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Construction of a Communication Guarantee System from Yunnan to Thailand in the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative: A Case Study of Yunnan Daily Press Group (Postprint)

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Date: 2023-10-08T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

[Purpose] Against the backdrop of the Belt and Road Initiative, China has been continuously strengthening the construction of its external strategic communication capabilities, with local governments also bearing corresponding responsibilities for construction and publicity. As one of China's southwestern border provinces, Yunnan enjoys inherent advantages of geographical proximity and close people-to-people ties with Thailand. Establishing a strategic communication guarantee system for Yunnan's outreach to Thailand is therefore crucial to ensuring the development of Yunnan's strategic communication capacity toward Thailand. **[Method]** This article takes the Yunnan Daily Press Group as a case study, discussing from a specific instance to the broader context how to construct such a strategic guarantee system. **[Results]** The Yunnan Daily Press Group has established a strategic communication guarantee mechanism through measures including innovating communication concepts and research approaches, strengthening media convergence and deeply exploring regional resource advantages, fully leveraging think tank talent strengths, and conducting precision communication to shape a comprehensive, multidimensional, and clear regional image. **[Conclusion]** As China's leading press institution radiating toward Thailand, the Yunnan Daily Press Group, by drawing on Yunnan's excellent culture, can not only tell China's stories well but also more readily serve as a friendly ambassador for the Belt and Road Initiative, while enhancing cultural exchanges between the two countries and thereby advancing the construction of Yunnan's strategic communication guarantee system toward Thailand.

Full Text

Preamble

Building a Strategic Communication Guarantee System from Yunnan to Thailand Under the Belt and Road Initiative: A Case Study of Yunnan Daily Press Group

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Abstract

[Objective] Against the backdrop of the Belt and Road Initiative, China has continuously strengthened the construction of its strategic communication capabilities, with local governments bearing corresponding responsibilities for development and promotion. As a southwestern border province, Yunnan enjoys inherent advantages of geographical proximity and cultural affinity with Thailand, making the establishment of a strategic communication guarantee system from Yunnan to Thailand crucial for ensuring the development of Yunnan's strategic communication capacity toward Thailand. **[Method]** This article takes Yunnan Daily Press Group as a case study, discussing from the specific to the general how to construct a strategic guarantee system. **[Results]** Yunnan Daily Press Group has established a strategic communication guarantee mechanism through measures including innovating communication concepts and research approaches, strengthening media convergence and deeply exploring regional resource advantages, giving full play to think tank and talent advantages, and shaping a comprehensive, three-dimensional, and clear regional image through precise communication. **[Conclusion]** As China's leading press organization radiating toward Thailand, Yunnan Daily Press Group can not only tell China's stories well and play the role of a friendly ambassador for the Belt and Road Initiative by leveraging Yunnan's excellent culture, but also enhance cultural exchanges between the two countries, thereby promoting the construction of a strategic communication guarantee system from Yunnan to Thailand.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative; China-Thailand relations; strategic communication; Yunnan Daily Press Group

CLC Classification: G234

Document Code: A

Article ID: 1671-0134(2023)02-047-04

DOI: 10.19483/j.cnki.11-4653/n.2023.02.009

Citation Format: Wen Haobin, Yang Ailun, Jin Weiwei. Building a Strategic Communication Guarantee System from Yunnan to Thailand Under the Belt and Road Initiative: A Case Study of Yunnan Daily Press Group [J]. China Media Technology, 2023(02): 47-50.

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Funding: Yunnan Philosophy and Social Science Planning Project “Research on the Spread and Influence of Chinese Culture in Thailand Under the Belt and Road Initiative” (Project No. QN2019055)

The advancement of Belt and Road construction facilitates cultural, economic, and political exchanges among countries worldwide, thereby building China’s international discourse influence. Since China established diplomatic relations with other countries, Thailand has consistently maintained friendly cooperation with China at the forefront of ASEAN nations. In the political domain, Thailand was the first to sign a joint statement with China on a 21st-century cooperation plan and hosts the most Chinese consulates among ASEAN countries. In the security domain, Thailand is the first ASEAN country to establish a high-level defense and security consultation mechanism with China. In the field of people-to-people exchanges, the Thai royal family maintains friendly relations with China and actively promotes positive official and public perceptions of China, vigorously publicizing Chinese culture and leading efforts to foster Sino-Thai friendship. In recent years, the broadcast of excellent Chinese film and television dramas containing Chinese elements in Thailand has enriched the levels of people-to-people exchanges between China and Thailand.

