

***Guo Qi Fei***

Associate Professor (Ph.D. in Law)

Program Director in Political Science and Administration

Department of Public Administration

College of Public Administration and Humanities,

Dalian Maritime University

Dalian, China

***Yang Shu Yuan***

Junior undergraduate student

College of Public Administration and Humanities

Dalian Maritime University

Dalian, China

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY BETWEEN  
CHINA AND RUSSIA: EVOLUTION OF PRACTICE  
AND STRATEGIC CHALLENGES**

***Abstract:** after entering the era of digital intelligence, big data and artificial intelligence technology play an indispensable role in the global political governance perspective. Its typical features are digitization, networking, and intelligence, which greatly promote the rapid development of information technology and have a profound impact on the diplomatic field. The use of digital diplomacy to deepen opening-up and strengthen cooperation with foreign countries is an important tool for coordinated development and competition among nations. In the international competition of the big data era, digital diplomacy and politics have become a new field of competition*

*among countries. As world powers, the practice and reflection of China and Russia in the field of digital diplomacy and politics are of great significance for understanding the current international situation and future development trends. This article will compare the political strategies and practices of digital diplomacy between China and Russia, and explore the development trends of both sides in areas such as data sovereignty and cybersecurity. Through comparative analysis, this study examines how China and Russia coordinate their relationships with other countries while maintaining their own interests and promoting common development, as well as the differences in digital diplomacy strategies between the two countries. Suggestions are also proposed for cooperation between the two countries in the field of digital diplomacy.*

**Keywords:** *digital diplomacy, China, Russia, Political communication, comparative analysis.*

**Го Чи Фэй**

д-р юрид. наук, доцент, руководитель направления

«Политология и государственное управление»

**Ян Шу Юан**

студентка

Институт государственного управления и гуманитарных наук

Даляньского морского университета

г. Далян, Китайская Народная Республика

# СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ ЦИФРОВОЙ ДИПЛОМАТИИ МЕЖДУ КИТАЕМ И РОССИЕЙ: ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ ПРАКТИКИ И СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКИЕ ВЫЗОВЫ

*Аннотация:* после вступления в эру цифрового интеллекта технологии больших данных и искусственного интеллекта играют незаменимую роль в глобальном политическом управлении. Их типичными чертами являются цифровизация, сетевое взаимодействие и интеллект, что в значительной степени способствует быстрому развитию информационных технологий и оказывает глубокое влияние на дипломатическую сферу. Использование цифровой дипломатии для углубления открытости и укрепления сотрудничества с зарубежными странами является важным инструментом для скоординированного развития и конкуренции между странами. В условиях международной конкуренции в эпоху больших данных цифровая дипломатия и политика стали новой областью конкуренции между странами. Как мировые державы, практика и размышления Китая и России в области цифровой дипломатии и политики имеют большое значение для понимания текущей международной ситуации и будущих тенденций развития. В статье сравниваются политические стратегии и практика цифровой дипломатии Китая и России, а также будут исследованы тенденции развития обеих сторон в таких областях, как суверенитет данных и кибербезопасность. Посредством сравнительного анализа в данном исследовании рассматривается, как Китай и Россия координируют свои отношения с другими странами, сохраняя при этом свои интересы и содействуя общему развитию, а также различия в стратегиях

*цифровой дипломатии между двумя странами. Также предлагаются рекомендации по сотрудничеству между двумя странами в области цифровой дипломатии.*

**Ключевые слова:** *цифровая дипломатия, Китай, Россия, политическая коммуникация, сравнительный анализ.*

### *Introduction*

Against the backdrop of a century of changes and technological revolution, digital diplomacy has become a «new frontier» for strategic competition among major powers, and the theoretical value and practical significance of digital diplomacy research are increasingly prominent. From a theoretical perspective, digital diplomacy integrates theories from disciplines such as communication studies, international relations, and artificial intelligence on the basis of traditional diplomatic theory, making it highly interdisciplinary. At the practical application level, digital diplomacy has broken through the traditional limitations of time, space, and actors. In the digital space, the increasing influence of non-state actors has promoted innovation in diplomatic paradigms and conceptual updates, enriching the research objects of diplomacy. Therefore, digital diplomacy is a necessary tool for current great power diplomacy. With the global COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 as the key node, digital diplomacy has gradually developed into one of the important fields of strategic competition among major countries and the reform of global governance system. This transformation is not only driven by technology, but also reflects the trend of the international power structure extending towards the «digital space».

