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Chinese Cultural Promotion in Serbia**

Abstract

Chinese cultural promotion in Serbia is mainly realized through work of two Confucius Institutes, Culture Office of the Chinese embassy, "Chinese Language Teaching" project under the Education Board of the Chinese embassy, Sino-Serbian Cultural Exchange Association, various friendship associations and individual contributions. The scope and content of promotion activities undertaken by these institutions is dated and does not correspond to expanding cultural influence of contemporary China. At present, there are many challenges in modernizing Chinese language lectures and curriculum as well as in the perception and understanding of cultural promotion itself. Based on the field research the author has conducted in Serbia, the aim of this article is to give suggestions for more efficient Chinese cultural promotion in Serbia.

Key words: Chinese culture, Serbia, cultural promotion

Serbia, a small country in Southeast Europe, is a home to a more than 5000 Chinese businessmen. Despite friendly and cordial bilateral relations between the two countries, Chinese businessmen can still encounter unwelcoming reception or even a boycott by Serbians. Notwithstanding the fact that these are mostly isolated cases, this attitude is also showing inadequacies in foregrounding "going out" policies espoused by the Chinese government.¹ In Serbia, just like in other parts of the world, the understanding and acceptance of Chinese culture is not directly related with the pace of Chinese global economic expansion; instead, there is a certain gap or time lag between marching economic expansion and tottering cultural acceptance. At present, Chinese cultural impact on global market is still far to match Japan and South Korea, while the gap between China's present contribution to the world's cultural life and its "responsibility to contribute" is becoming very evident.² Therefore, in order to enhance Sino-Serbian cooperation, especially in the light of Belt and Road Initiative and 16+1 Cooperation, it is necessary to tackle Chinese cultural promotion in Serbia.

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** Received on October 24, 2018; Accepted on November 15, 2018.

1 Set of policies intending to strengthen Chinese cultural promotion abroad, also called "Cultural going out" (文化走出去) policies are launched by The Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee in November 2013. For details, see: Ma Xiaodai: Zhongguo Wenhua "Zouchuqu" de Zhanglvwe Sikao [Reflecting on Chinese "Cultural going out" strategies], *People's Forum*, Beijing 2017, no.2; Guo Qi, Hong Xiaonan: "Zouchuqu" de Zhanglvwe Yanjiu [Research on Chinese "Cultural going out" strategies], *Culture Journal*, no.9, Beijing, 2016.

2 Lei Xingchang, Liu Wenyu, "Strategic assessment of Chinese cultural products on world's market", *Economic Science Press*, Beijing, 2015, p. 3.

1. Chinese cultural promotion in Serbia

1.1 Cultural promotion activities under Ministry of Education and Office of Chinese Language Council (Hanban)

Currently, there are two Confucius Institutes in Serbia: the Confucius Institute of the University of Belgrade and the Confucius Institute of the University of Novi Sad. Confucius Institute in Belgrade was founded in 2006, under University of Belgrade with Nanjing Normal University as supporting institution (and Communication University of China after 2009). The Confucius Institute of the University of Novi Sad was established in 2014 under cooperation agreement between the University of Novi Sad and Zhejiang Agricultural and Forestry University. By the end of 2017, Confucius Institute in Belgrade had set up six Chinese teaching sites and one Confucius School, while Confucius Institute in Novi Sad had created sixteen Chinese teaching sites and one Confucius School. Both institutes provide cultural and educational activities to local communities, such as: language courses, calligraphy, cooking, painting, martial arts, qigong and Tai Chi classes. In cooperation with the Chinese embassy, relevant departments of the Serbian government, local cultural and educational institutions and organizations, these two institutes are also engaged in the field of cultural promotion. They have launched a number of cultural activities, such as "China Film Week", "Happy Spring Festival", "China Cooking Day", "China Music Show Week", "Month of Chinese Martial Arts".³

Belgrade Confucius Institute is comparatively bigger institute, has more local teachers and pays more attention on their academic development and scientific research. Among academic activities organized by Belgrade institute are: two international Sinology conferences (2008-2012), first training course for native Chinese teachers in Serbia (2014) and Chinese language textbook development seminar for Serbian teachers (2014). Moreover, the institute in Belgrade has its own journal, "The Journal of Confucius Institute in Belgrade" which by the end of 2017 had its 14th issue. It is the only professional journal in Serbia for Sino-Serbian cultural cooperation and sinology. Other publications also include: "Tang Yan Zhenqing's Regular Script", "The Introduction to Chinese Cooking" and "A Guide for Transliteration of Chinese Names into Serbian"⁴.