According to data from the Thai Ministry of Commerce website, in 2000, China-Thailand trade volume was only US\$6.226 billion, accounting for merely 4.7% of Thailand’s total trade volume, while US-Thailand trade volume during the same period reached US\$22.187 billion, representing 16.8% of Thailand’s total trade. In 2007, China-Thailand trade volume first surpassed that of US-Thailand trade. In 2013, China-Thailand trade volume exceeded Japan-Thailand trade, making China Thailand’s largest trading partner. Although the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 severely impacted economies worldwide, trade between China and Thailand continued to show an overall upward trend. In 2021, China-Thailand trade overcame the pandemic’s impact to exceed the US\$100 billion mark, with China becoming Thailand’s largest trading partner for the ninth consecutive year [1]. Thailand holds important geopolitical significance and represents a key focus for China in advancing the Belt and Road Initiative. Yunnan Daily Press Group, as Yunnan’s window to external communication, shoulders the mission of the era, conforms to and seizes the trend of the times, promotes a regional international communication radiation network, and continuously innovates to facilitate the construction of a communication guarantee system through its own development. Yunnan Daily Press Group’s communication strategy actively echoes the Belt and Road Initiative’s strategic goal of promoting people-to-people connectivity among countries and regions along the route, constituting an important component of Yunnan’s proactive efforts to conduct external publicity work in the new era and tell China’s stories well.

1. Background and Current Status of Yunnan Daily Press Group' s Communication Toward Thailand

1.1 Analysis of the Background for Yunnan Daily Press Group' s Communication Toward Thailand

As China' s discourse power in the international community continues to enhance, the shaping and improvement of its international image have become crucial. Chinese stories and Chinese voices constitute important components of this international image. Telling China' s stories well and disseminating China' s voice enable people worldwide to deepen their understanding of China, thereby enhancing trust and dispelling doubts about the Belt and Road Initiative [2]. The widespread dissemination of the Belt and Road Initiative relies not only on national-level external publicity work but also on regional media that shoulder corresponding responsibilities and missions. Yunnan Daily Press Group has consistently regarded telling Yunnan' s stories well and showcasing Yunnan' s image as the overarching task of its external communication and exchange. By presenting Yunnan as a region rich in cultural landscapes and blessed with superior natural scenery, the Group not only enhances Thai people' s understanding of Yunnan but also increases their interpretation of China. Chinese President Xi Jinping has pointed out the need to accelerate the construction of a Chinese discourse and narrative system, using Chinese theory to explain Chinese practice and Chinese practice to sublimate Chinese theory, creating new concepts, categories, and expressions that integrate Chinese and foreign elements to more fully and vividly demonstrate the intellectual power and spiritual strength behind Chinese stories [3]. International communication work has become one of the central tasks of Yunnan Daily Press Group, which actively deploys and participates in communication practices to enhance its principal role in communication toward Thailand.

1.2 Current Strategic Layout of Yunnan Daily Press Group' s Communication Toward Thailand

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Yunnan Daily Press Group' s International Communication Center has established a "five-in-one" external publicity layout when constructing international communication platforms: dominated by traditional print media layout cooperation, linked by multilingual external publicity publications, supplemented by diverse media, supported by physical projects, and guaranteed by talent cultivation, creating a new model and new journey for international communication layout oriented toward Thailand [4]. Yunnan Daily Press Group has cooperated with Thailand' s renowned English-language media *The Nation* to jointly publish English-language news publications, better telling Chinese stories and disseminating Chinese voices in Thailand, thereby enhancing cultural and information exchanges between the two peoples and expanding in-depth cooperation across all sectors and fields between China and Thailand. The *China · Yunnan* news special issue, co-founded by Yunnan Daily Press Group and Thailand' s *The*

