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A Valentine to China [1]

One of the indicators of a nation's soft power is the export of its festivals beyond its borders. Festivals that are fun for participants and simultaneously offer a business opportunity find an especially eager audience.

Of the U.S. holidays, Halloween and Valentine's Day seem to be doing especially well. As any Westerner who has traveled in East Asia knows, Valentine's is a favorite in many young people, especially in urban centers. Chinese couples are reported to spend more than twice as much on gifts and treats to mark the day than Americans do. This year, of course, the day is overshadowed by restrictions associated with the current Covid-19 (Coronavirus) public health crisis in China, but all the more reason to send love to the citizens experiencing the crisis, and especially our peers in the Chinese public diplomacy studies community.

Some are marking the day with action. At the Centre for Public Diplomacy at Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU), the students and their professor Zhou Xinyu see Valentine's Day in the time of Coronavirus as a moment to act. They see misunderstanding of China around

the world, especially in relation to the use of masks by Chinese citizens.

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Westerners often assume that masks are a sign that someone is fearful of their environment and even suspect that the people around them at the airport or in the street are diseased. Perhaps we Westerners feel that withholding ones face breaks some kind of unspoken contract with the world around and that we strangers have a right to be smiled at. That feeling has surfaced in debate around the burqa in Western Europe.

The reality of Chinese masks is the reverse of this: People wear masks in the first instance as a gesture of civic responsibility. At a time when a society is wrestling with a virus that has the potential to become a global epidemic, these small gestures of love toward the community and the outside world accumulate to something much more valuable than a Hallmark card and a box of chocolate.

Seeking to dramatize this and understanding the importance of acknowledging the gestures of goodwill from friends and neighbors around the world, the BFSU students plan to post Valentine pictures of themselves i ɔ show their underlying emotions of love f ıe project has included the two cartoons illus

I send my own love back to the institution where I was so happy to teach back in March 2015. The students and colleagues are in my thoughts and I know we would be in theirs if the situation were reversed.