sports for travelling refers to sports activities based on tourism resources and destinations, including climbing the Great Wall and famous mountains, and crossing the Yangtze River. The “tourism+sports” model has a wider range of participants, including athletes’ competitions participating, public tourists’ competitions watch-
ing and media personnel’s sports events reporting. There are two different types of large-scale sports events. The first is regularly held events with a relatively fixed location, such as the Tour de France, the Tour of Qinghai Lake, and the “Australian Open”. The advantages of relatively fixed location and period have gradually established a “tourism+sports” brand that attracts tourists from all over the world. The second type is the kind of events that have constantly changing venues and longer cycles, for instance, the Olympic Games and World Cup are held every four years, and the host country and city also change every time. In these events, the host country can develop tourism through these major sports events with important influence and attraction after the holding of the sports event. On the one hand, the number of people watching, participating and reporting on sports games and tourists will reach a high peak during the sports events; on the other hand, sports venues and facilities built for sports events often become popular tourist attractions, such as the “Water Cube” and the Nest stadium built by China for the 2008 Olympic Games. At the same time, in order to host sports events and promote the development of local tourism after the events, the host country will improve the infrastructure, transportation and communication facilities of the host city, which will help enhance the local tourist attraction and social and economic development. It can be found that “tourism+sports” has gradually become an important development trend of national tourism diplomacy. The 2008 Beijing Olympic Games is a combination of tourism, sports and diplomacy, enriching the connotation of traditional Chinese diplomacy. China hosted the Summer Olympic Games for the first time, and sports delegations from all over the world gathered in Beijing and exchanged sports culture. The hosting of the Beijing Olympics not only contributed to the progress of China’s sports, but also strengthens China’s connection with the world. Top officials of many countries attended the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games. Like Russian President Vladimir Putin led the Russian sports delegation himself.

With the rapid development of international tourism, Olympic tourism has become a major popular event. People can not only watch the Olympic games but also visit the host country and city, in the process of which tourists will have a certain understanding of the country’s infrastructure, social environment, tourist attraction, customs, etc. The Beijing Olympics has shown a good image of China to international friends, and the success of the Beijing Olympics symbolizes China’s growing international influence. The establishment of China’s international image is inseparable from the support and guarantee of China’s traditional diplomacy, as well as the diversified operation of non-traditional diplomatic methods such as sports diplomacy and tourism diplomacy. “Tourism+sports+diplomacy” is an inno-
vative model that will help the country obtain wider international support, strengthen the country’s soft power, and create a favorable international environment.

The “tourism+sports” model could also promote the overall development of a country’s economy, society, culture and tourism, and enhance a country’s comprehensive strength. Large-scale international sports competitions such as the Olympics, Asian Games, and World Cup have become a powerful driving force for the economic and social development of the host city. “Olympic tourism” is the best interpretation of the “tourism+sports” model. During the period of the sports competition, the number of international tourists entering the host country increase sharply, which lead to the increase in tourism consumption demand, and the foreign exchange income will also increase significantly. At the same time, the sports competition attracts overseas investment in the host city’s economy, tourism and other industries, thereby promoting the economic development of the host city. Through sports competitions, athletes from various countries exchange sports culture. International tourists can experience the traditional culture and customs of the host country while watching the competition, deepening the understanding of different cultures and enhancing the friendship between people of all countries. The host country takes the opportunity of organizing sports competitions to improve the transportation environment and infrastructure of the host city, which can effectively promote the development of local tourism in the later period. Comprehensive strength affects a country’s status, influence and discourse power in the international system. Tourism diplomacy, as an important manifestation of a country’s comprehensive strength, has gradually become an important content of a country’s foreign strategy. Against such backdrop, the “tourism+sports” model promotes the overall development of the country’s economy, society, culture and tourism through the combination of these two important aspects.