Nation, was first launched in Bangkok on December 15, 2015. The launch ceremony was attended by the Minister Counselor of the Chinese Embassy in Thailand, Thailand's Minister of Culture, the Thai Consul General in Kunming, the President of *The Nation*, and other political and business figures from both countries. Relevant personnel from the Tourism Authority of Thailand stated that Yunnan's rich tourism and cultural resources captivate the Thai people, and the publication of this periodical would further enrich Thai people's understanding of Yunnan. The publication of *China · Yunnan* provides a bridge for exchanges between the two peoples, thereby better promoting economic and cultural exchanges. The evolution from the periodical *Beautiful Yunnan* to *China · Yunnan* represents not merely a name change but demonstrates Yunnan Daily Press Group's proactive response to the national external communication strategic layout by exploring its own work direction and development—always oriented toward the strategic goals of a modern media group, actively exploring unique regional cultural resources, enhancing its discourse system construction within international media institutions [5], continuously adapting to new international development situations, expanding its main business development scale, strengthening diversified industries, and creating new directions for multi-media coordinated development. The Thai Consul General in Kunming stated that Yunnan Daily Press Group has facilitated multiple important cooperations with Thai national media. The placement of news special issues in Thailand's *The Nation* and publicity in relevant columns of Thailand's *Mekong River* magazine have enhanced mutual understanding between the two peoples.

2. Manifestations of Problems in Yunnan Daily Press Group's Communication Toward Thailand

Alongside rapid economic development, China's international influence has grown increasingly prominent. While pursuing its own development, China is also committed to promoting new changes in the international political and economic landscape, making international communication work increasingly important. The state continuously innovates its systems and mechanisms to enhance China's external communication capabilities. Meanwhile, local governments also need to consider their own development levels, actively play their roles, explore their unique regional communication advantages and channels, and contribute their strength to enhancing the nation's overall external communication capacity [6]. However, multiple factors must be considered in the communication process. In the process of communication toward Thailand, differences in political environments, religious customs, cultural heritage, and economic structures between the two countries have significantly impacted Chinese communication institutions, groups, and individuals at all levels toward Thailand. As an important force in China's communication toward Thailand, Yunnan Daily Press Group has generally experienced smooth progress in its communication efforts in Thailand, but has also faced many problems constrained by various factors. The accumulation of these problems has led to dilemmas and challenges in Yunnan Daily Press Group's communication toward Thailand,

specifically manifested in the following aspects.

2.1 Intervention by Western Hegemonic Countries

Thanks to the open and free nature of media itself, the internet era has rapidly broken through temporal and spatial limitations, promoting information flow with far greater efficiency than traditional media. Some scholars now use the term “network cultural imperialism” to describe this phenomenon. The United States holds a dominant position in internet hardware and software fields. Taking social media commonly used by Thai people as an example, during the 2019 Thai general election, Thai political parties campaigned via social media for the first time, with platforms such as Line, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram becoming important channels for Thai political parties to disseminate information. These four representative social platforms are all dominated by American and Japanese companies, whose capitalist media control and guide public opinion through platform discourse advantages to achieve predetermined strategies aimed at safeguarding their own interests.

2.2 Ambiguous Positioning of Yunnan Daily Press Group’ s Communication Toward Thailand

With the rapid development of information technology, the era of mediatization has arrived, where almost everyone can voice their opinions on the internet. The dispersion of communication channels and diversification of information have rendered the government-dominated, one-way communication model obsolete. In its “going out” process, Yunnan Daily Press Group still relies on traditional media as the backbone, supplemented by online new media in its communication layout. Although it has adopted certain online media as extensions, the development level is far from sufficient, with the overall model still being one-way external communication. Following the trend of the times, the communication methods of online new media are equally important as those of traditional media. Online new media platforms allow users to communicate simultaneously on social platforms, and their ability and effectiveness in disseminating information far surpass traditional media [7]. Expanding the development of internet social media platforms fundamentally compensates for the traditional model’ s shortcomings of single information release channels, limited audience participation, lagging information updates, and minimal dissemination content. It can not only deliver precise information to user groups based on their interests, broaden communication and exchange models, and enhance user experience, but also increase user stickiness.