Confucius Institute of Novi Sad has very intensive activities in cultural promotion of China. In the past three years, the institute organized more than 200 events promoting cultural cooperation and exchanges. Comparing to its Belgrade counterpart, the institute in Novi Sad is more closely integrated with local Chinese business circles and local government. The institute directly benefits from a close cooperation with the Chinese Business Federation of Serbia, the Chinese Business Federation of Vojvodina, the Lishui Chamber of Commerce, the provincial government of Vojvodina and the city government of Novi Sad.

³ For details, see: http://www.hanban.edu.cn/confuciusinstitutes/node_6713.htm and <http://wsc.zafu.edu.cn/kzxy.htm> (accessed on 10/01/2018)

⁴ In Chinese: "Tangyan Zhenqing Kaishufa" (《唐颜真卿楷书技法》), "Zhongguo Pengtiao Rumen" (《中国烹调入门》), "Hanyu Zhuanming Saiyu Yiyin Zhinan" (《汉语专名塞语译音指南》)

1.2 Cultural promotion activities organized by the Culture Office of the Chinese embassy

In September 2008, Chinese and Serbian Ministry of Culture signed the Implementation Plan for Cultural Cooperation for 2008-2012 period. In May 2013, both ministries signed the Cultural Cooperation Plan for 2013-2016 period, which includes the exchange and cooperation projects in various fields, such as cultural festivals, literature, art, publishing, books, museums, archaeology, archives, radio, television, film and so on.

These plans served as a framework for the Culture Office in conducting cultural promotion activities. On Serbian side, participating institutions include: The University of Belgrade, the University of John Nesbitt, the Open University of Subotica, the Belgrade City Library, the Serbian Film Archives Museum and the Yugoslav Museum of History. Culture Office with Serbian partners every year organize "China Film Week" and invite various art delegations from China to perform in Serbia, including the Chinese Central Ethnic Song and Dance Orchestra, the Chinese Broadcasting Arts Orchestra Ethnic Orchestra, the Gansu Opera House Art Orchestra, the Beijing Symphony Orchestra. So far, partnering institutions have organized several art exhibitions, displaying ancient Chinese bronzes, Chinese graphic design artefacts, Sichuan earthquake relief photos, traditional woodblock paintings, contemporary ink and wash painting, etc. Culture Office also promotes cultural activities through platforms and programs of Serbian partner institutions. For instance, in April 2008, on the 1130th anniversary of the founding of Belgrade, Cultural Office organized "Chinese Day", Fujian Christian Choir participated on the third Exit Music Festival in Novi Sad. Book donations for primary and secondary schools and city libraries have also been organized. Also, important events organized by Culture Office have been reported by RTS, Serbian state-owned television, Pink TV, Prva 1, Tanjug, Belgrade Radio, Danas, China Central Television, Xinhua News Agency, China National Radio and other media.⁵

2. "Chinese Language Teaching" project under the Education Board of the Chinese embassy

In March 2012, the Education Board has launched a Chinese teaching project in primary and secondary schools. The Chinese Ambassador to Serbia, Zhang Wanxue, and the Minister of Education and Science of Serbia, have officially signed a memorandum on the implementation of the pilot project "Chinese language courses in Serbian primary and secondary schools". The project has received support by Hanban Council and the embassy in sending teachers and volunteers. Until 2018, 18 volunteers and 2 Chinese teachers have been sent to 11 different places in Serbia. In terms of teaching materials, Confucius Institute and Hanban Council jointly provided textbooks for primary and secondary school students: "Chinese Playground" and "Happy Chinese" primary schools, and "Learn Chinese with Me" for the secondary school students. At present, there are 64 Chinese teaching points in Serbian primary and secondary schools.

⁵ For details, see: <http://rs.chineseembassy.org/chn/zsgx/whjy/> (accessed on 12/12/2017)

2.1 Activities organized by the Sino-Serbian Cultural Exchange Association

The Sino-Serbian Cultural Exchange Association was established in 2013 by Guo Xiao, chairman of the Chinese business association of Serbia. The intention to found the Association came from Chinese businessmen in Serbia who believed that business cooperation must be based on cultural understanding. From 2015, the Association regularly organized activities, such as, "Chinese Culture Week", every year in May-June period in Beli Dvor (old royal palace). This activity includes Chinese tea ceremonies, film releases, art exhibitions, acupuncture lessons, singing, dancing and Tai Chi performances, food tasting, etc. Every year, the culture week received donations from about 10-15 local Serbian private enterprises, each contributing with 1,000 EUR. Also, the Association supports and participates in the International Dragon Boat race and organized fund raisers for big floods in Serbia. A total of 55,000 euros and over one million dinars in goods and materials were donated to the people affected by the flood that occurred in 2015. The Association also supported charity and education promoting activities by the former First Lady and its activities are usually attended by important officials and have local media coverage.

