



Rising Soft Powers

CHINA

CPD

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Director's Dispatches

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The U.S.-China Relationship: Holding Together Through Public Diplomacy

The relationship between the United States and China is arguably the most consequential bilateral relationship of our times for both countries and beyond.

Taken together, the U.S. and China represent one fourth of the world's population, one third of the global economic output, over 40 percent of CO2 emission, and nearly half of the world's defense spending. Given the disproportionate impact the two countries have globally, it is not difficult to understand why the relationship between them also matters greatly to others.

Competition and rivalry between the U.S. and China appear inevitable. Their relationship is generally framed as that of a rising power challenging an incumbent power. There are three possible outcomes for such a relationship: a win-win situation, a negative-sum scenario, and a zero-sum game.

Most of the attention has been focused on the zero-sum scenario. The conceptual expectation when a rising power (China) challenges a sitting power (the United States) is one of security competition and military conflict, because the dominant power will naturally resist the rising power's efforts to overtake its incumbent position. Many have pointed to historical precedents to demonstrate that military conflict is inevitable in such a power transition, with the exception of the United States replacing Britain in the first part of the twentieth century. After all, the United States and China have dif-

ferent histories, political systems, and cultural norms.

On the other hand, the liberal-internationalist school of thought contends that the dynamics of international order have changed fundamentally, given the unprecedented globalization facilitated by widespread, instantaneous communication technologies and the emergence and diversification of global actors. There are now more incentives and opportunities for countries to cooperate than to compete and destroy. In the U.S.-China case, as James Steinberg and Michael O'Hanlon have argued in their book *Strategic Reassurance and Resolve: U.S.-China Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, "The lack of intense ideological competition, as well as the absence of bilateral territorial disputes or imperial ambitions by either side, suggest grounds for hope." And the two countries are far more interconnected and interdependent through commerce and culture than most tend to realize, a trend which is only growing.

Whether one holds a deterministic view or a more optimistic view, the key challenge remains how to effectively manage the tensions and conflicts between the two countries amidst their growing contact with one another and, especially, in light of China's expanding regional and global footprint, including such new initiatives as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Silk Road Economic Belt, and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road programs.

The United States has pursued a mixed strategy of con-

tainment and engagement toward China since the end of the Cold War. The two-pronged policy of “congaement” – military containment and economic engagement – has enjoyed bipartisan support; but is also seen as a paradoxical tangle and, according to Justin Logan, a “hopeless contradiction,” for one cannot have it both ways in this situation – making China more powerful through economic engagement, while at the same time seeking to contain its power and influence.

The Obama administration has continued with this general policy orientation. This reflects an increasingly common view that the U.S.-China relationship will be characterized by, in the words of the noted China scholar Harry Harding, “a blend of cooperation, competition, and discord.”

At the same time, the Obama administration’s China policy does have a sharpening focus on the Asia-Pacific region through its “strategic pivot to Asia” initiative, later re-phrased as “rebalancing toward Asia.” China has not been invited to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a pan-Asia-Pacific free trade pact, in which the United States is playing a leading role. Obama’s China policy embodies consistent themes in America’s China policy over the past couple of decades. However, neither China’s elites nor its general public view his policy as being more cooperative or pro-Chinese than previous administrations’ policies.

Needless to say, there are many complications in managing this complex relationship. Chief among them are the geopolitical uncertainties in regions where the two countries’ interests and values may diverge or collide. The disputes in the East and South and China Seas in recent years are illustrative of such challenges.

Within the United States, the “crisis of becoming number two” will become more acute. Are America’s leaders and citizens prepared for the fact that the U.S. economy will be superseded by China’s in the near future, given the likely continuation of China’s growth trajectory?

The U.S.-China relationship is simply too consequential to be allowed to falter and fail. The cost of mishandling it would be enormous, if not disastrous, for all.

However, it should be noted that China’s continued rise is not pre-ordained. The most important uncertainty lies within China. China’s modernization strategy is anchored around loosening top-down, central command over aspects of its society. Although the government retains control over ideology and politics, its relative loss of control means that it is in greater need of public legitimacy; hence the growing importance of public opinion.

In short, competing and conflicting interests abound between the United States and China, and there are genuine differences in the policies they pursue and the values they embody. Nevertheless, the bottom line is clear: the U.S.-China relationship is simply too consequential to be allowed to falter and fail. The cost of mishandling it would be enormous, if not disastrous, for all.

Holding the relationship together requires political and policy imagination, as well as active, sustained engagement through public diplomacy. Public diplomacy tools are vital to creating an enabling environment in which the two countries can pursue goals and policies; whereas a hostile climate of opinion puts pressure on both governments’ diplomatic stance, leaving little room for policy maneuver and implementation.

This article first appeared July 2015 as a [CPD Blog](#).

Public Diplomacy in U.S.-China Relations

As [Secretary Hillary Clinton](#) stated last week, U.S.-China relations are now at “a critical juncture.” Public diplomacy plays a crucial role in steering this vital relationship in a positive direction.

U.S.-China relations have always been complex and, at times, tumultuous. Amidst the ups and downs of this relationship, popular perception of each other matters, because it forms the climate of opinion in which policies

and actions are considered, weighted and pursued.

