

# Chinese City Diplomacy should Integrate Resources to Serve the Country's Overall Interests

Reporter: WANG Yanqi



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## Li Xinyu

Director of the Center of International Sister City Exchange of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) which is committed to promoting economic and cultural communications and exchanges among international friendship cities, and to promoting researches on city diplomacy strategy and relevant trainings.

People-to-people diplomacy is very important. It is an important complement to the official diplomacy. In many cases, it is undergone in the form of friendly exchanges between cities. City diplomacy should maintain a kind of flexibility and put together a variety of resources to serve the overall interests of the country.

**Reporter:** On the sub-forum, you had described in detail the interaction between China and sister cities of other countries around the world. In making and developing friendly cities, what specific forms of interaction between publics of different countries /regions exist?

**Li Xinyu:** Public interaction can be achieved through a variety of projects of economic cooperation and cultural exchange. For example, an exchange of folk art groups, a photo show such as the thematic photo exhibition called "Your City in My Eyes", or a joint project between Universities by which people can make reciprocal exchanges and visits so to achieve interactions, for instance, the Federation of Universities built between Shandong Province of China and Gyeonggi of S. Korea

that has helped achieve co-sharing of higher education resources and by which, students can participate in exchange programs in more than a dozen universities/colleges, or participate in summer camps, etc., and also, many Chinese students may go to South Korea universities to learn Korean, and vice versa, South Korean students may come here to learn Chinese, thus to achieve various forms of communication and exchanges.

**Reporter:** We noticed that the cities that get involved in developing foreign friendly sister cities are mostly distributed in the coastal southeast of China. In your views, what measures can CPAFFC take to promote China's western regions to engage in the cause?

**Li Xinyu:** The difference in the degree to develop friendly cities between Eastern and Western regions of the country generally reflects the overall development of China among different regions. In the past, the coastal provinces are more open and free in terms of policy than the west, so the coastal cities are able to take the lead to go out, going abroad to make international exchanges. But today, the strategy of China's Initiative of the One Belt and One Road, in fact, is conducive to promoting the development of friendly city relations between western China cities and cities of countries along the routes. In the past, China's cities were paired with cities of other countries for matchmaking, and during which, we learned a lot of technologies and experiences from them for our economic development. But today, we want to cooperate with countries lying west of China along the routes. And we will play more a role in supporting their economic development than a role to learn from them. Taking the exchange between Shaanxi and Donggan ethnic of Kazakhstan as an example, we found the story is very interesting. Two thousand years ago, apple tree cultivation could not be seen in Shaanxi, a region quite near to the central Asia, but in contrast it was very popular and mature in Kazakhstan. So no doubt, Shaanxi today's apple trees and planting technology were actually introduced from Kazakhstan long time ago in history. But today, because of climate and other reasons, Kazakhstan

apple industry is on the way to decline, while Shaanxi's grows healthily and produces very good quality apples. This is the reason and motive behind that the two sides begin joining hands to develop apple orchards in Kazakhstan. Through this joint effort, now Shaanxi has brought Apple trees, techniques and experiences back to the apple homeland, and the seemingly simple exchange has created direct and great benefit, welfare and fortune for many people who plant apple tree. Actually, there are a lot of stories of promoting foreign exchanges and economic cooperation across the Eurasia regions; this is just one of the countless cases.

**Reporter:** In the international politics and diplomacy, countries often fall into tensions. For China, what roles of city exchange and diplomacy would play in easing tensions between the countries?

**Li Xinyu:** I think city diplomacy is an embodiment of the characteristics of people-to-people diplomacy compared to the official diplomacy. It is also a window to showcase wisdom of the older generation of Chinese leaders. Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) was founded in the 1950's, and began promoting people-to-people diplomacy from then on. When the official diplomacy fell into tensions, usually, people-to-people diplomacy would still go on the track, and will never be interrupted. Actually they are interdependent relations with each other. People-to-people diplomacy is very important, it is an important complement to official diplomacy. In many cases, it is undergone in the form of friendly exchanges between cities. For example, when official diplomatic tensions arose between China and Japan, the people-to-people exchanges had never been cut off. This, indeed, plays a role to constantly enhance mutual understanding between the two peoples.

**Reporter:** In the process to promote Chinese city diplomacy and exchanges, what resources in what areas can CPAFFC integrate them together, so as to collaboratively promote development of the city diplomacy?

**Li Xinyu:** First, CPAFFC has many branches in every province and municipality in the country, which are known as XX provincial CPAFFC or XX municipal CPAFFC. Second, we have cooperation with various domestic agencies and institutions. We accept guidance from our Foreign Ministry, but also collected a lot of nongovernmental resources. Overall, our outreaches are wide and far, and we have large room for cooperation. This characteristic is inherent in the people-to-people diplomacy. City diplomacy should maintain a kind of flexibility and put together a variety of resources to serve the overall interests of the country.

**Reporter:** In China's city diplomacy, what is the role that Shanghai plays?  
And what features has in Shanghai's city diplomacy?

**Li Xinyu:** As an international metropolis, Shanghai's location, economy and culture enjoy a strong advantage and extreme competitiveness in China and the world. In developing international sister cities, it brings together a variety of domestic and international resources, and has made remarkable expansion of sister cities. It has played a very good role model to carry out non-governmental diplomacy. For example, earlier this year, 68 members of the delegation of the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA), who are very important figures in the North American Jewish communities, visited China. This is their first official visit to China, and it is quite rare for such visit we can see. During which, CPAFFC Shanghai has done very good job in reception that made the guests quite appreciated. Such achievement reflects unique advantages and charm of Shanghai in carrying out city diplomacy and international cooperative projects, whether be it large and small.

**Reporter:** You just mentioned the North American Jewish delegation, and we know that the Jewish people are very good at public diplomacy and public relations. In your views, what can we learn from them in terms of our foreign relations development?

**Li Xinyu:** The Jewish people is very wise, and very united. When dealing with them, we discovered they are always dedicated to the jobs they do. For example, if they organize or participate in an activity, they will do it in detail, they would specify when, where, how of the processes. Actually, they are quite detail-oriented men. So in developing foreign relations, I think the Jewish perseverance and wisdom are something that is complementary to us. In order to get a thing done, no matter how difficult it will be, we should move it on and on. I think this is what should learn from in the cause we do public diplomacy.

**Reporter:** Finally, I would like to ask you about your impression on Shanghai forum.

**Li Xinyu:** I think Shanghai forum is a very good forum. Here, we can speak freely, and it is well arranged, whether be it of the forum process, the quality of guest speakers, or the whole arrangement. The theme of the forum combines of current hot issues and the topics we are studying. It is very interesting. Very grateful for the invitation that enables me to attend the forum.