3. Other institutions in charge of Chinese cultural promotion

In addition to the above-mentioned institutions and projects, the Chinese Department of Belgrade University, the Serbian non-governmental friendship organization "House of Orient" (Kuća Oriјenta) and the Sino-Serbian Association for Educational Exchange among others are also active in promotion of Chinese culture and Sino-Serbian people-to-people exchanges.

4. Some problems and challenges in Chinese cultural promotion

Chinese culture promoting activities in Serbia have achieved certain success in deepening the understanding of Chinese culture among local population and enhancing the social influence of Confucius institutes, Sino-Serbian Cultural Exchange Association and other relevant institutions. However, some problems and challenges are still present.

First, Chinese language as a course in high schools and colleges has not yet obtained the credit status. Currently, only Niš University and Novi Sad University have Chinese included in credit system. In secondary education, Chinese course has credit status only in Belgrade Language Middle School and Sremski Karlovci Language Middle School. Therefore, it is very challenging for Chinese teachers and volunteers in more than 60 schools where Chinese language projects have been launched to attract students for taking and passing Chinese courses.

Second, general feedback on many of Chinese cultural activities is that they are somewhat superficial, formalist and without interaction. For example, various painting and calligraphy exhibitions organized by Culture Office usually only invite authors without inviting experts able to introduce the context and give an insight for understanding historical background of Chinese calligraphy and Chinese art. As a result, Serbian audience tends to have one-sid-

ed, fragmented and superficial understanding of Chinese art.

Third, cultural promotion activities are not in the same track with other (economic, political) activities. Sometimes it may seem that cultural promotion and economic cooperation are conducted completely unrelated to each other. For instance, after the launch of 16+1 Cooperation and Belt and Road Initiative, departments in charge of PR or local liaison offices haven't timely responded by issuing detailed and long-termed plans for follow up and coordination of (promoting) cultural cooperation.

Fourth, due to a small number of Chinese-speaking Serbians, Chinese works are often translated into Serbian from Russian, German or English, which as a result affects the accuracy of Serbian translations. For example, "Water Margin", a one of the Four Classic Novels of Chinese literature, has been classified not as a novel, but as an introduction to some roles and some plots, which distorts the understanding of the place this masterpiece has in Chinese literature.

Fifth, some communication 'hiccups' between Serbian institutions in charge of Chinese cultural promotion. Some typical examples include the (mis)coordination of the activities undertaken by the two Confucius institutes in Serbia; related institutions and scholars sometimes have opposing and conflicting ideas regarding the promotional activities, non-governmental Chinese culture associations complain for the lack of financial support from the Culture Office, etc. Due to insufficient coordination between the local institutions long-term systematic plans for cultural promotion tends to be neglected and financial resources are consumed to maintain some low-level activities.

Sixth, delays in establishment of cultural centers. Even though two countries in July 2010 officially signed the Memorandum on mutual establishment of cultural centers and President Xi Jinping during his visit to Belgrade in 2016 together with President Nikolic jointly laid the foundation for the future Chinese cultural center, according to the author's understanding, so far there was no any progress in this field. Possible explanation might be in defining the specific scope of activities which should be carried by the center, which, in Serbia, a small country with two existing Confucius institutes could be very challenging task to do.

5. Suggestions for improvement

First, conceptual reassessment of "going out" strategy. In the past ten years, Chinese culture has been "going out" of its low-profile position in Serbia. Today, "going out" in Chinese teaching can be witnessed through increasing number of primary and secondary schools in Serbia having set up Chinese as an optional course. It is, therefore, time to put more emphasis on the in-depth development of the strategic partnership between China and Serbia, which means to support policies that facilitate and enhance learning Chinese and understanding Chinese culture, among Serbian population. Also, it means to continue carrying out high-level cultural promotion activities to demonstrate that traditional Chinese culture as well as the values of contemporary Chinese society can actively contribute to Sino-Serbian friendship.