(2) “Culture+leisure+tourism diplomacy”: Enhancing China’s international influence

1) Expanding the cultural connotation of tourism diplomacy

The 17th National People’s Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed that China needs to strengthen the construction of cultural soft power to better protect the people’s basic cultural rights and interests, which marks the first time that China’s highest authoritative government agency has defined culture as soft power. China’s continuous rise has attracted widespread attention from the international community, and the latter has focused its attention on China’s growing hard and soft power. Scholars Iver B. Neumann and Halvard Leira pointed out in the book *International Diplomacy IV: Public Diplomacy* that “In most Western coun-
tries, there are misunderstandings and paradoxes about China from officials to the public. For example: Westerners seem to like China’s history and culture very much, but they don’t like contemporary China, because from their perspective, China today is too political and lacks cultural connotations; Westerners seem to like to travel and invest in China, but they seem unwilling to live in China. In other words, Westerners seem to enjoy the benefits produced by China’s rise, but they are unwilling to bear the costs of China’s rise, including the resulting pollution...”[5] In response to the above-mentioned paradoxes and misunderstandings, on the one hand, China has always insisted the concept of peaceful development, which is derived from the historical origin of Chinese civilization, as well as the realization of development goals and the grasp of world development trends. On the other hand, China has clearly set its sights on how to improve its soft power and actively express itself to the world.

China’s public diplomacy emphasizes cultural dissemination and exchanges, but not American-style media diplomacy. To a large extent, this is because China’s media has not been popularized worldwide. However, China’s tourism market is huge and has great development potential, including large tourism consumer groups and abundant tourism resources. China has become the world’s largest tourist source and consumer for several consecutive years. China’s domestic and overseas tourism continue to grow rapidly, and the diplomatic function of tourism continues to emerge. Tourism diplomacy has built a bridge in cultural communication and exchanges between China and foreign countries with its unique flexible diplomatic way. Chinese culture is extensive and profound, and tourism, as an important carrier of cultural transmission, could convey Chinese voice to the world. By telling the story of China, tourism diplomacy helps build people-to-people bonds, and its long-term task is to accurately show the world how China will use its power after its rise. To this question, the BRI cooperation and the initiative of a community with a shared future for all mankind provide the best answer.

Tourism diplomacy is an emerging field, and the pattern of tourism diplomacy has not yet been fully formed. First, tourism diplomacy always works in a low-profile way. The understanding, cognition and mutual trust of different civilizations and cultures by people of different countries also require a certain process and time. Second, the positive role of tourism diplomacy has not been brought into full play in a timely, full and effective manner. Tourism diplomacy is not only a consumption activity of shopping, nor a simply entertainment activity of sightseeing. Tourism diplomacy carries more of an important role in cultural dissemination and exchange, and shaping a positive national image.
The rapid development of China’s tourism industry has benefited from the reform of the vacation system, and the vacation time is determined by labor productivity. China’s technological advancement has brought about an increase in labor productivity and increased people’s leisure time. Since 1995, the State Council of China has formally established two-day weekend system, and the arrangements of vacations for National Day and Dragon Boat Festival have also been adjusted accordingly. The “culture+leisure” model is another important manifestation of the rapid development of tourism. Leisure culture refers to the general term of values, artistic achievements, language and social relations that people produce through various leisure activities during non-working hours. The “culture+leisure” model reflects the integration of leisure activities and world culture and has developed a new cultural atmosphere. The “culture+leisure” model is a higher level of tourism and cultural activities, paying more attention to a safe and peaceful tourism environment, cultural and entertainment activities with a rich vision, and high-quality services that enhance physical and mental health. With the further improvement of China’s technological level, the reform of the vacation system will also achieve optimized arrangements based on reasonable distribution of holidays, reduce the concentration of leisure tourism, and thereby improve the quality of cultural and leisure tourism services. In 2015, developed countries fully entered the “leisure era”. As a developing country, China’s opening-up pattern of tourism diplomacy continues to deepen, and the development trend of “culture+leisure” industry is becoming growing obvious, and therefore higher requirements are put forward for the overall development of domestic and overseas tourism in the traditional Chinese sense and the establishment of national image.

