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“WOLF WARRIOR” DIPLOMACY. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF CHINESE DIPLOMATIC DISCOURSE ON THE TWITTER SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM

– ABSTRACT –

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The first chapter of the thesis establishes the theoretical and conceptual framework necessary for the study of digital diplomacy. The analysis begins by clarifying the concept of diplomacy, examined both from a historical perspective and in relation to its main meanings in the specialized literature. Diplomacy is presented as a mechanism for managing international relations through representation, communication, negotiation, and compromise, aimed at promoting states' interests and preventing conflicts.

Its evolution from early forms of representation and ad hoc diplomatic missions to modern diplomatic institutions highlights the dynamic nature of the concept and the progressive expansion of its scope. At the same time, contemporary diplomacy is no longer limited to interaction between states, but also involves international organizations, non-governmental organizations, companies, opinion leaders, and other actors capable of exercising influence at the international level.

The evolution is further examined through the concept of public diplomacy, defined in relation to the relationship between states and foreign publics. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which focuses primarily on interaction between state representatives, public diplomacy seeks to build relationships with society, influence the opinions and perceptions of foreign publics, and promote a state's image. Thus, the first chapter highlights its transformation from predominantly one-way models of information transmission to forms of communication based on interaction and relationship-building. In this context, Joseph Nye's concept of soft power becomes particularly important, as it emphasizes attraction, culture, values, and influence, as opposed to the use of coercion.

The development of the Internet brought about a new stage in the evolution of diplomacy, characterized by the rapid transmission of information, interactivity, and direct access to a global audience. Digital diplomacy is therefore analyzed as a new adaptation of diplomatic practices to digital tools, including the use of the Internet, mobile devices, and social media platforms to achieve foreign policy objectives. The literature reviewed nevertheless reveals difficulties in defining the concept, as well as the need to distinguish it from public diplomacy and from terms such as "Twiplomacy" or "digital public diplomacy".

Within this context, social media platforms play an important role; among them, Twitter/X has been regarded as a central instrument of digital diplomacy. It enables rapid

and direct communication with international audiences, the development of networks comprising diplomats, journalists, researchers, politicians, and opinion leaders, as well as the dissemination of messages with the potential to become widely popular. At the same time, the transparency and public nature of digital communication generate new vulnerabilities, as diplomats must find a balance between openness and confidentiality. The relationship between digital diplomacy and foreign policy is also clarified by distinguishing the two concepts: foreign policy establishes a state's objectives and orientations, while diplomacy represents one of the instruments through which these objectives are promoted and managed in relations with other international actors.

Overall, digital transformation does not eliminate traditional diplomacy, but modifies its instruments, practices, and relationship with the public. The literature reviewed indicates a shift from predominantly discreet and one-way communication toward a form of diplomacy characterized by interconnectedness, transparency, participation, and competition for the attention of international audiences. At the same time, the digital environment creates challenges related to disinformation, credibility, anonymity, information security, and the difficulty of managing a very large volume of data. This framework provides the basis for the subsequent research, devoted to the analysis of diplomatic communication on Twitter/X and, in particular, China's use of assertive "wolf warrior" rhetoric.

The second chapter of the thesis provides the theoretical foundation for the analysis of "wolf warrior" diplomacy by relating China's rise and its contemporary diplomatic behavior to the main paradigms of international relations. The analysis starts from the premise that the phenomenon cannot be understood outside the geopolitical transformations generated by China's emergence as a major power on the global stage and by the intensification of international competition. Among the perspectives examined, realism is considered the main explanatory framework, as it emphasizes power, security, national interest, and competition among major powers. From this perspective, "wolf warrior" diplomacy can be interpreted as an expression of China's effort to protect its strategic interests, consolidate its international status, and respond to external pressures, particularly those associated with rivalry with the United States.

The analysis of the realist paradigm is deepened through reference to classical realism and neorealism, as well as through the use of the concept of the “security dilemma.” In China’s case, the expansion of its economic and strategic presence, including in important maritime areas, is associated with such dynamics, while “wolf warrior” rhetoric appears as an extension of this competition, through which Beijing conveys firmness and seeks to deter challenges to its interests.

In contrast, liberalism emphasizes the role of economic interdependence, institutions, and multilateral cooperation. China’s integration into the global economy, its participation in international organizations and mechanisms, and the development of trade relations may contribute to moderating state behavior and reducing the risk of conflict. However, “wolf warrior” diplomacy highlights the limits of an exclusively liberal interpretation, as its firm rhetoric and rapid responses to external criticism contrast with the logic of cooperation and interdependence. Therefore, China’s behavior is presented as a combination of integration into global economic and institutional mechanisms and an assertive discursive strategy intended to protect national interests and its international image.