According to data from the *2021 Thailand Digital Report* jointly released by We Are Social and Hootsuite, as of January 2021, Thailand’ s total population was approximately 69.88 million, of which about 55 million were social media users. The number of social media users in Thailand accounts for 78.7% of the total population [8]. Social media platforms encompass almost all social strata in Thailand. However, when Yunnan Daily Press Group utilizes social

media platforms to conduct communication and exchanges with Thailand, its content selection often proceeds from its own concepts, propositions, and policies, targeting the entire Thailand or even ASEAN as the communication objective without precise design of communication content. Conducting public diplomacy requires engaging in dialogue with Thai people on an equal footing, understanding their aspirations through interactive exchanges. Big data analysis can enhance the efficiency of digital public diplomacy, truly achieving “people-to-people connectivity” with Thai citizens. As an important component of building a community with a shared future for neighboring countries, culture promotes all-round, multi-field exchanges and cooperation between China and other countries. Therefore, communication toward Thailand must consider Thailand’s national and regional geographical environmental characteristics, political systems, local customs, value appeals, and acceptance habits [9]. Proceeding from Yunnan’s actual conditions, relying on vision statements, expressions of goodwill, and media linkage orientation, and interpreting with the concept of mutual benefit, ultimately achieves the perfect narration of “Chinese stories.”

2.3 Insufficient Research Depth on Thailand

Although Thailand is the only constitutional monarchy in Southeast Asia with unique folk customs, it has had profound historical ties with China since ancient times, with cross-regional population flows enabling continuous cultural exchange and collision. Southwestern Chinese culture and related Thai culture share considerable affinity, which should constitute an advantage for communication toward Thailand. However, in practice, research on various aspects of Thai society remains incomplete, with insufficient think tanks and media personnel who thoroughly understand Thailand’s political, social, business, and public sentiments. These constitute fundamental deficiencies in current China-Thailand communication and exchange. Investigation of various strata, regions, and audiences in Thai society also represents an important foundational condition for determining the direction of Yunnan’s strategic communication toward Thailand. Without fully considering the needs of Thai audiences, the extensive output of Yunnan’s regional culture without targeted techniques or methods will significantly compromise communication effectiveness. Therefore, in-depth research on Thai audience needs plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of Yunnan Daily Press Group’s strategic communication toward Thailand.

3. Construction of Yunnan Daily Press Group’s Strategic Communication Guarantee System Toward Thailand

With continuous advancement in reform, opening-up, and international affairs, international communication has gradually gained attention as an important component of external exchange. As a key province in China’s radiation toward Southeast Asia, Yunnan’s unique geographical advantages play an undeniable role in disseminating Yunnan stories, shaping China’s image, and enhancing its own regional international communication capabilities. Yunnan’s unique

geographical factors combined with its distinctive stories require scientific and systematic institutional frameworks to guarantee Yunnan Daily Press Group' s precise strategic communication toward Thailand, thereby laying a solid foundation for creating an amiable and charming Chinese image and exporting Chinese culture to Thailand. This can be specifically summarized in the following aspects.

3.1 Innovation in Communication Concepts and Research Approaches

While adhering to the principle of giving equal importance to print and online media, Yunnan Daily Press Group actively promotes cooperation with Thai media. Research on communication effectiveness toward Thailand should focus on several aspects: analyzing and comparing Yunnan Daily Press Group' s communication content and forms in Thailand with successful cases of national external communication, summarizing successful experiences to address choices in communication methods, content and its connotations, and the use of communication techniques. This involves scientifically analyzing the current status and effects of Yunnan Daily Press Group' s communication toward Thailand, reflecting on problems and deficiencies in the communication process, and providing scientific foundations for strategies to enhance China' s cultural communication effectiveness toward Thailand. In terms of communication effects, consideration must be given to Thailand' s social background and the acceptance habits of Thai audiences.

3.2 Strengthening Media Convergence and Deeply Exploring Regional Resource Advantages

Yunnan Daily Press Group should deeply explore excellent cultural resources native to Yunnan. As the Chinese province with the most ethnic minorities, Yunnan possesses rich tourism and cultural resources, producing numerous outstanding artistic works in fields including dance, painting, film and television, among others. By selecting relevant artistic works with distinctive Yunnan characteristics for communication toward Thailand and identifying convergence points between local excellent cultural resources and Thailand, this approach not only showcases Yunnan' s unique cultural resources but also enhances Thai people' s understanding of Yunnan and China. In the process of promoting ethnic culture, critical inheritance should be practiced, continuously absorbing and drawing upon advanced world cultures and technologies to propel the advancement of ethnic culture, constantly creating more outstanding ethnic cultural works and enriching local resources [10].