2) Carrying forward the experience and charm of positive traditional culture

In the face of a rising China, the international community needs to deepen its knowledge and understanding toward China. This deeper knowledge and understanding goes beyond the traditional economic and political levels and goes to the cultural level. Chinese traditional culture reflects the outstanding character and lofty value pursuit of the Chinese nation. Faced with great changes in the century, China needs to reflect on the question that how to show China’s wisdom and plans in this background, and the answer to this question can be found in the essence of Chinese traditional culture. The BRI proposed by China aims to regain the glory of the ancient Silk Road and to set up a new channel for mutual learning between Eastern and Western civilizations. The BRI itself is the inheritance of the ancient Silk Road and traditional Chinese culture. Chinese President Xi Jinping has repeatedly quoted Chinese traditional famous sentences on diplomatic occasions, which also reflects the important role of traditional culture in diplomacy. Historical
allusions and historical experience have provided important references for China’s modernization and promotion of peaceful diplomacy.

Traditional culture is the common heritage of all mankind. Historical sites such as the Forbidden City, Pyramids, and Notre-Dame de Paris are not only the common material heritage of all mankind, but also a symbol of civilization and a common cultural heritage. On April 15, 2019, a serious fire broke out in the main building of Notre-Dame de Paris, causing sighs from all over the world. Firstly, once the building is destroyed, all mankind will lose precious material and cultural heritage. Secondly, Notre-Dame de Paris has a profound impact on all mankind in various fields such as architecture, history, literature, film, tourism and religion. Notre-Dame de Paris is also a symbol of the French Revolution. The French Revolution destroyed the feudal system in Europe and became an important symbol of the development of world civilization. The disaster of Notre-Dame de Paris also gave inspiration to the protection of cultural heritage in countries around the world. Tourism diplomacy, as the driving force of the BRI interconnection construction and the carrier of cultural exchanges, carries the important task of cultural inheritance and dissemination.

First, the revival of traditional culture needs to be passed on from generation to generation. On the one hand, countries should strengthen tourism and cultural cooperation, not only to share the experience of cultural heritage protection, but also to jointly implement the responsibilities and obligations of the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. On the other hand, the tourist spots appreciated by international tourists belong to the important content of tangible cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage. Relevant departments could formulate protection plans based on different historical and cultural features, innovate historical and cultural protection mechanisms. At the same time, relevant departments should also promptly and effectively publicize the importance of cultural heritage protection and the inheritance of human civilization to public tourists, and strengthen supervision and management of historical relics and other destructive behaviors. Many traditional Chinese cultures, including folk culture, are at risk of extinction. Domestic universities and educational institutions could add relevant majors and courses. The revival of traditional culture needs to be passed on from generation to generation, so that Chinese culture can be carried forward. Only when a nation understands its own history and traditional culture can it better move towards the future and make civilization progress and development.

Second, the revival of traditional culture needs to be spread to the outside world. The most important thing in tourism diplomacy is to promote cultural ex-
changes and people-to-people exchanges. The material cultural heritage of tourist destinations contains profound historical culture. For instance, through the activities in Dunhuang Mogao Caves, international tourists can deeply understand the changes of the nation and the Silk Road culture of the exchanges and mutual learning of ancient Eastern and Western civilizations. China’s BRI and Russia’s Eurasian Economic Union also need to play a linking role in tourism diplomacy. Through “red tourism” and “red culture” activities, cultural and historical ties between countries can be deepened, thereby promoting the joint construction and cooperation of the BRI. Folk culture and traditional culture have gradually become important attractions for domestic tourism in China. Traditional Chinese culture such as paper-cutting, opera, martial arts, Tai Chi, cross talk, bamboo carving, etc. attracts increasing international friends to China. Traditional craftsmen even recruit foreign students to inherit and spread Chinese traditional culture. The inheritance and dissemination of traditional culture demonstrates the historical process of uniting the great spirit of the Chinese nation, enabling the international community to have a deeper understanding of China and increasing mutual trust between different cultures.

3. Effectively Develop Cooperation Space for China’s Tourism Diplomacy

Facing the complicated international situation and regional environment, China must insist on win-win cooperation, which applies not only to exchanges and cooperation with countries outside the region, but also to cooperation with neighboring countries. Tourism is the carrier of culture, and people-to-people exchanges are an important link between countries along the BRI and an effectively way of enhancing mutual trust between different cultures. People-to-people communication in tourism exchanges is also an important part of the BRI interconnection construction. Tourism is playing an increasingly important role in international affairs. Tourism diplomacy can effectively enhance China’s international voice and help build a new type of relationship between major powers. Therefore, it is particularly important to actively explore the cooperation space of China’s tourism diplomacy.