## 1. *Definition and Theoretical Framework of Digital Diplomacy.*

Digital diplomacy is a new form of diplomacy in which digital technology and diplomatic practice are deeply integrated. Relying on digital technologies such as the Internet, big data, artificial intelligence, and through digital carriers such as social media, video conference systems, and online government platforms, digital diplomacy can achieve cross-border interaction in multiple fields such as policy communication, public diplomacy, consular services, and global governance<sup>[1]</sup>. Its core features present three dimensions: first, real-time interactivity. Digital diplomacy breaks through the temporal and spatial limitations of traditional diplomacy, achieving real-time information exchange and sensory technology enhancement across time zones and regions<sup>[2]</sup>; Secondly, the diversity of subjects. Multiple actors such as countries, international organizations, multinational corporations, and the public jointly participate in setting diplomatic agendas. Thirdly, functional complexity. Digital diplomacy not only continues the intergovernmental game function of traditional diplomacy, but also expands the functions of shaping public opinion and disseminating values to the public.

Based on the functions and characteristics of digital diplomacy [3], it is necessary to focus on the interests of major powers, especially China and Russia, from a realistic perspective, and analyze how digital diplomacy competes for information dominance. From the perspectives of constructivism and soft power, this paper explores how digital narratives affect the international community's perception of national identity [4], as well as the practices, characteristics, and lessons learned from enhancing national attractiveness through cultural dissemination. Comparing the differences and common

challenges in the practice of digital diplomacy between the two countries can help understand the transformation logic of emerging countries' diplomacy in the digital age and provide experience references for building an inclusive global digital order.

## 2. *Comparison of Practice Paths and Characteristics of China Russia Digital Diplomacy Since 2020.*

In the current global landscape, digital diplomacy is a strategic tool for Russia to break through Western sanctions and maintain its geopolitical influence. For China, digital diplomacy is a key lever for promoting global governance system reform and breaking the international communication pattern of «strong in the west and weak in the east». So, what are the characteristics and similarities and differences of digital diplomacy practices between China and Russia?

### *(1) China's Digital Diplomacy: A Development oriented Diplomacy Guided by Multilateral Communication*

China's digital diplomacy is supported by digital technology, and its core lies in practicing the path of multilateralism, with development issues as the key link, forming a diplomatic model guided by the value of «common development» and the action mechanism of «multilateral cooperation» to strengthen the country's narrative ability. This digital technology practice is not only a tool innovation, but also an international cooperation network that breaks through geographical limitations by improving the efficiency and scope of information exchange. Under this framework, China's digital diplomacy focuses on actively leading issues, promoting resource sharing, and policy coordination on multilateral platforms, aiming to enhance the transparency and

predictability of international dialogue and build a more inclusive global governance consensus.

The concept of 'Digital China Construction' was first proposed in the 14th Five Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China and the 2035 Long Range Objectives Outline [5]. The Outline points out that to embrace the digital age, activate the potential of data elements, and promote the construction of a strong cyber nation. In the top-level design led «development oriented diplomacy», China has incorporated digital diplomacy into the «China's characteristic major country diplomacy» system, with the ultimate goal of «building a community with a shared future for mankind», forming a complete chain of «strategic guidance mechanism innovation practical implementation».