Second, keeping pace with (bilateral) economic cooperation. Institutions in charge of cultural promotion should follow closely developments in other fields of cooperation, timely respond to new trends in current Sino-CEEC cooperation platform, especially in Sino-Serbian relations. They should develop strategies and platforms for the main stakeholders in Sino-Serbian economic cooperation, organize economic forums and encourage bilateral visits and exchanges; in a word, actively promote the concept of “harmony is above all”, “responsibility for the world” and, finally, guiding bilateral cooperation so that it can reflect the focal points of “community of shared future”⁶ and showcase Chinese “way” in making cooperation initiatives and doing business.

Third, the role of non-governmental organizations is indispensable in the process of cultural promotion. NGO organizations and civil society can soften and vitalize more formalist and strict manners in conducting political relations and dispel possible tensions that could arouse due to communication issues. Chinese people living in Serbia are invaluable asset to their country in promoting bilateral cooperation and people-to-people exchanges. They are more familiar with Serbian society, can grasp better the local mentality and have learned shortcuts for efficient promotion of cooperation with Serbian people.

Fourth, focus on training of local teachers and experts in cultural promotion. Relying solely on Chinese teachers and volunteers to teach Chinese and promote Chinese culture cannot be sustainable long-term plan. In cooperation with local educational and cultural departments, it should be designed a plan for education of local Chinese teachers and cultural promoters. Hanban Council can set up projects that aim to scout local teachers and “cultural exchange envoys” and tap potential in local talents committed to promote Chinese culture in a “localized” way.

Fifth, pay attention and seek commonalities out of existing cultural differences. There is only one real cultural dialogue, the one that does not exclude cultural differences.⁷ Therefore, only by understanding and accepting mutual differences can start a true cultural dialogue between China and Serbia. With the economic and cultural globalization, the concepts of ecology, environmental protection, sustainability, harmony and win-win cooperation⁸ should be the guiding principles pursued by both sides.

Sixth, Chinese embassy should be in charge of guiding and coordinating Chinese cultural promotion. This means to more actively coordinate the activities of Culture Office, Education Board, Confucius institutes, encourage non-governmental cultural organizations to play more active roles and complement strength of all institutions in charge of cultural promotion.

6 These two Confucian concepts are increasingly gaining relevance in Chinese “going out” policies, reflecting the synthesis of traditional and contemporary traits in Chinese culture. See: Analects: Ch 1, LZYHWG: “He wei gui”, “Harmony is above all” (“和为贵”), Ch 1: YTXWJR: “Yi Tianxia wei ji ren” “responsibility for the world” (以天下为己任). “Community of a shared future” or “Community of shared destiny” (命运共同体) is a concept promoted by Chinese government to promote and sustain intercultural dialogue and people-to-people exchanges under Belt and Road Initiative..

7 Du Weiming (ed.), *From axis civilization to dialogue civilization: Songshan Forum Collection*. 2012, Guangming Daily Press, 2013.

8 “Harmonious development” (和谐发展) and “win-win cooperation” (互赢合作) are two signature concepts of Chinese government which laid foundation for Chinese cultural promotion abroad.

Overall, Chinese cultural promotion in Serbia has made some achievements, but has also revealed many practical problems and challenges.⁹ Just like all modern cultural institutions striving to make a full use of the advantages of global world, develop strategies for sustainable fusion and collision with different cultures, institutions in charge of Chinese cultural promotion should take an active part in renewing their concepts and strive to dig out the contents of Chinese culture that share the common values of mankind, explore commonalities with Serbian traditional and modern, Orthodox and civic culture and engage into real cultural dialogue with Serbian people.

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Ли Ђијанђун

Културна промоција Кине у Србији

Апстракт

Културна промоција Кине у Србији се остварује кроз рад Конфућијевог института, Одељења за културу при амбасади НРК, програма учења кинеског језика под секцијом за просвету при амбасади НРК, Удружења за културну сарадњу између Кине и Србије, радом организација српско-кинеског пријатељства те индивидуалним доприносима. Међутим, потребно је истакнути како опсег и садржај промотивних активности не одговара развоју кинеског културног утицаја у свету. Тренутно предстоје многи изазови у модернизацији учења кинеског језика као и промени разумевања циљева културне промоције. На темељу спроведеног теренског истраживања у Србији, ауторка даје сугестије за побољшање кинеске културне промоције у Србији.

Кључне речи: Кинеска култура, Србија, културна промоција