A complementary perspective is provided by constructivism, which emphasizes identities, norms, perceptions, and discourses. In China’s case, the memory of the “century of humiliation,” the idea of national rejuvenation, and concern for sovereignty and dignity contribute to the formation of a national identity that influences how external interests are defined. From this perspective, “wolf warrior” diplomacy is not merely a foreign policy instrument, but also an expression of the identity China seeks to project: that of a strong and resilient state capable of defending its interests and challenging dominant narratives. The use of digital platforms contributes to this identity construction by allowing Chinese diplomats to continuously project and reinforce this image in the international sphere.

In this context, the forms of power are also relevant to understanding China’s foreign policy strategy. Soft power is associated with cultural attraction, legitimacy, and the ability to influence without coercion, whereas hard power relies primarily on military and economic resources. The concept of smart power refers to the strategic combination of these instruments, while sharp power is presented as a controversial form of influence associated with information manipulation and attempts to shape public perceptions. In China’s case, these concepts highlight the complex nature of its projection of power, in

which material resources are combined with diplomatic, cultural, informational, and communication instruments.

Digital diplomacy should be understood as an umbrella concept that includes websites, applications designed to implement diplomacy, multimedia materials, digital activism, and social media platforms. Although the tools and speed of communication have changed, the fundamental principles of diplomacy have not been replaced, but adapted to an international environment characterized by interconnectedness, rapid access to information, and the participation of an increasingly large number of actors.

The evolution of digital diplomacy can be divided into three stages. The first, corresponding to the period 1990–2000, was marked by the emergence of the Internet and the use of institutional websites and email for diplomatic communication. The second stage, between 2000 and 2020, was characterized by the development of social media platforms and their integration into public diplomacy. Events such as the Arab Spring, youth radicalization online, Brexit, and the WikiLeaks scandal highlighted both the potential of social networks for mobilization, influence, and communication and the vulnerabilities associated with disinformation, manipulation, radicalization, and information security. The third stage, beginning in 2020, was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequently by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Restrictions on physical interaction led to the expansion of diplomacy into the digital sphere, while current conflicts demonstrated the importance of digital platforms for the rapid transmission of information, combating disinformation, mobilizing international support, and projecting a state's image.

The analysis of social media platforms highlights distinct functions within digital diplomacy. X/Twitter favors rapid, concise, real-time communication and is suited to conveying official positions and responding to international events. Facebook enables the communication of broader and multimedia content and facilitates outreach to large audiences, including through live broadcasts and targeted campaigns. Instagram, due to its predominantly visual nature, enables the development of an emotional connection with audiences, the promotion of national culture and values, and closer engagement with younger audiences. However, the effectiveness of these tools depends on adapting the

message to the specific platform, identifying the target audience, and having a coherent strategy.

The case study concerning Romania's Ministry of Internal Affairs demonstrates that digital diplomacy is no longer exclusively the domain of foreign ministries, but may also include domestic institutions with relevant responsibilities in international cooperation and public communication. The OSINT analysis of official Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounts, conducted in July 2023, reveals differentiated use of the three platforms. Twitter is oriented primarily toward official communication and foreign audiences, Facebook toward informing the Romanian public, and Instagram toward a younger audience. The Ministry of Internal Affairs uses these channels to communicate institutional activities, manage crisis situations, promote international cooperation, project soft power, and combat disinformation. Nevertheless, the analysis indicates predominantly one-way communication, with limited direct interaction with the public.

The thesis then discusses the historical, cultural, and ideological foundations that contributed to shaping contemporary Chinese diplomacy and its adaptation to the digital environment. China's rise following the reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 led to a gradual opening toward the international system and its transformation into a global actor, a process in which historical traditions and cultural values continued to influence diplomatic behavior.

A first point of reference is the traditional *Chaogong* and tributary system, through which imperial China organized its external relations for centuries. These systems were built around a Sinocentric perception of the international order, in which China occupied a central position and recognition of imperial authority was expressed through rituals, missions, and gifts. Although the tributary system has been challenged as a predominantly Western interpretation of China's historical relations, it remains relevant for understanding the persistence of certain conceptions concerning prestige, hierarchy, and China's position in the world. The concept of *Tianxia* ("all under heaven") also forms part of this development and has been reinterpreted in contemporary times either as a cooperative alternative to the Westphalian order or, critically, as a possible instrument for legitimizing a hegemonic Chinese position.