The good news is that both Americans and Chinese appear to see eye-to-eye on the importance of their oft-not-so-easy relationship. A recent [Pew Research Center](#) poll reveals that a majority of Americans consider it very important to build stronger ties with China, as they increasingly see Asia and China of greater importance to the United States.

Similarly, in China, according to an opinion survey conducted by [China Development Research Foundation and Horizon Research Consultancy Group](#) last year, when asked which countries are the most important to China currently as well as in 10 years, the U.S. comes in first by a wide margin, followed by Russia, E.U. and Japan.

On the other hand, these surveys also indicate that Americans and Chinese alike identify each other as posing the greatest threat to their own country. Their mutual image is mostly divided and, in some instances, gross misperceptions abound.

Public opinion from China indicates that, while most Chinese view positively their country's global influence, they see the U.S. (and the West in general) as attempting to contain China's rise, suggesting a lack of trust in America's intentions and actions.

Still, the U.S. frequently tops the most-favorable-nation

lists in China. The U.S., for instance, is the destination of choice when Chinese parents decide where to send their children for education. Meanwhile, although many Americans like and even admire Chinese culture and tradition, overall they tend to see China in a more negative light as evidenced in national polls over the last two decades.

The Pew study finds that almost half of Americans mistakenly believe China is now the world's leading economic power; whereas in the minds of most Chinese,

China remains primarily a developing country. These mutual popular perceptions speak to some of the deeper anxieties and suspicions about the relationship between the world's super-power and a re-emerging one.

Nurturing and sustaining a positive relationship between the two countries is consequential not only for the U.S. and China but also for the world. And, it requires the active engagement of public diplomacy.

But the practice of public diplomacy is conditioned by institutional and ideological imperatives and contexts. So, an important first step is to initiate dialogs and substantive exchanges between practitioners and scholars of public diplomacy of the two countries.

This article first appeared January 2011 as a [CPD blog](#).

**When a nation is
seen as economically
successful and
politically stable,
its power increases
regionally and globally.**

China's First Lady

First ladies have long been an important part of a nation's public diplomacy. Now their role is ever more pronounced. In this regard, China's first lady invites special attention as the country actively courts international public opinion.

What is most interesting about Peng Liyuan is that, at home, her fame and celebrity long preceded her husband Chinese president Xi Jinping's. Before Mr. Xi emerged on the national scene, Ms. Peng, one of the country's fore-

most folk singers, was already a household name, and her popularity has spanned the past three decades.

While there is growing recognition that Peng is a valuable asset for China's public diplomacy, there is much less understanding of the role she can and will play.

If we take a look at the American first ladies in recent times, their role runs the gamut from "ceremonial backdrop" in the case of Laura Bush to "substantive

world figure” in Hillary Clinton. Even Hillary Clinton’s first ladyship evolved over the years, from her “I-could’ve-stayed-home-and-baked-cookies” comment and her failed attempt to overhaul the nation’s health care, to a more conventional profile of championing women’s and children’s issues.

Ms. Peng has accompanied her husband on several state visits. Her presence on these trips, highly publicized in the Chinese media, represented a major shift in China’s approach as regards its first lady. But her exact role remains ambivalent. And how this will unfold will be reflective of China’s political reality as well as shaped by her own personal charisma.

In her recent video address on the naming of the giant panda cub at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., Peng Liyuan came across as being friendly and attractive. Michelle Obama, who begins her visit to China today, also taped a video on the same occasion.

Both offered messages of congratulations, and underscored the deepening collaboration and connections between the United States and China. While Michelle Obama traced the history of giant pandas in the U.S., Peng brought a more personal touch by speaking from a mother’s perspective. Her holding a panda doll while delivering her speech amplified the point. The setting of a Chinese bamboo garden in the video seemed appropriate as well. Notwithstanding a few needed production improvements, the video clearly demonstrates the growing sophistication of China’s international communication and Peng’s potential of playing a more prominent role in the country’s global outreach.

At first glance, promoting arts and culture appears a natural fit for Ms. Peng. But her artistry, Chinese folk singing, is decidedly difficult for a non-Chinese audience to appreciate or understand. Even within China, it finds a much older audience these days. The art form relies solely on vocal performance, and its tunes draw from distinct, local folk songs from various regions of China.

Like their president husbands, first ladies are increasingly expected to enter the foray of pop culture, especially when it comes to engaging with a younger demographic. Ms. Peng certainly doesn’t have the on-camera stiffness typical of many Chinese officials. But to what extent she can venture into the wider media

world remains to be seen.

If Michelle Obama is, as The New York Times reporter Jennifer Steinhauer wrote, “the embodiment of the contemporary, urban, well-heeled, middle-aged American woman,” what Peng Liyuan stands for both at home and abroad is less clear. This is in fact indicative of a larger challenge facing China’s soft power efforts, as the country’s identity is in constant flux. Amidst rapid change, there has been a lack of a clear, compelling, consistent narrative about what the country represents and its global role.

While Mrs. Obama talks freely about her PTA meetings, restaurant choices, films she likes and fitness routines, we don’t know what Ms. Peng can and will share to engage the broader public. We may find out more about her as a host during Michelle Obama’s visit to China this week.

