

The Transformation of China's International Communication Paradigm in Social Media and Feminism - Taking Overseas Media's Comments on China's National Diplomatic Female Spokespersons as an Example

Danlei Ruan

*Department of English, Shenzhen University, Shenzhen, China
sauranbo2762447@gmail.com*

Abstract. In the era of deep integration of globalization and digitization, the international communication landscape is undergoing profound changes. The rise of social media has broken the spatial-temporal barriers of traditional communication, while the global spread of feminist discourse is reshaping the gender dimension of power expression. This article takes Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons Hua Chunying and Mao Ning as the research subjects, with relevant reports from “The New York Times” and “The Times” between 2020 and 2025 as samples. The research explores the transformation of China's international communication paradigm under the dual influence of social media and feminist discourse, illustrating Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons, by leveraging direct dialogues constructed through social media, dismantle the “center-periphery” communication rules dominated by western mainstream media. It proves that their practices not only challenge gender stereotypes in international communication but also reconstruct power relations of feminist discourse, providing a practical path for building a new international communication framework of diversity and coexistence.

Keywords: social media, feminism, international communication

1. Introduction

The research aims to explore the transformation of China's international communication paradigm through the unique perspective of female Chinese diplomatic spokespersons, against the backdrop of the vigorous development of social media and the increasing prominence of feminist discourse.

Firstly, focusing on the social media practices of Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons, it explores how they break through the traditional one-way linear model of international communication, construct new communication paths and discourse spaces. Secondly, it investigates the narrative logic and cognitive differences of international media towards female Chinese foreign affairs spokespersons from a feminist discourse perspective. The study dissects the gender role perception, professional ability evaluation, and cultural background presented by Western mainstream media in their reports, revealing the underlying gender power structure and ideological

biases. At the same time, within a broader framework of gender and communication, it interprets how the infiltration of feminist discourse changes the narrative methods and value orientations of international communication, as well as the impact and reshaping of this narrative logic by the feminist trend. Moreover, it reveals the essential mechanisms and contradictory nature of the communication paradigm transformation. By dissecting overseas media commentary on China's female diplomatic spokespersons, the study exposes the contradictions embedded in international narratives and their intricate entanglement with Chinese feminist discourse. It clarifies both the drivers and the real-world obstacles reshaping China's global communication paradigm, offering fresh theoretical and practical lenses for grasping the nation's evolving role on the world stage.

2. Methods

2.1. Sample collection

This study selects the reports and comments on Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons in "The New York Times" and "The Times" from 2020 to 2025 as research samples, based on their irreparable influence on the international media landscape. "The New York Times" is one of the most internationally influential newspapers in the United States, with readership covering the entire world and strong agenda-setting ability in politics, economy, and culture. The newspaper has won numerous "Pulitzer Prizes" and is renowned for its in-depth investigations, rigorous reporting, and independent stance, exerting a significant influence on public opinion and policy-making. In today's digital age, it maintains profitability through a paid subscription model, becoming a model for traditional media transformation and expanding its global readership. As the oldest national newspaper in the UK, with authoritative coverage of Commonwealth and European affairs, "The Times" has won the "British News Awards" many times. These two newspapers have incomparable control of discourse and representatives in international communication, whose reports and comments reflect the viewpoints of Western media to a large extent.

2.2. Case analysis

This research is conducted on relevant reports of the current and former Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons, Mao Ning and Hua Chunying. They are chosen as cases because of their frequent appearance on the international stage, receiving extensive attention from the international community. Numerous overseas media outlets provide rich coverage and interpretations of them, offering sufficient materials for the research. This paper conducts an in-depth content analysis regarding gender roles, professional capabilities, and cultural backgrounds of them. During the analysis, multiple dimensions will be considered, ranging from their professional performances to their Chinese cultural background and related diplomatic policies.