The ideological foundations are represented primarily by Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Confucianism instilled in Chinese diplomacy values such as harmony, hierarchy, moral responsibility, respect, and the cultivation of long-term relationships. Daoism, through the yin-yang principle, suggests complementarity and balance between apparently opposing forces, a perspective associated at the international level with the combination of hard power and soft power. Buddhism, in turn, contributes to constructing an international image associated with cooperation, compassion, and humanitarian assistance and represents a resource of soft power and cultural diplomacy.

The concepts of Mianzi, Lian, and Guanxi are particularly important for understanding diplomatic behavior. Mianzi refers to prestige and social image, while Lian reflects honor and moral integrity. In digital diplomacy, protecting “face” translates into careful management of China’s image and reputation, including through responses to external criticism. Guanxi, centered on relationships, reciprocity, and networks of trust, can be extended to the digital environment, where diplomats build connections, promote narratives, and counter critical messages. These principles nevertheless coexist with increasingly assertive diplomatic behavior characteristic of “wolf warrior” diplomacy.

During Xi Jinping’s period in power, Chinese diplomacy entered a “new era,” characterized by the explicit assertion of great-power status, the expansion of national interests, and the use of firmer diplomatic communication. Concepts such as the “community of shared destiny,” the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation,” and the “Chinese Dream” combine traditional elements with contemporary geopolitical objectives. Initiatives such as the Belt and Road reflect this synthesis between historical heritage and global ambition.

The thesis also addresses the emergence, evolution, and particularities of “wolf warrior” diplomacy, placing the phenomenon within the transformation of Chinese diplomacy and the development of digital diplomacy. The term, originating from the Chinese patriotic films *Wolf Warrior*, was adopted in the specialized literature to describe the more assertive and confrontational diplomatic style adopted by certain Chinese representatives. It does not represent an officially declared strategy of the Chinese government, but rather denotes a diplomatic practice associated particularly with certain

diplomats and characterized by the firm defense of sovereignty, rejection of external criticism, and the use of nationalist discourse.

The evolution of the phenomenon must be understood in relation to the transformation of Chinese foreign policy. While Deng Xiaoping's period was associated with the principle of *taoguang-yanghui*, namely maintaining a discreet international profile and focusing on domestic development, China's economic and geopolitical rise, together with Xi Jinping's accession to power, favored a more active and visible foreign policy. This change was supported by the consolidation of nationalism, the growing role of the Chinese Communist Party in foreign policy, and the desire to assert China as a major power. From the perspective of power transition theory, diplomatic assertiveness can be interpreted as an expression of China's growing economic, military, and technological capabilities and of its competition with the United States.

"Wolf warrior" diplomacy developed in three main stages. The pre-pandemic period represented the stage of gradual emergence of this style, particularly through the use of Twitter/X to promote China's interests and counter Western criticism. The COVID-19 pandemic constituted the moment of maximum visibility, when "wolf warrior" diplomacy intersected with "mask diplomacy," with China promoting foreign medical assistance in order to construct its image as a responsible global actor. In the post-pandemic period, a recalibration of this strategy can be observed, against the background of its negative effects on China's image and the need to maintain functional economic and diplomatic relations.

The central empirical component of the research seeks to identify the particularities of Chinese diplomatic discourse during the pandemic by correlating the activity of officials, diplomats, and state media with major international developments. The research starts from the premise that the pandemic provided "wolf warrior" diplomacy with a favorable context for manifestation, but also represented a test of its effectiveness in influencing international perceptions. The analysis examines both official statements and digital communication on Twitter/X in order to identify common themes, patterns, and rhetorical strategies.

State media represents an important component of Chinese digital diplomacy. The analysis of the five main media entities identified 225 articles addressing the concept of "wolf warrior," with Global Times having a dominant presence. Three main elements were identified in their discourse: patriotism, through the presentation of assertive diplomacy as

the defense of national interests; self-defense, through the portrayal of China as a victim of Western criticism and “slander”; and the assertion of China’s global role, through the presentation of economic and technological development as arguments for a more important role in the international order.

For the analysis of official discourse, 460 speeches were examined, of which 205 belonged to Chinese spokespersons and 255 represented communiqués and statements by high-ranking officials, totaling 184,192 words. The use of critical discourse analysis and word-clouding enabled the identification of the main themes and priorities of diplomatic communication. The most frequent terms were “China,” “Foreign Ministry,” “Taiwan,” “countries,” “international,” “Hong Kong,” “cooperation,” “relations,” “rights,” “development,” and “security.” The results highlight the coexistence of firm defense of sovereignty with concern for cooperation, development, and the positioning of China as a global actor.