Moreover, it is important to recognize that the international image of the Chinese first lady is also a function of the changing Western perception of Chinese (or Asian) women in general. Gone are the days when the orientalist feminine mystique dominated the popular imagination, as in the case of the “beautiful, powerful, and sexy” Meiling Soong (Madame Chiang Kai-shek), who charmed a generation of Americans in the 1930s and 40s.

The primary focus of attention in first-lady diplomacy has been facilitating a meaningful, supportive climate for countries to pursue constructive relationships. This is no less important than policy advocacy. In fact, such public diplomacy is fundamental to a nation’s effectiveness in international affairs. It is increasingly doubtful that any significant foreign policy agenda can be achieved without the support of the public, especially when dealing with countries where the middle class flourishes. Indeed, given the centrality and complexity of the U.S.-China relations, first-lady diplomacy has an indispensable role in improving the bilateral ties.

This article first appeared March 2014 as a [CPD blog](#).

Despite her growing presence on the world stage, Peng’s exact role remains ambivalent

Mr. Xi Comes to America's Heartland

Muscatine, Iowa, is to play host to a special guest on Wednesday, when China's Vice President Xi Jinping, the nation's presumed next leader, returns to the small town he first visited as part of a sister-state program more than two decades ago. Mr. Xi's journey to America's heartland underscores the importance of the public dimension of U.S-China diplomacy.

Despite growing and deeper ties, U.S. and China relations seem more volatile and fragile than ever. While the two governments have proclaimed to pursue a "positive, cooperative and comprehensive" relationship, there is, in the recent words of a senior Chinese official, a "[trust deficit](#)" between Beijing and Washington.

Trust is invariably a function of risk, and risk perception is heightened in times of great uncertainty. The China in 1985, when Mr. Xi was last in Iowa, certainly feels like a lifetime ago. Although what China has since accomplished is truly remarkable, the speed and velocity of development has also exacted immense social and environmental costs that the country is beginning to grapple with. Similarly, contemporary America is confronted with the daunting challenges of wrestling with the redistribution of work and wealth, unleashed by global capitalism, and of re-adjusting its evolving international role in light of the "[rise of the rest](#)."

Indeed, competing and conflicting interests abound between the two countries; and there are genuine differences in policy pursuits and the values they embody. These shifting realities are likely to be further complicated and tested by this year's [political transitions](#).

Nevertheless, the bottom line is clear: the U.S.-China relationship is simply too consequential to let it falter and fail. The cost of mishandling it will be enormous, possibly disastrous, for the two peoples and beyond.

While the two governments continue to negotiate differences and to adjust and accommodate each other's priorities, public diplomacy, invaluable for laying the broad and solid foundation of trust, must come to the fore.

At times the differences concerning the two countries may be overdrawn. In fact, mutual public opinion has been relatively stable over the last two decades. National polls (e.g., Gallup, Pew Research Center) indicate that, barring a few isolated time periods, Americans' positive and negative views of China have respectively hovered around 40-50 percent, trending slightly towards the negative. Meanwhile, Americans have consistently shown admiration of Chinese culture. As for America's image in China, anti-U.S. sentiments by some vocal Chinese netizens aside, the mere fact that Chinese parents have been clamoring to send their sons and daughters to American universities at "full freight" speaks volume of the attraction and prestige of what this country has to offer.

High-level official visits, such as this one, are by design symbolic, media-oriented events. Since China's "soft power" efforts have largely been bi-coastal, Mr. Xi's trip to the fly-over country is particularly noteworthy.

Iowa occupies a special place in the American national imagination, from the vigorous presidential caucuses every four years, to the still yet timeless landscape mythologized in Grand Wood's paintings. While not a microcosm or the "MagicState" representative of the entire country in the social scientific sense, Iowa and, for that matter, the Midwest, exude a certain "middle-ness" that, as author [Colin Woodard](#) wrote, serves as an "enormously influential moderating force in continental politics."



Image by [Mahinda Rajapaksa](#)

Sarah Lande of Muscatine, who hosted a dinner for Mr. Xi's delegation back in 1985, will be welcoming him to her house this time. "I do feel a little bit the weight of helping shape the future," she recently told the local paper [The Muscatine Journal](#). "I hope this can be an example of learning about each other's culture, working together and listening to each other."

Let's also hope that Mr. Xi's Iowa visit will help broaden and enrich the Chinese imagination of America.

This article first appeared February 2012 as a [CPD blog](#).

Advertising China

Last week, China unveiled an ad campaign on the jumbotron screens in New York City's Times Square to promote its national image. The two 30-second spots, titled "Experience China," feature the country's celebrities and luminaries from different walks of life. So, like many other countries, China is now taking a page out of the Madison-Avenue playbook to try to get its message out.

Of course, no one would naively believe that a single ad campaign like this will galvanize popular perceptions of China in the U.S. Nevertheless, it is meaningful to talk about the ad in the context of a series of undertak-

ings China has pursued over the last several years to enhance its soft power on the world stage, from the global expansion of its media properties to the rapid growth of the Confucius Institutes.

This campaign, which aims to broaden the American discourse about China, adds to the momentum of these efforts. Therefore, whatever one might think of the ad itself is really beside the point. In this case, the medium is the message.

Still, out of the 50-plus people featured in the ad, the majority of Americans would most likely only recog-





nize Yao Ming, while for the Chinese all are among the “Who’s Who” of contemporary China. The domestic dimension of such internationally-oriented communication cannot be overlooked. In this age of increasing information transparency, the boundary between the “domestic” and the “international” is certainly artificial at best; so is the distinction between nation building and nation branding.