(1) Optimizing cooperation between countries in tourism diplomacy

The BRI tourism diplomacy is a diversified process, in which the government, tourism enterprises or tourists could all play economic roles.

1) At the government level
First, make a mid- to long-term development plan for the BRI tourism diplo-
macy, strengthen in-depth tourism cooperation with countries along the “Belt and Road”, and introduce preferential tourism policies to encourage foreign companies to invest in China’s tourism industry. At the same time, China should also use its tourism diplomacy strategy as the carrier to sign cooperation agreements with countries along the BRI, negotiate and introduce more favorable overseas tourism investment policies, so as to encourage domestic tourism companies to “go global”.

Second, relying on platforms such as the “Belt and Road” International Cooperation Summit Forum, and using the BRI countries tourism ministers’ meeting as a carrier to promote exchanges and cooperation with other countries in tourism product development, tourism destination marketing and tourist source exchanges. When appropriate, tourism counsellors can also be set up in Chinese embassies in countries along the BRI to gradually form normalized BRI tourism cooperation.

Third, the BRI tourism development fund can be established led by the Chinese government and participated by other countries, specifically for assistance to poor areas along the BRI, so as to enhance China’s discourse power and leading power in the development pattern of regional tourism, and to realize the strategic goal of becoming a world tourism power.

2) At the enterprise level
The BRI tourism diplomacy is inseparable from the support of powerful tourism companies. Even if China has a large number of tourists, without strong tourism enterprises, it is difficult to achieve the strategic goal of becoming a world tourism power. For China’s tourism diplomacy to achieve sustainable development, a large number of leading tourism enterprises must serve as a basic guarantee to serve the BRI development framework. In view of this, first of all, the government must fully support the development of tourism enterprises, and provide more support in terms of policies and funds. Especially against the backdrop of the current global economic downturn, it is even more necessary to make an targeted domestic and overseas tourism revitalization plan for tourism companies, and cultivate comprehensive world tourism leading enterprises within next 3-5 years. Secondly, tourism enterprises should also actively respond to the policies of the Party Central Committee and the State Council to vigorously expand the tourism market of countries along the BRI.

3) At the tourist level
Tourism diplomacy takes people-to-people exchanges as the main method. Giving full play to the role of tourism diplomacy requires not only government support and macro management, but also micro-groups such as tourists to demonstrate civilized tourism behaviors in the process of tourism exchanges. Every citi-
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zen’s overseas tourism represents the image of his country. Although all sectors of society are paying attention to the issue of civilized tourism, uncivilized tourism behaviors still occur frequently. In order to establish a better international image of Chinese citizens overseas, the Civilization Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the National Tourism Administration jointly promulgated the Guidelines for Civilized Behaviors of Chinese Citizens Traveling Abroad as early as 2006[^6], while received little effect. In response to this situation, in addition to strengthening the implementation of relevant laws and regulations, tourists themselves should also establish a sense of civilized tourism. Relevant departments should strengthen to promote civilized tourism education for the people, use traditional media and new media to promote and publicize civilized tourism, and develop civilized etiquette related and tourism-themed promotional videos about countries along the BRI. Only in this way could citizens have a timely and effective understanding of the general situation, customs, etiquette, and cultural taboos of other countries, the society’s awareness of major-country diplomacy, tourism diplomacy, and non-governmental exchanges can be cultivated, rectifying uncivilized overseas tourism behavior can be strengthened, and a harmonious and civilized tourism environment can be better constructed.