The analysis of activity on Twitter/X covered 12 accounts belonging to Chinese diplomats and used automated data extraction, sentiment analysis, polarity, and subjectivity analysis of messages. The data indicate a concentration of posts in the neutral sentiment range, with most messages displaying a moderate level of subjectivity. This combination suggests calculated communication in which nationalist and assertive elements are combined with factual information in order to maintain credibility. Diplomats also showed a preference for reposting messages originating from Chinese media rather than engaging in direct and sustained dialogue with Western users.

The key themes identified are Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, nationalism, territorial and maritime disputes, the Belt and Road, and strategic rivalry with the United States. Across all these areas, Twitter/X functions as a space for contesting Western narratives and promoting official Chinese positions. At the same time, the analysis reveals a dual strategy: assertive discourse is associated with defending sovereignty and countering criticism, while references to cooperation, development, and multilateralism seek to project an image of China as a responsible actor.

The final chapter of the thesis examines the recent evolution of Chinese diplomacy and its prospects in the information age, starting from the transformation of the concept of security and the increasingly strong interdependence between domestic policy, foreign

policy, and digital communication. In China's case, security is no longer defined exclusively in terms of military capabilities, but includes political, economic, technological, and informational dimensions. This approach is closely linked to the centralized nature of the political system and Beijing's concern with domestic stability, regime legitimacy, and the management of external pressures.

A fundamental element of contemporary Chinese diplomacy is the effort to build a favorable international image. The concept promoted by Xi Jinping, that of "telling China's story well," highlights the concern with controlling and shaping external narratives. Public diplomacy, international media, social media, cultural exchanges, and institutions such as Confucius Institutes are used to strengthen soft power. At the same time, this strategy has limitations, as state control over communication may reduce external credibility, while the influence of Chinese media remains lower than that of major Western sources.

The analysis of the recent period highlights the existence of two seemingly contradictory diplomatic identities. The first is associated with "wolf warrior" diplomacy, characterized by firmness, nationalism, and challenges to external criticism. The second seeks to present China as a responsible, stabilizing, and mediating actor capable of contributing to conflict resolution and global governance. This duality does not imply the abandonment of China's strategic objectives, but rather an adaptation of the instruments through which they are pursued.

The Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative belong to this context. While the BRI was primarily centered on infrastructure, connectivity, and investment, the initiatives launched subsequently place greater emphasis on sustainable development, common security, multilateralism, and the promotion of an alternative vision of global governance. The GSI seeks to promote concepts such as common and indivisible security, while the GCI aims to assert a vision of civilization and modernization that prioritizes sovereignty and diversity of development models. Through these initiatives, China seeks to consolidate its influence without relying exclusively on the direct confrontation associated with the peak period of "wolf warrior" diplomacy.

In relations with the United States, this transformation must be viewed within the framework of long-term strategic competition unfolding simultaneously in the economic,

technological, military, and informational spheres. Twitter/X thus becomes a space of competition for influence and legitimacy, in which Chinese diplomats challenge Western narratives and promote their own interpretation of the international order. At the same time, China seeks to diversify its partnerships and consolidate its position in partner states, where discourse centered on sovereignty, non-interference, and development may resonate more strongly.

In the post-pandemic period, therefore, a reduction in the intensity of “wolf warrior” diplomacy and a shift toward more nuanced discourse can be observed. Diplomatic initiatives concerning Ukraine, the promotion of multilateralism, and the role of mediator seek to strengthen China’s image as a responsible actor. Nevertheless, the fundamental principles that characterized “wolf warrior” diplomacy have not disappeared: defense of sovereignty, rejection of external criticism, and assertion of great-power status continue to constitute important elements of Chinese foreign policy.

The research demonstrates that digital diplomacy and “wolf warrior” diplomacy represent converging components of the transformation of Chinese foreign policy in the information age. The use of digital platforms, particularly Twitter/X, enables China to project soft, hard, and smart power, defend its interests, and participate directly in the competition for international influence and legitimacy.

Overall, the research hypotheses are confirmed: digital diplomacy has become a central vector of China’s projection of influence; diplomats’ discourse on Twitter/X displays a pronounced assertive and defensive character; and China’s presence in the digital environment functions as a coordinated network of institutional actors and media organizations. The impact is nevertheless ambivalent: the strategy strengthens internal cohesion and China’s image as a power capable of defending its interests, but may also fuel distrust and negative perceptions abroad. The post-pandemic evolution therefore suggests not the abandonment of strategic objectives, but a transition toward a combination of strategic communication and cooperative diplomacy.