It also comes to no surprise that China chose, out of all places, Times Square for the campaign. Perceived as the center stage of America, Times Square occupies a privileged position in the Chinese imagination. The annual New Year’s Eve ritual is widely known in China, having inspired Chinese versions of it, for instance, at Shanghai’s own Times Square. In this sense, the ad campaign is also spatially meaningful for the Chinese public.

In fact, Times Square is not unfamiliar territory for China. Sanjiu Medical and Pharmaceutical Company was the first Chinese company to place a billboard ad there. Clips of a Peking Opera performance were shown on the giant screens a couple of years ago.

This ad attempts to showcase various facets of China’s achievements, and its tone is decidedly celebratory. In

a clamorous media environment, spots such as this one typically serve to draw attention and to start a conversation with target audiences, rather than being a stand-alone, be-all-and-end-all venture.

That’s why it is surprising that the campaign doesn’t include any other component. Since most Americans are not familiar with the people featured in the ad, a related website, for instance, would be helpful and even illuminating for interested individuals to visit and learn about their stories and accomplishments. Indeed, the desire to tell, as evidenced in this ad, needs to be balanced out by the act of explaining.

What’s more, against a crowded information setting, whether it is in the environs of Times Square or anywhere else for that matter, presenting multiple images of people in rapid succession results in the audience only noticing the most outstanding, based on their physical features or physical placement in the ad. But to tell a compelling story of any sort these days, it is ever truer that less is more.

This article first appeared January 2011 as a [CPD blog](#).



Features

Authenticating the Nation: Confucius Institutes and Soft Power

By Jennifer Hubbert

At the heart of analytical debates on soft power remains a concern for semantic security on several levels, defining the constitution of soft power and categorizing whether certain soft power activities are a means to an end or ends in and of themselves. However, if, as political and cultural analysts, we are to take seriously global claims of soft power as an effective or even potential tool of public diplomacy, we must not only examine the transnational intentions of the particular policy formations—what “counts” as soft power and what are its image-enhancing targets—but also the specific projects in which these intentions are embedded and enacted. Thus, both methodologically and theoretically, it is key to consider not only the political visualizations of soft power but also the trans-local imaginations and alliances they render both achievable and inconceivable.

This paper considers the implications of this claim through an examination of China’s rapidly expanding Confucius Institutes (CI) program, one of the nation’s central mechanisms for the constitution of soft power.¹ CIs are Chinese government-funded international language and culture programs, modeled on European programs such as Alliance Française and the Cervantes Institutes. They are unique in that they are located within existing schools and universities, rather than as stand-alone organizations, and are directly managed by a branch of the central government. Support for the programs includes salaries for the teaching staff from China, curricular materials for students and reference materials for libraries, and cultural exchanges such as kung fu masters and song and dance troupes. CIs also fund annual conferences in China for American school administrators. This paper will analyze one of these support programs, the CI-funded “Chinese Bridge

Summer Camp.” These are 17-day tours of China for high school students who are learning Chinese under the auspices of the Confucius Institutes. With an eye to the empirical, this analysis will examine how policy is “peopled”² on the receiving end of the process. How, I ask, are we to understand the junctures and disjunctures of transnational policy-making and implementation in both structure and practice?

These tours, the CI mission statement informs us, are intended to “promote exchange between the youth of China and the United States and enhance the understanding of American high school students of Chinese language and culture, thus to stimulate their interest in Chinese learning.”³ This summer bridge mission mirrors general CI bylaws, Chinese media reports, and political speeches that laud the CI program for its promotion of Chinese language and culture in the interests of international trade relations and global multiculturalism. Yet, as both CI central administration and other government officials have made clear, the CI program is also explicitly intended to create an improved global image in the face of concurrent discourses that pose China as a threat to global well-being. As National People’s Congress member Hu Youqing explained, “Promoting the use of Chinese among overseas people has gone beyond purely cultural issues...It can help build up our national strength and should be taken as a way to develop our country’s soft power.”⁴ CIs are thus mechanisms to build soft power by creating attraction to Chinese culture, but also to wield soft power through encouraging targets to understand China as an object of desire.

In these summer tours, the CIs rely upon two policy mechanisms to both establish soft power and redeem

its efficacy. One I call “witnessing the modern” and the other the “embodied performance of tradition.” On the one hand, students are provided with a multitude of experiences that allow them to “witness” the tangible results of nation-building—of China’s fast-track modernization—thus locating China as a developed nation among peers.⁵ On the other hand, students are asked to experience soft power through hands-on involvement, performing traditional culture in a variety of ways that include stage presentations and practicing classic art forms. This is an intended “politics of affect” through which students are meant to demonstrate a desire for things China through “mimetic cultural performance.”⁶ One thus witnesses the modern and practices the traditional as a comprehensive package designed to link the two forms of experience as ineluctably entangled in a causal relationship and to interpellate the students as both “appreciating” and “desiring” subjects, with China as the object of aspiration. Ultimately, I argue that China’s attempts to build and promote soft power in these programs have both intended and contradictory effects, frequently rendering the object “China” problematic, while leaving “Chinese” as an entity of desire. To enhance its nation-building process, China clearly covets the desire of the global community. However, as we will see below, CI soft power efforts may leave Chinese culture intact as an intended soft power attraction, but only when divorced from the broader intended object of desire—China—itsself.

