

Chinese Cultural Approaches to the “policy community” in Washington, D.C. and its consequences: A case study based on the “gateway model.”

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Since 2010, the Chinese Communist Party (CPP)/Chinese government introduced “cultural diplomacy” as a pillar in its foreign policy, along with the Chinese version of “soft power” and “public diplomacy.” Changing its image to a more positive one within the international community was essential for China to be a major global power. China resorted to two major “weapons” in its cultural diplomacy toward the United States: 1) to provide research grants through a foundation in Hong Kong to major think tanks and universities, most of which are members of the “policy community” in Washington, D.C.; 2) to support American universities launching and operating the Confucius Institutes, Chinese language teaching institution. These academic patronages by China were welcomed amongst the policy community in Washington, D.C. and American universities, and this approach proved successful in the first half of the 2010s.

However, Chinese influence activities did not completely change American’s fundamental perception of the communist China. The Washington policy community started expressing their concerns over the China’s strategy behind its cultural diplomacy. As the U.S.-China relations were aggravated under Trump administration, the Washington policy community considered China as a competitor rather than a cooperater with the United States in the global society during the second half of the 2010s.

In this article, I will discuss about the Chinese influence activities toward the United States, especially to Washington policy community, and those

consequences by the end of the 2010s, using the “gateway model.” The model emphasizes the role of the policy community, surrounding the decision-making arena, where many actors, including think tanks, lobbyists and consultants, NPO/NGOs, media, etc., work to influence the decision-making. The discussions amongst the Washington policy community often affect Congress and the executive branch’s decisions, directly or indirectly. For foreign governments or companies, the Washington policy community is a “gateway” to access and influence to the U.S. government.

I will analyze on two major aspects: 1) how China tried to access to the Washington policy community utilizing its cultural diplomacy, and; 2) how Washington policy community reacted against it, as they perceived China’s political intention behind its cultural diplomacy. I will conclude that the discussions in the Washington policy community gradually developed the concerns of American people about Chinese cultural diplomacy. By the end of Trump administration, Congress and the executive branch discussed various legislations and provisions against China, and cautions against China were inherited by the Biden administration.