(2) Integration of tourism and infrastructure construction

There is a Chinese folk proverb goes that “If you want to be rich, you must first build roads”, which reflects the important role of transportation and infrastructure construction in local economic development. Facility connectivity is one of the functions of five connectivities of the BRI. The prerequisite for the development of tourism diplomacy and the joint construction of the BRI is the construction of facilities, including transportation facilities, communication facilities, and infrastructure facilities. The cooperation environment of the countries along the BRI is various. Many countries have complex geographic conditions and dilapidated transportation facilities, which seriously affects exchanges and cooperation between countries. Under such circumstances, China needs to make full use of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Silk Road Fund to invest and develop the construction of the BRI and continue to promote the construction of facilities with BRI countries. The relationship between tourism and facility construction is a two-way relationship. The increase in the number of tourists will greatly encourage the local government to improve the communication, infrastructure and transportation environment, and the improvement of local facilities will attract more tourists. With a huge tourism market, the continuous rise of the Chinese economy has made important contributions to the development of the world economy. More and more countries have chosen to join in the construction of the BRI, cooperated with
China in various fields such as tourism, economy and trade, and strive to become the tourist destination of Chinese citizens. Infrastructure and transportation are not only the road to economic development, but also a road made by people-to-people exchanges. Many countries are willing to accept assistance and investment from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Silk Road Fund to participate in China’s overseas high-speed rail construction projects, so as to improve the country’s facilities, develop tourism economy and promote cultural exchanges. With the continuous advancement of the BRI facility construction projects, the time and space distances for interconnection between countries have been shortened, and the ties between countries have become closer. The tourism enthusiasm in the countries along the BRI has also been rising, and such tourism enthusiasm will further promote the improvement of the local people’s livelihood environment, safety environment and facility construction.

(3) Deepening international tourism cooperation around the BRI

As different countries have different views and responses to the BRI proposed by the Chinese government, countries and regions have different advantages and disadvantages in the tourism diplomacy of the BRI. Therefore, on the one hand, it is necessary to deepen tourism cooperation with destination countries, and on the other hand, China can also implement targeted development strategies of tourism diplomacy in light of the actual conditions of countries along the BRI.

1) Deepen tourism cooperation with destination countries

China can continue to deepen tourism dialogue and cooperation among major countries guided by the principle that “travel goes first in interconnection”, such as the launching of China-Russia BRI red tourism cultural activities, which expanded new areas of red tourism cooperation. China should also integrate multiple resources, strengthen tourism cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European countries, and set up tourism counsellors in embassies and consulates abroad to promote tourism exchanges through mechanisms. Central Asian countries and regions are an important part of the BRI tourism diplomacy. It is necessary to open up new space for cooperation in visa simplification policies, security guarantees, and Chinese language services in Central Asia. Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand and Malaysia are not only key countries participating in the joint construction of the “Silk Road Economic Belt” and the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”, they also have deep tourism and cultural ties with China. China needs to consolidate tourism cooperation with these neighboring countries through hosting China-Thailand Tourism Year and China-Malaysia Tourism Year, etc. On the whole, China’s tourism diplomacy must take the initiative in the new pattern of opening up, deepen tourism cooperation with destination countries, and serve the China’s over-
2) Adopting differentiated development strategies of tourism diplomacy

First, based on the actual conditions of the countries and regions along the BRI, China needs to carry out targeted complementary projects to realize the exchange of tourist volume and market, energy, resources and energy with BRI countries. China could promote in-depth diplomatic cooperation and exchanges through cooperation in tourism investment and tourism route development with BRI countries. At the same time, the Chinese government should also strengthen negotiations with BRI countries that have not yet signed an ADS agreement with China, and strive to realize that all BRI countries join the ADS agreement as soon as possible.

Second, China also needs to actively negotiate with countries along the “Belt and Road” to comprehensively promote cooperation in realizing visa relaxation, opening of navigation rights, facilitation of settlement methods and faster transportation facilities. In border areas such as Heilongjiang, Xinjiang, and Yunnan, China can jointly build cross-border tourist areas with friendly countries, and at the same time implement a visa-free entry and exit policy for tourists from both sides.

Generally speaking, China’s tourism diplomacy, as a new and special non-traditional diplomatic method, serves the major power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics together with traditional diplomacy, and is unique in the history of world diplomacy. In the context of the BRI, tourism and foreign exchange activities have shown an important role in promoting people-to-people exchanges between countries, establishing a positive image of China and promoting China’s peaceful development. Therefore, research on tourism diplomacy is of important theoretical and practical significance.

Works Cited


[2] Ibid.