I was a chaperone for one of the Summer Bridge tours in 2013. What follows is an extended description of that excursion to provide the context for an assessment of the intended production of soft power. The journey to China went relatively smoothly. We gathered, 26 high school students and three chaperones at the airport at noon, sporting matching t-shirts that advertised our CI benefactor. After clearing security with minimal difficulty we boarded an airplane bound for Beijing. One girl fainted on the plane, while several others drowned themselves in the limitless supply of caffeinated beverages. A layover in Tokyo offered the opportunity for a gleeful cluster of students to avail themselves of “local” culture in the form of a Japanese McDonalds. The others gathered around the chaperones in the boarding area, chatting about what to expect when we finally landed on Chinese soil. Questions about bathroom options dominated the conversation. “Will we be able to shower every day?” one of the students asked, and I was not surprised by the groans elicited by one of my fellow chaperones informing the students that yes

indeed, there would be many squat toilets. She added, “Well, you are going there partially for the experience too.”

“Promoting the use of Chinese among overseas people has gone beyond purely cultural issues...It can help build up our national strength and should be taken as a way to develop our country’s soft power.”

Hu Youqing,

National People’s Congress member

We finally arrived at our destination, a boarding school on the outskirts of Beijing, well after midnight. A massive statue of Confucius, rendered in marble, greeted us at the entrance. While students were shuffled off to bed, we chaperones were ushered down a cavernous hallway decorated on one side with a mural of China’s cultural glories superimposed with images of its aerospace industry and a bullet train. After gathering in a large conference room, a representative from Hanban, the governmental organization that runs the Confucius Institute program, welcomed us to Beijing and introduced us to China. “The Great Wall is a famous symbol,” she informed us, “but now Beijing is a successful and modern city. It successfully held the Olympics... I’m so glad you find Chinese culture so amazing.” Her speech, like the mural on the wall, exemplified what I have come to label in a different context China’s “exceptionalist narrative of modernity.”⁷ This narrative links contemporary and future progress to past glory in a linear model that weds historical, “traditional” practices and belief systems to contemporary economic growth and technological advancement in a manner that positions China as an innovative leader of the global community.

After two days in Beijing, students in the summer program were farmed out to various cities in China. On our group’s first day outside of the capital, we boarded a bus for a long ride to the outskirts of town. The university had built an immense new campus in the suburbs, its expansive spaces dotted with impressive-looking edifices sheathed in gray and brown marble. We were toured through the new library, a spectacular, multi-storied gray stone building, replete with both

floor-to-ceiling stacks of books and journals and the latest in computer technology. Plastic covered much of the interior. Besides the tour group, no one else was in the library and our footfalls reverberated through the long, high-ceilinged corridors. The campus itself was similar—eerily depleted of the humans and bicycles that populate most Chinese campuses. Thoughts of Potemkin villages crossed my mind and students began to grouse, wondering about the point of the excursion and questioning the need to remain next to the guides. “It’s all so controlled,” one of them grumbled.

Our excursions the next day were to a textile museum and an airplane factory. Our route there took us down vast, newly-constructed thoroughfares and past a Lamborghini dealership. Aside from a small army of landscapers working the green spaces by the sidewalks, there were few people or cars in the area. We spent an hour and a half in the air-conditioned textile museum, during which time we learned that China was already weaving fabric during the Neolithic period and that by the 1930s, China had garnered a large share of the global textile market by employing sophisticated processing techniques that had surpassed those of Japan and England. The tour guide then explained however, that the Japanese invaded and assumed control over two-thirds of the textile factories and later the Guomindang appropriated all the textile factories as they fled to Taiwan. Her explanation of China’s history mirrored the popular “century of humiliation” narrative that locates the onset of China’s modernity in episodes of humiliation and tragedy rather than in moments of triumph.⁸

As we exited the museum, two of the students asked me why the tour guide “seems to leave out stuff and

make it always seem like they [the Chinese] are the good guys.” I looked around to see most of the other students chatting in pairs away from the displays or playing on the various electronic devices they had brought from home. After we left the museum, we drove for a few miles and then pulled into a deserted parking lot. Lunch was consumed on the bus after employees from McDonalds climbed aboard carrying cardboard boxes full of cold Big Macs and French fries and lukewarm sodas. As we ate, the student sitting next to me complained, “I didn’t come to China to eat McDonalds; I came to China to eat Chinese food,” his desperate dash to the Tokyo McDonalds clearly forgotten.

Next we headed to the airplane assembly factory, a joint venture with a western aviation company. Before we entered, our guides gathered us in front of a massive corporate sign and unfurled a 20-foot banner that branded us as members of the CI summer bridge program. The official photographer simultaneously documented our presence alongside China’s accomplishments in the field of aviation. The constant presence of the photographer and the CI banner, and the subsequent evening airing of the photos and videos on local TV stations, allowed domestic citizens to do their own “witnessing,” beholding foreigners appreciating China under the tutelage and beneficence of the CI program.