3. New language of social media

3.1. Social media reshapes the core features of international communication

The immediacy of social media has completely transformed the speed and reach of the dissemination of diplomatic information. Formerly, information often had to go through multiple stages from release to dissemination before being received by the audience, resulting in a considerable time lag. Nowadays, opinion leaders in international communication can release diplomatic updates and respond to international concerns in real time through social media

platforms, significantly enhancing the timeliness and relevance of diplomatic communication, which enables China to seize the initiative in international public opinion arena and guide the direction of public opinion in a timely manner in case of misunderstandings caused by delayed information dissemination to weaken the agenda monopoly of traditional media [1].

In the era of social media, the subjects of international communication are no longer limited to traditional media organizations and government officials; both ordinary people and opinion leaders have become important communication forces. With characteristics of agenda setting showing “multiple subjects and interactive influence” in the new media environment, public issues directly affect policy agendas [2]. This diversification of subjects has formed a multi-directional interactive communication pattern. Chinese diplomats, scholars, and ordinary people can all communicate and share perspectives directly with international audiences through social media platforms.

Social media also provides a richer variety of forms and expression for international communication. Some opinion leaders, such as diplomatists and journalists, instead of limiting themselves to releasing official and stereotyped information, share their experiences and insights on social media, making the contents more personalized and authentic. The personalized contents and “soft communication” approach can bridge the gap with international audiences, enhance their understanding and recognition of China's diplomacy, and build China's national image through cultural infiltration and emotional resonance in a non-coercive way [3].

3.2. Social media disrupts the traditional landscape of international communication

Traditionally, Western media outlets have long held the power to set the agenda and dominate the narrative, characterized by the “centre-periphery” order [4]. However, Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons break the entrenched paradigm through bypassing western media filtering mechanisms and enabling immediate responses and direct dialogue. They integrate “soft communication” strategies with in-depth issues, breaking through the agenda monopoly of traditional media. As the first Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson to operate an overseas social media account, Hua Chunying's Twitter account bypasses Western media filtering mechanisms through frequent and multilingual posts. Accordingly, each of her tweets averages nearly 4,000 interactions, far beyond those of other international political figures' accounts in the same period [5]. The response-targeted and emotion-resonated communication model transforms diplomatic discourse into perceptible narratives, establishing an empathetic diplomatic communication paradigm [6]. Regarding some sensitive issues such as Xinjiang and Hong Kong, Hua Chunying has replaced traditional political arguments with factual narratives by posting videos of Xinjiang residents' daily lives and data on Hong Kong's progress in the rule of law, thereby improving the moral authority of China's discourse through ideological construction [7].

The related comments and interpretations by “The New York Times” and “The Times” not only objectively validate the effectiveness of China reshaping the logic of international communication but also reflect western media's discomfort toward such changes. In 2023, “The New York Times” published three consecutive reports hyping the claim that China's restrictions on rare earth exports threaten global supply chains [8]. Hua Chunying promptly posted historical documents on social media revealing the United States' past implementation of quota controls on rare earth exports, accompanied by the caption to clearly demonstrate China's firm stance of not taking the blame. Under public pressure, “The New York Times” was forced to cite official Chinese data in subsequent reports, breaking its usual practice of unilaterally defining the issue. This direct dialogue model shifted international communication from “Western media retelling” to “China's own interpretation”, effectively safeguarding the rationality of China's international communication.

3.3. Social media constructs a new model for international communication

Traditional diplomatic communication often follows a one-way linear model of statement release and audience reception, where the audience lacks interaction and feedback with the communication subject [9]. However, the social media practices of Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons have created an interactive loop of “issue initiation, user participation and narrative iteration”, propelling international communication into a new stage of participatory co-creation.