The innovation of China's digital diplomacy practice empowered by technology is mainly reflected in three major scenarios: firstly, digitalization of summit diplomacy. Create the «Cloud Summit» mode. In 2023, the «the Belt and Road» Summit Forum will open an online parallel forum for the first time, attracting more than 3000 representatives from more than 150 countries to participate, and realizing the deep integration of «offline+online» [6]. The 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics will use technologies such as 5G live streaming and virtual exhibition halls to convey the Olympic spirit of «greater unity» to the world and become a model of digital public diplomacy. Secondly, the intelligence of consular services. The «Chinese Consul» App has integrated passport handling, emergency help and other functions, and has served more than 2 million overseas citizens since its launch in 2021. The «Consular Express» WeChat official account provides security alerts, emergency assistance and other

functions, promotes the construction of a full chain foreign affairs digital protection system of «early warning communication disposal», and provides important tool support for foreign affairs services. Thirdly, the institutional supply of global governance. President Xi Jinping attended more than 60 international conferences such as the United Nations General Assembly and the BRICS Summit through video, proposed the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), and built a «three-dimensional integration» global governance plan for the digital era. Promote the implementation of rules such as the Global Data Security Initiative and the Cyberspace International Cooperation Strategy, lead the establishment of the BRICS Digital Economy Working Group, and effectively export Chinese solutions in areas such as artificial intelligence ethics and cross-border data flow.

In addition, General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed in his report to the Twentieth National Congress that we should strengthen the construction of international communication capacity, comprehensively improve the effectiveness of international communication, and form an international voice that matches China's comprehensive strength and international status. On August 18, 2022, according to the decision of the Joint Committee of the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA), the China Joining DEPA Working Group was officially established to comprehensively promote negotiations on China's accession to DEPA<sup>[7]</sup>. DEPA members have their own advantages in the field of digital economy. By joining the working group, China can «bring in» advanced digital technologies, management experience, and development models from other countries, while also creating a more favorable international



environment for Chinese digital enterprises to «go global». For China, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to break through and leverage its latecomer advantage in the digital economy to narrow the digital divide with developed countries and promote the development of new quality productivity.

From the above cases, it can be seen that China's digital diplomacy is based on multilateralism and development orientation as its core values. China's digital diplomacy has always adhered to «true multilateralism» and opposed «digital hegemony». At the Wuzhen Summit of the World Internet Conference, China advocated the global Internet governance principle of «respecting network sovereignty, promoting openness and cooperation, and building good order», promoted developing countries' equal participation in digital rule making, and helped narrow the «digital divide» between the North and the South <sup>[8]</sup>. China has deeply integrated the Silk Road Digital Economy Belt with the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, promoting the effective dissemination of the image of a great power and making it serve the overall diplomacy. In the unprecedented great changes, while showcasing the «responsible image of a major country» [9] in combination with the interests of all parties, we will closely link digital diplomacy with digital economic cooperation. On the basis of promoting multi-party political cooperation, we will strengthen economic exchanges and strengthen the ties between all parties, and promote coordinated and balanced development in the field of diplomacy. The core logic is «development priority» – transforming the digital space into an «incremental space» for global development through technological cooperation and rule sharing.

(2) *Russia's Digital Diplomacy: A Geopolitical Breakthrough Oriented 'Security Diplomacy'*

In 2015, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs released an overview of the foreign policy and diplomatic activities of the Russian Federation, which first proposed the term «digital diplomacy» [10]. However, Russia's digital diplomacy started earlier and went through several stages of development: the initial stage (2002–2010): through the «Electronic Russia» federal goal plan, the efficiency of information interaction between the government and society was improved, laying the foundation for Russia's digitalization. Initial development stage (2010 – before the outbreak of the epidemic): The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs began to open accounts on multiple platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, VK, gradually forming a diplomatic communication network of «official website – social accounts – international media (RT TV)»; Acceleration phase (after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020): The pandemic has promoted the on-line of diplomatic activities, and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has established an online consultation window. Diplomacy has expanded its interaction with the public through platforms and personal accounts. Response to conflict phase (after the escalation of the Russian language conflict in 2022): Due to Western platforms restricting Russian information resources, Russia's digital diplomacy has shifted towards strengthening anti false information and adversarial information dissemination [11]. After the escalation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the western countries led by the United States imposed all-round sanctions on Russia. In the face of Western sanctions and information war pressure, Russia has positioned digital diplomacy as the core tool of the «anti containment» strategy. In