As we returned to the hotel, I was pelted with questions about why, when students were expecting to study Chinese and learn about China, we spent a long day visiting a textile history museum and an airplane assembly factory. We were only three days into our 17-day excursion and the incessant group photography, the long bus rides, and the didacticism were already wearing on student nerves. “My mom tricked me into coming here,” one student moaned to me. The CI program’s categories and opportunities for witnessing had produced “zones of boredom and unreadability,” as Anna Tsing notes in a different context.⁹ Powerful and even charismatic evidentiary moments of categorization and validation from the perspective of CI attempts to construct appreciation for China, such as airplane factories and textile museums, were not read by students as identification but as betrayal and imprisonment.

Another student informed me, “It feels like jail.” Efforts to construct common identification through mobilizing China as belonging to the category of the universal failed to resonate with American students, who were



Mural at boarding school. Photo by J. Hubbert

seeking particularity rather than recognition. Yet as we will see below, even when the CI offered particularity, through the embodied performance of tradition, there remained a level of incommensurability between the CI model of particularity and that desired and/or expected by the students. The frames of reference through which the different actors attempted to create value remained mutually illegible.

The CIs' second mechanism to construct soft power, the embodied performance of tradition, also failed to resonate with the students, for the form of particularity it involved highlighted the paradoxical notions of authenticity that the various actors brought to the setting. On most days, following several hours of Chinese instruction, students were gathered into a common area for lectures on traditional arts and crafts that they later practiced themselves. The topics included examples of what Geremie Barmé¹⁰ felicitously calls "History Channel-friendly" Chinese culture: globally available symbols of recognition that locate value in an essentialized and exoticized but depoliticized and palatable past.

Such activities are staple practices for CIs around the world, and students who had been studying Chinese had "performed" China this way many times before. One afternoon on opera mask-painting day, alongside eye-rolling and nap-taking, students took poetic license and several of the resulting masks more closely resembled characters from Planet of the Apes and Batman rather than standard Chinese opera characters. Nonetheless, the activity was featured during our send-off ceremony in a video the host CI produced, entitled "Achievements of the Summer Camp." Although many of the students were phenotypically Chinese, including adoptees from China or children of immigrant parents, this video featured close-ups almost entirely of Caucasian and/or African-American students. The racial connotations evident in this video emerged in multiple contexts through the CI program, locating a "target" policy audience largely in the white body.¹¹ Yet, while being "removed" from the picture, in this case literally, the Chinese-American students by and large rejected the "brother" and "sister" appellations they were subject to while being called upon to purchase products in public markets or in the expectation that they felt some sort of "natural" affinity for

China.¹² Their responses to the program reinforced instead their own structural "whiteness" as members of a middle class who, similar to their Caucasian counterparts, failed to engage with the CIs' affective offerings that were intended to produce appreciation.

Here the forms of practice intended to produce admiration and thus soft power backfired in multiple registers, removing the phenotypically Asian students as valid objects of a politics of affect. At the same time, effectiveness was limited through defining authenticity as "Culture with a capital C," in the form of the wearied traditional art project that failed to produce admiration and appreciation. In contrast, students were hoping for "culture with an anthropological lower case c," that conflicting moment of particularity through which, as is described below, students constructed value, but not in the form the CI program intended and/or desired.

Efforts to construct common identification through mobilizing China as belonging to the category of the universal failed to resonate with American students, who were seeking particularity rather than recognition.

Evening activities helped illuminate some of the disparate assumptions and objectives of the China tour. Highly-scripted daytimes often ended with students, tired and frustrated, wandering around the hotel hallways in search of experiences that seemed less derivative and indistinct. Our hotel was located in a newly emerging area of town, affording little in the way of entertainment and commerce. An outdoor night market at the end of the road selling street food offered one of the few local diversions other than an adjacent

convenience store. I found myself the frequent leader of unscripted nighttime excursions to the market, a place understood by students as authentic "China."

On one level, the market excursions provided students with an opportunity to experience what they perceived to be a form of Chinese authenticity in which snacking on unidentified creatures roasted on a stick stood in for the "real." Such experiences provided value and desire, but not of the sort intended by CI efforts to turn culture into soft power. Value here was indicated by a margin of difference that could not be overcome by the host university's endeavors to render students comfortable and compatible through providing them with the familiar. This "familiar" included not only the ultra-modern university campus and avant-garde architecture of the Beijing capital, but also cold French fries at breakfast and warm milk at dinner, attempts at modernity that

were recognized by students, as Homi Bhabha argues in his studies of postcolonial mimicry, as “not quite.”¹³

Where the affective labor of culture consumption, theoretically immanent through the practice of traditional arts, failed to resonate with student constructions of authenticity, it worked through consumption of the forbidden, the off-plan, the exotic unknown. Yet the value was not in the object of consumption itself, typically proclaimed “gross” by most of those who consumed it, but in the act of consumption, locating value in the body of the literal eater of the other.¹⁴ Here the students performed for each other and for the recipients of their Instagrams back home, mugging grimaces for the camera after ingesting deep fried silkworm, or smirking with octopus legs protruding awkwardly from the corners of their mouths. When the students were required by the CI program to compose essays at the end of their stay, those who wrote about the night market were quickly instructed to amend their descriptions—to remove the night market adventures and highlight instead Hanban-sanctioned activities that communicated an authorized exemplarity of China as peaceful and first world, not as a land of bizarre indigestibles.