In promoting media convergence, Yunnan Daily Press Group should actively strengthen cooperation with Thai media. Simultaneously, it should make good use of its own communication platforms toward Thailand, local Thai media platforms, and communication methods between media from both countries to form a media communication system featuring resource integration, rational structure, differentiated development, and collaborative efficiency. For multi-

channel media communication, the Group should adopt methods such as unblocking information collection channels and building structural pathways for information classification and integration. This requires not only internal coordination but also guidance and support from relevant policies in both China and Thailand.

3.3 Fully Leveraging Think Tank and Talent Advantages

Yunnan Daily Press Group should continuously upgrade technology by building technical think tanks to ensure the stability of its communication toward Thailand. Applying think tanks to media communication helps disseminate the value system of socialism with Chinese characteristics and gather Yunnan's unique local customs. In intelligent thinking-based news production models and intelligent pan-content production models, fully leveraging think tanks holds profound significance for Yunnan Daily Press Group's communication toward Thailand. Yunnan Daily Press Group should cooperate with relevant domestic and Thai schools to implement talent cultivation programs. Perfect media communication talent cultivation policies are key factors ensuring the stability and enhancement of Yunnan Daily Press Group's communication toward Thailand. Guided by talent cultivation planning policies for journalism and communication formulated under the socialist system with Chinese characteristics as the strategic direction, integrating the Marxist view of journalism throughout the entire process and all aspects of talent cultivation, adhering to clear political positions and directions, consolidating professional spirit and moral education, guiding students to uphold journalistic ethics, fulfill their social responsibilities in communication work toward Thailand, and strengthening their sense of mission and responsibility for this work. The Group should consistently uphold the socialist direction in running schools, ensuring clear strategic intentions and orientations, accurately grasping the discourse system of socialist ideology with Chinese characteristics and related academic discourse accumulation, and memorizing confidential news or publicity policies [11]. Simultaneously, it should draw upon relevant experiences in responding to international crisis events to vigorously conduct training on communication toward Thailand. Through normalized professional training and practice-oriented theoretical training, the Group can enhance the precision and professionalism of its journalists' information collection, clarify participants' responsibilities and missions, continuously improve their sense of mission and work capabilities, and cultivate them as experts in communication toward Thailand.

3.4 Precisely Shaping a Comprehensive, Three-Dimensional, and Clear Regional Image

In recent years, the term "urban image" has gradually entered public view. Urban image construction represents not only a city's facade but also embodies the condensation of a region's cultural elements. Consequently, urban image is constructed through representative characteristic elements of cities or regions.

Urban image serves not only as a symbol of a city but also as its intangible asset [12]. In its communication process toward Thailand, Yunnan Daily Press Group represents the entire Yunnan region, making the construction of a regionally distinctive image crucial. Led by Yunnan Daily Press Group and in cooperation with Yunnan's Department of Culture and Tourism and relevant design institutions, the Group should 梳理 and 挖掘 materials such as photos, videos, and texts containing high-quality cultural elements from within Yunnan to constitute Yunnan's regional image IP repository. By employing distinctive regional elements, Yunnan's overall image becomes more recognizable, thereby solidifying Yunnan's image in the minds of Thai audiences and bringing a characteristic Yunnan image to the Thai stage.

The development of Yunnan Daily Press Group's strategic communication work toward Thailand helps promote the construction of a community with a shared future for neighboring countries, boosts China's international communication work process, enhances China's discourse construction and public opinion leadership capabilities in the international community, and presents a real, great, and outstanding Chinese image to the world. In the process of communicating with Thailand, by combining local conditions in Thailand and gradually enhancing China's cultural communication effectiveness toward Thailand, the Group vigorously publicizes China, tells China's stories well, disseminates China's voice, consolidates friendship between the Chinese and Thai peoples, promotes relationship development with countries and regions along the Belt and Road, and facilitates the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative in Southeast Asian countries along the route as well as deep-level exchanges between China and these countries and regions.

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(Executive Editor: Zhang Xiaojing)

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv –Machine translation. Verify with original.