addition to focusing on maintaining the international discourse power, Russia has also strengthened regional digital cooperation and consolidated the cooperation ties with the Commonwealth of Independent States and BRICS countries, in addition to the goal of countering the Western monopoly on Russia's public opinion in international events such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict by shaping the national image and strengthening the issue design. The 2023 BRICS «Cloud City» International Innovation Forum attracts 30 countries to participate, promoting mutual recognition of smart city technology standards and becoming an important pivot for Russia's digital geopolitical strategy. The substantive driving force behind Russia's digital diplomacy practice lies in its focus on national interests, replacing the demand for integration into the Western system in the post Cold War era, and positioning the country as a «unique civilization country» independent of the West.

Under the guidance of the above diplomatic strategies, the practical path of Russia's digital diplomacy presents the characteristics of «technology driven+issue focused». Firstly, social media attack and defense. Russia strongly supports the establishment and development of overseas Russian language media, promotes the visualization of national conditions, attaches importance to Russia's image as a major power in international news media, explains Russia's political stance, gains international public understanding and support, and mitigates the monopoly and influence of Western media on Russian information. Relying on new media platforms such as «Russia Today» (RT) and «Satellite News Agency», Russia's position is disseminated in the form of multilingual short videos. In 2022, RT English channel will broadcast more than 1 billion times a month during the Russia-Ukraine conflict. By

using the Twitter Diplomacy account @ RussiaRU to post cultural and technological content, we aim to alleviate the Western stereotype of Russia's «tough image». The pictures posted on Russian social media about Putin's personal «tough guy» image have been widely circulated, not only shaping the temperament of Russian national leaders, but also highlighting Russia's image as a strong country. Secondly, the construction of regional digital mechanisms. Russia leads the establishment of the «CIS Information Technology Cooperation Committee» to promote the liberalization of cross-border data flow among member states. Establish a Ministerial Conference on Digital Economy within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and establish regional digital trade rules. Thirdly, the narrative of technological sovereignty: The Russian side has proposed the theory of «information sovereignty» and legislated to restrict the storage of foreign social media data (such as requiring Facebook and Google to set up servers in Russia), strengthening control over the domestic digital space Within the framework of the United Nations [12]. Russia has repeatedly submitted drafts of the International Convention on Information Security, advocating the establishment of a global network governance system based on national sovereignty, which echoes China's concept of a «community with a shared future in cyberspace» in regional governance. Its strategic focus is to maintain national sovereignty and security through digital means, and resist external ideological infiltration. Russia's digital diplomacy policy reflects a focus on safeguarding national information security and sovereignty interests, emphasizing autonomy and control in the digital space. Strengthening Russia's autonomy and control in the digital space can also help enhance its discourse power and influence in the international community.

In summary, Russia's digital diplomacy embodies the characteristics of sovereignty first and security orientation. Its core logic is «sovereignty above all else» and opposes Western interference in internal affairs through «internet freedom».

(3) *The commonalities and differences of digital diplomacy between China and Russia*

The practice of digital diplomacy between China and Russia presents a dialectical unity of strategic homogeneity and path differentiation. The core difference lies in the differential positioning of technological and political attributes between the two countries, which can be analyzed from three dimensions: in the strategic dimension, although both sides jointly regard digital diplomacy as a key field of great power game, China emphasizes the global governance effectiveness empowered by technology, while Russia focuses on the strategic hedging value and counter containment of digital technology, regards digital technology as a strategic buffer tool to cope with Western oppression, and builds an independent and controllable digital system to resist external threats and reduce geopolitical risks. In terms of technological application, both China and Russia emphasize the matrix application of basic technologies, relying on basic communication forms such as video conferencing and new social media to build a trinity of conference, social media, and official media to promote digital diplomacy. The core difference lies in China's focus on the output of cutting-edge technology standards such as 5G and artificial intelligence, while Russia focuses on the digital transformation of traditional media. In terms of practice, both sides focus on summit diplomacy and regional mechanism construction. China focuses on global issues such as development, security, and civilization, while Russia places more emphasis on

regional issues, such as the agenda construction of the CIS and BRICS countries, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