I conclude this schematic overview with a few brief comments on the global production of soft power. This CI-sponsored tour I have analyzed above brought long-term policy targets into an “identity journey”¹⁵ that exhibited a China devoid of its contentious place in global political exchanges, one that defined the nation through an exceptionalist narrative of commensurability and difference. Its claims of similarity were crafted to create an imagined community beyond representations of difference that were so essentialist and innocuous as to lie outside claims of value production in the contemporary world order.¹⁶ Clearly, in attempts to build soft power, intention fails to guarantee affirmative reception, for this particular structuring of desire failed to resonate with policy targets’ own locally-embedded expectations for identity construction through prefigured notions of authenticity and value.

Yet at the same time, it remains important to heed wider, transnational structures of power beyond the immediate realm. I am reminded here of anthropologist Thomas Looser’s discussion of New York University’s establishment of a “global university” in Abu Dhabi where instruction is in English and the only foreign languages offered are Arabic and Chinese.¹⁷ Indeed, before students leave China, after the Summer Bridge scheduled programs are completed, they fill out an exit survey that includes, among many others, the questions “Do you intend to further your study

in China?” and “If not, do you plan to learn Chinese in the future?” Interestingly, many of the students answered the first question in the negative and the second in the positive, not intending on studying Chinese within China in the future but continuing to learn the language. As I have explored elsewhere, this “desire” for Chinese may be understood as less a function of the CI program itself than a result of global economic forces in which Chinese offers a potential mechanism for empowerment in the domestic U.S. context.¹⁸ In this case, the “Chineseness” of the Chinese language is less relevant for its link to “China” than it is for its ability to differentiate students who find themselves confronting a recession-prone society in which successful futures are increasingly privatized within rapid shifts of late capitalism that quickly make certain kinds of knowledge obsolete as a source of future success.¹⁹ Thus, students often study Chinese as a “magic bullet” to enhance the chance of gaining admission to Stanford or a job at Nike, rather than having a predilection for the language or its national host. Within this context, Chinese emerges as the latest do-it-yourself project²⁰ to manage an unknown and worrisome future. Language and nation become unmoored here, clearly beyond the intentions of soft power policy, but perhaps in its ultimate interest.

Endnotes

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Author Biography

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Media Diplomacy and U.S.-China Military-to-Military Cooperation

By Thomas Hollihan and Zhan Zhang

In January of 2011, Chinese President Hu Jintao visited the United States for a series of conversations with President Barack Obama. Following that visit, the two leaders issued a joint statement affirming “the need for enhanced and substantive dialogue and communication at all levels: to reduce misunderstanding, misperception, and miscalculation; to foster greater understanding and expand mutual interest; and to promote the healthy, stable, and reliable development of the military-to-military relationship.”¹

Later that month, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates visited China to meet with his Chinese counterparts and to argue for closer military-to-military cooperation. Military leaders in each nation have long distrusted each other, but nonetheless Gates invited General Chen Bingde to visit Washington.² General Chen visited the United States in March; a few months later, in July, Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, visited China for a series of meetings with the leadership of the People’s Liberation Army. Mullen’s visit was the first by the senior commander of the U.S. military in Beijing in four years. While in China Mullen observed Chinese fighter planes conduct close air exercises over an airfield, watched counterterrorism training maneuvers on an army base, and toured a Chinese submarine at a naval base.³

Military-to-military contacts serve two important purposes. First, they give commanders from each nation the opportunity to forge genuine first-hand relationships with potential adversaries that might prevent missteps, misunderstandings, or accidental encounters from escalating into a full-scale military confrontation that neither country desires. Second, they create opportunities for public diplomacy as each nation communicates its foreign policy objectives through the media to multiple audiences. Each nation communicates with its own domestic audience, with the public audience from the other nation, and with the leaders and publics of the other nations in the region. Viewed from this perspective, public diplomacy is a form of strategic communication where arguments are cre-

ated in order to advance particular goals.⁴ Strategic communication may involve traditional foreign policy, international diplomacy, military strategy, and domestic politics.⁵

This essay examines the public arguments regarding military-to-military cooperation between the U.S. and China as a form of media diplomacy. As Gilboa noted, media diplomacy may include speeches, press conferences, interviews, tours of significant sites, media events, or even managed leaks. Media diplomacy permits policymakers or political leaders to “use the media to send messages to leaders of rival states and to non-state actors,”⁶ and it also allows nations to send signals that can be interpreted and understood differently by different audiences. The objectives of foreign policy are pursued as the heads of state, diplomats and military leaders seek to influence public audiences through op-eds and media interviews, in which their positions can be explained and put into the context of the other country’s and region’s needs, issues, and challenges. The goal of such communications is to influence reporters, editors, academic leaders, community leaders, and key decision-makers in government ministries or other organizations that can in turn impact public opinion. If public opinion is favorably influenced, then the political environment might be shifted so that it is possible for each nation to achieve its foreign policy objectives.⁷