In 2024, the United States hyped the “China Cyber Attack Theory”, and “The New York Times” promptly followed up with expert analysis, defining China's diplomatic strategies as systematic information manipulation [10]. In response, Hua Chunying promptly posted historical evidences of the US intelligence agency NSA's surveillance of allies on social media and initiated the #WhoIsTheRealHacker topic. Within 24 hours, this topic sparked over 2000 user-generated counter-evidence cases globally, covering technical details, historical events, and policy analyses of US surveillance activities, forming a vast “evidence matrix”, rendering the ideologically-biased narrative ineffective within overwhelming counter-evidence [11].

In essence, social media platforms enable Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons to bypass media filtering and directly reach the audience, while user-participatory interpretations have completely broken the monopoly of “media defining the truth”, initiating a “decentralization” revolution in international communication. This new interactive model is co-constructed by multiple subjects, significantly enhancing the efficiency of China's international communication.

4. Feminist perspective

4.1. Social media provides a new platform for feminist discourse

The widespread use of social media has ushered in a new era for feminist discourse and activism, serving as a powerful tool for connection, mobilization, and advocacy on a global scale [12]. In international communication, Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons have used social media to promptly release diplomatic updates and address international concerns, not only enhancing the transparency and influence of Chinese diplomacy but also highlighting the important role and influence of women on the international stage. Previously, women are always struggling to gain adequate viewpoints expression. While the emergence of social media has offered a more equal platform. As outstanding representatives of the female population, Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons have actively utilized social media platforms for their perspectives, injecting vitality into global feminist movement.

4.2. Western media reconstitutes gender standards

When reporting on Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons, Western media often unconsciously place them within traditional gender frameworks [13]. This tendency to link language style with gender traits is essentially a form of latent gender bias that often overlooks the professional capabilities and strategic thinking of female diplomatic spokespersons. Nevertheless, the influence of feminist thought is gradually dismantling the traditional communication paradigm centered on a male perspective. The international debut of Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons and the subsequent discussions in Western media serve as a vivid illustration of this transformation.

In the commentary on Mongolian Prime Minister Khurelsukh Khurelsukh's visit to China, “The Times” quoted Mao Ning's statement “seeking peace and cooperation”, describing it as using soft

language to convey a firm stance, reflecting the unique communication wisdom of female diplomats. Hua Chunying's firm stance in response to U.S. tariff provocations was described by "The New York Times" as calm and resolute, dispelling external expectations of Chinese female diplomats as mild and weak. Such shift indicates that overseas media are gradually transitioning from "gender-stereotyped" to "gender-neutral" perceptions of gender roles, which is precisely the practice of the "subjectivity values" advocated by feminism in international communication.

4.3. Feminism promotes the international discourse logic transformation

The traditional communication paradigm is influenced by realistic international relations theory and always presents a confrontational discourse logic of "zero-sum game". Male-dominated, deterrent, and conquer styles have become the mainstream expression, emphasizing conflict and confrontation, which is not conducive to the peace and development of the international community [14].

Feminism, on the other hand, advocates "rational thinking", emphasizing resolving differences through dialogue rather than confrontation, which gradually penetrates into the discourse style of international communication [15]. When Mao Ning responded to the Philippines' South China Sea dispute, she adopted a "problem-oriented" dialogue approach and underlined "differences control through rule-making", avoiding using traditional expressions like "sovereignty cannot be violated". "The Times" stated that this communicative strategy is a practice of feminist concern ethics in the field of diplomacy, which is essentially an embodiment of the feminist concept of "non-confrontational communication". It does not deny the firmness of positions but refuses to equate "strong" or "powerful" with "masculine expression", conveying perspectives in a more persuasive and resonant way.

It can be noted that feminist influence on the international communication paradigm is a specific practice reconstruction: it transforms women from "communication objects" to "communication subjects", breaking the gender power monopoly in international communication; it also converts "confrontational discourse" into "conversational expression", softening the contradiction logic of international communication. Although this process still faces ideological biases and cultural misunderstandings, it is undeniable that feminism has become a more and more important force promoting the transformation of the international communication paradigm towards a more equal, diverse, and inclusive direction. The practice of Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons has proved the value of feminism lies not only in striving for gender equality but also in injecting a new paradigm with more humanistic care and global vision into international communication.