### Commonalities and Differences of China Russia Digital Diplomacy

<i>Dimension country</i>	<i>Russia</i>	<i>China</i>
<i>Strategic positioning</i>	Both consider great power diplomacy as a key arena for great power competition	
	Russia focuses on reducing geopolitical risks and countering containment	China focuses on global governance and development cooperation
<i>Technical application</i>	All rely on basic technologies such as video conferencing and social media	
	Russia focuses on localizing tools for traditional digital transformation	Russia focuses on localizing tools for traditional digital transformation
<i>Practice focus</i>	Both attach great importance to summit diplomacy and regional mechanism construction	
	Russia focuses on regional issues (CIS, BRICS)	China focuses on global issues (development, security, civilization)

Two different strategic paths reflect the two paradigms of China's «embedded rise» driven by technological interconnectivity in the politicization of technology, and Russia's practice of «fortress style autonomy» based on technological sovereignty, jointly challenging Western digital hegemony while providing differentiated civilization solutions for a multipolar digital order.

### 3. Strategic Challenges and Optimization Path of China Russia Digital Diplomacy.

#### (1) The main challenges of China's digital diplomacy

The current international digital diplomacy field presents a complex power game and narrative competition situation. The Western countries led by the United States

stigmatize China's digital diplomacy as «ideological infiltration» through discourse construction, and systematically shape a negative framework of «digital authoritarianism» in conjunction with allies. This symbolic political operation is essentially a manifestation of soft power containment strategy. In 2023, the EU will establish an exclusive technology governance system under the guise of data sovereignty, restricting the participation of Chinese enterprises in digital infrastructure construction, reflecting the expansion of «regulatory power» driven by technological nationalism. At the level of technical standard setting, the United States and Europe have formed a value alliance, engaging in institutional power struggles around key areas such as 6G communication protocols and ethical frameworks for artificial intelligence, putting China under dual structural pressure of marginalization of the standard system and insufficient discourse power in multilateral mechanisms. From the perspective of dissemination efficiency, some local governments' digital foreign affairs practices have an excess of instrumental rationality and insufficient practical value and significance; Low resource utilization rate; Overseas propaganda lacks audience orientation and interaction with the public [13]. Due to the lack of research on the decoding language and cultural habits of cross-cultural audiences, there may be systematic deviations in the encoding decoding process, and communication strategies may fall into the trap of technological determinism, making it difficult to achieve expected results. This highlights the necessity of multidimensional integration of political science and communication studies in China's digital diplomacy.

(2) *The main challenges of Russia's digital diplomacy*

Russia's digital diplomacy faces multiple structural challenges: at the technical level, its digital technology research and development has led to a heavy reliance on imports for core software and hardware, and the 2022 Western sanctions have directly caused the interruption of social media platform functions, exposing the vulnerability of insufficient underlying technological autonomy. In addition, Russia is constrained by the integration of technology and industry, making it difficult to promote the upgrading of social digital industries, which limits the application and play of Russia's digital diplomacy in broader fields; In terms of regional cooperation, the doubts of the CIS countries towards Russia's «digital hegemony» continue to deepen. Kazakhstan's accession to the US led «Global Digital Economy Alliance» in 2023 marks a diversion pressure on Russia's regional digital leadership; In terms of narrative strategy, due to the influence of American hegemony, especially the war between the United States and Russia behind the Russia-Ukraine conflict in recent years, its digital diplomacy excessively focused on political issues such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict, resulting in the absence of flexible content, which made the overseas public form a «confrontational» stereotype.

From the above, it can be seen that both China and Russia have room for improvement in their digital diplomacy, and share common challenges and complementary advantages. It is necessary to adopt a path of coordinated development between the two countries in order to optimize the digital diplomacy environment and conditions.

### (3) *Optimization Path of China Russia Digital Diplomacy*



Although China and Russia have different paths in digital diplomacy – China shapes its image as a responsible major power through «development oriented diplomacy», while Russia maintains its geopolitical space through «security oriented diplomacy» – both face the suppression of the Western dominated «digital order». In the future, China and Russia need to explore a new type of relationship that combines competition and coordination while adhering to their own values and concepts

Strategic coordination and deployment, building a multilateral rule coordination mechanism. To overcome the diplomatic dilemma brought by the United States and the West, China and Russia can build a rule coordination system through multilateral mechanisms such as the United Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, jointly promote the formulation of international rules such as the Basic Principles of Global Digital Governance, deeply integrate the concepts of «digital sovereignty» and «right to development», and jointly resist technological colonialism. China and Russia can jointly promote the integration of international rules on «digital sovereignty» and «right to development» within the framework of the United Nations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and other organizations, and jointly oppose «technological colonialism». For example, promoting the formulation of the Basic Principles of Global Digital Governance to balance national sovereignty and security with international development rights and interests.

Technology complementarity, creating a collaborative technology industry chain. China can export application technologies such as 5G and cloud computing to Russia, while Russia can share achievements in areas such as satellite communication and blockchain, and build a three in one cooperation model of «technology security

development». For example, joint research and development of low-cost digital infrastructure suitable for developing countries.

Narrative innovation, focusing on resonance with people's livelihood values. The effectiveness of digital diplomacy not only relies on technology and resources, but also needs to be adapted to Ren Rong's strategy and audience needs. China and Russia can focus on the issue of «digital livelihood» by jointly producing documentaries on «smart city living» and launching cross-border e-commerce cooperation cases to enhance narrative integrity and improve narrative ability through concrete storytelling, in order to dissolve ideological confrontation. For example, showcasing the inclusive value of digital technology in poverty reduction, healthcare, education, and other fields, and enhancing global public recognition.

The new paradigm of coordinated development mentioned above can not only resolve the dual crisis of Russia's technological dependence and weakened regional influence, but also achieve substantive cooperation such as centimeter level positioning interoperability between the Beidou and GLONASS systems and cross-border data corridor construction through the China Russia «Digital Sovereignty Alliance», reshape the (digital) discourse pattern of the Eurasian continent on the world stage, jointly promote the development of global digital governance towards fairness, inclusiveness, and sustainability, and contribute great power wisdom to building a community with a shared future for mankind.

#### 4. Conclusion.

The diplomatic form in the digital age is undergoing a profound reconstruction: the technological revolution has driven diplomacy from «elitism» and «mysticism» to

«populism» and «transparency», and the digital space has become a new field for great power competition and global governance.

China and Russia currently share many common development directions and interests in digital diplomacy, with broad prospects for cooperation. The deepening mutual recognition between China and Russia is a crucial time for promoting cooperation between the two sides. In the face of external risks, as a major world power, we should adjust our strategies in a timely manner, coordinate our actions as a whole, assume public responsibilities, and unleash individual vitality. China and Russia should prioritize the development of productive forces and lay a solid foundation for promoting digital diplomacy. At the same time, strengthen communication and collaboration, promote political mutual trust, jointly formulate and implement digital policies and action rules, promote the security and efficiency of cross-border data flow management, and maintain the accuracy and timeliness of international information exchange and sharing; Promote the introduction and exchange of talents in the field of artificial intelligence; Actively adhering to the policy of multilateralism, establishing an open and inclusive new digital diplomacy system to cope with the adverse effects of hegemonism and power politics, and making greater contributions to the friendly relations between the two countries and the balanced development of the world system.

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