5. The essence of international communication contradictions

5.1. The contradiction of western media evaluations on China's female spokesperson

Western media narratives have traditionally associated "women" with "gentleness" and "vulnerability", while linking "diplomacy" with "firmness" and "rationality" as male traits. However, since Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons entered this framework with a balanced blend of firmness and flexibility, the narrative logic of western media became chaotic. This chaos stems from discomfort with China's development and anxiety over the erosion of their own hegemony.

In 2023, "The New York Times" praised Hua Chunying for her "familiarity with international rules compared to most of her western counterparts", while also subtly criticizing her for "using her feminine empathy to package her tough stance" in the same report. "The Times", in analyzing Mao

Ning's performance at a press conference, acknowledged that her “logically rigorous arguments struggled to respond” yet interpreted her cultural promotion content as “using feminine charm for national image public relations”.

This split evaluation is essentially a form of “cognitive defense” driven by geopolitical anxiety [16]. When China's diplomatic discourse no longer fits the western preconception of an “antagonistic male narrative”, attempts are made to stress “feminine traits” through gender labels, thereby seeking to weaken the underlying national power and institutional support.

5.2. The underlying causes of contradictions in international communication

Further anxiety lies in the existence of Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons subverts the western-constructed binary narratives of “democracy vs. authoritarianism” and “progress vs. conservatism”. Western media have used this binary narrative to shape international public opinion since early, positioning themselves as representatives of “democracy and progress”, while labeling other countries that do not align with their values as “authoritarian and conservative” [17]. The performance of China's female diplomatic spokesperson has both shattered the prejudice of losing voice under authoritarian regimes and refused to be co-opted into the Western feminist framework. For example, Hua Chunying has explicitly stated that China's gender equality does not need to be defined by the West [18]. This unconquerable trait leaves Western media unable to categorize them as “sympathetic dissidents” or simply dismiss them as “regime puppets”, ultimately falling into a contradictory narrative loop, which exposes the cognitive dissonance in the West amid the shifting of geopolitical power [19].

As China's comprehensive national strength gradually grows, its influence on the international stage has also increased, challenging the long-established hegemonic position of the West. The contradictory evaluations of Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons by Western media reflect the anxiety of the West in the process of this power shift. They attempt to maintain their hegemonic status through various means, but their inherent narrative logic and cognitive frameworks are no more adaptable to the new international landscape.

6. Conclusion

It is clearly observable that social media, with its characteristics of immediacy, diversified subjects, and personalized content, has broken through the barriers of traditional international communication and provided new channels and methods for China's international communication. Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons, through social media platforms, have achieved direct dialogue with international audiences, constructed a new interactive model, and effectively enhanced China's international discourse power. The infiltration of feminist discourse has changed the narrative logic and value orientation, broken the monopoly of gender power, transformed confrontational discourse into logical expression, and injected new elements of greater humanism and global vision into international communication [20]. The performance of Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons on the international stage demonstrates the power and value of women as communication subjects, challenges the gender stereotypes of Western media, and promotes international communication towards a more equal, diverse, and inclusive direction.

The image of Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons is “floating symbol” of multiple discourse competitions. They speak for conveying China's diplomatic policies and redefining power and gender on behalf of women around the world, demonstrating their vital role in international affairs. Their existence is also a mirror of geopolitical changes, reflecting China's progress and

changes in the international power structure. When gender is no more used as a tool to disprove other people's discourse, when national narratives and feminism are no longer forcibly separated, international communication may truly enter a new stage of "mutual coexistence" [21]. The practice of Chinese female diplomatic spokespersons confirms that with the continuous promotion of social media and feminist discourse, international communication will develop in a more equal, just and objective direction, making positive contributions to building a community with a shared future for mankind.

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