The current media environment is complex. Public audiences draw upon multiple sources of information and construct different and often competing narratives as they evaluate foreign policy arguments. People judge and value facts differently because they rely upon their own unique histories, cultural memories, social knowledge, notions of what constitutes good reasons, and normative rules for argumentative praxis.⁸ Foreign policy arguments and public diplomacy today has become what Joseph Nye calls “a contest of competitive credibility.”⁹ While previously the strength of a nation’s economy or the power of its military may have determined success, today a nation’s success may be deter-

mined by whose story wins.¹⁰

The world today is composed of globally linked communication networks where “competing ideas shape the course of events.”¹¹ Even in a nation such as China, known for its controlled press and authoritarian government, elite and educated audiences are increasingly exposed to messages from an array of media sources, and have access to social media that permits them to exchange information with each other and with people living overseas. Kuang Wenbo described how in China the development of an era of “omnimedia” created by new low-cost information technologies has left audiences with more freedom and government less in control.¹² It is increasingly difficult for any government to control its own story because the contemporary media-scape consists of multiple competing stories.¹³

This study considers three questions: 1) How did U.S. and Chinese government spokespersons use the media to communicate their objectives and to reach various audiences? 2) Were there substantial differences in media coverage of the talks on military-to-military collaboration in U.S. and Chinese media? And, 3) How did the mediated arguments and media discussions of the visits reflect the foreign policy interests of each nation?

The U.S. Military Role in the Pacific

Since the end of World War II the U.S. has been the dominant military power in the Asia-Pacific, and it deploys significant numbers of personnel in the region. A series of postwar bilateral treaties increased allies’ dependence on the U.S. and created a structure for long-term U.S. hegemony in the region. The cornerstone of this policy was the Mutual Security Treaty, forced on Japan as the price for ending the formal U.S. military occupation. The U.S. presence has served several purposes over the years, most importantly the encirclement of the Soviet Union (and now Russia), China, and North Korea. The U.S. acquired sites for training, refueling, and maintenance, and bases from which U.S. military interventions could originate. The most visible evidence of the U.S. role in the region has been the presence of the U.S. Navy. The 7th fleet, headquar-

tered in Yokosuka, Japan, deploys 50 to 60 vessels, 350 aircraft, and approximately 50-60,000 personnel in the region. These forces can be quickly supplemented by Pacific Fleet forces operating from Hawaii. U.S. ships frequently make port calls around the neighborhood, and each visit constitutes an act of public diplomacy and is an overt expression of U.S. military might and interest in the region.

If public opinion is favorably influenced, then the political environment might be shifted so that it is possible for each nation to achieve its foreign policy objectives

The U.S. security umbrella prevented Japan and South Korea from developing their own nuclear weapons systems. Advocates of the U.S. presence, both in the United States and in allied nations, would cite the past sixty-plus years of peace and stability in the region as evidence that these expenditures have borne fruit. U.S. hegemony in the region demands, however, a permanent and substantial presence of U.S. military assets now and into an unending future. This is at a time when the United States is facing huge budget deficits, is embroiled or is just recovering from costly land wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and when the American people are being asked to reduce government expenditures by surrendering very popular entitlement programs at home. The commitments to Asia have been in place for so long that they have been taken for granted in Washington, and have not been seriously questioned or discussed in either presidential or congressional campaigns. Lind argued that: “because the hegemony strategy is so alien to American and international foreign policy traditions, and so potentially costly in its open-ended strategic and budgetary commitments, many of its supporters have suggested that it should be kept secret from the wider American public, since it is so at odds with what most Americans think.”¹⁴ Lind further argues that the American people, if they really understood the nature of our hegemonic commitments in Asia, might balk at the notion that they should shoulder so much of the cost to provide global security while their allies get off so cheaply.

The Rise of China

The Asia-Pacific is profoundly important to the rest of the world. The twenty-one nations that belong to the Asia-Pacific Economic Forum account for 40 percent of the world’s population, 54 percent of its economic out-

put, and 44 percent of its international trade. The rapid economic development of the region has stimulated global economic growth.¹⁵ The nation that has most accounted for this growth has been China, where, under Deng Xiaoping, the economy was changed from a centrally planned system largely closed to international trade to a market-oriented system emphasizing manufacturing for export. As a result, the Chinese economy has experienced unprecedented expansion. China now has the second largest economy in the world and the International Monetary Fund has projected that it will pass the United States and become the world's largest economy by 2016.¹⁶

China has now decided to modernize its armed forces. In recent years, China has updated its land-based ballistic and cruise missile program (improving both their accuracy and range), enlarged its submarine fleet, and completed a new submarine base on Hainan Island. China now has approximately 66 submarines compared to the U.S. fleet of 71, and some experts claim that it could have 85 to 100 submarines by 2030. It has also significantly improved its communication, intelligence, and cyber-warfare capabilities. In addition, China has been working on anti-satellite weapons and lasers that could help shield the nation from incoming missiles.¹⁷ Finally, in an achievement that will be both symbolic and strategically important, China is developing its own aircraft carriers and a new generation of jet fighters.¹⁸

The increasing military capability of China has been accompanied by a more assertive foreign policy. China has in recent years contested – or from a Chinese point of view has been challenged by – Vietnam (over the Paracel and Spratly Islands), the Philippines (over the Spratly Islands), South Korea (over Socotra Rock), and Japan (over the Okintori and Sankaku/Diaoyu Islands). China has asserted claims over large parts of the South China Sea.¹⁹ In defense of their claims of sovereignty, Chinese naval vessels have actively confronted and harassed American and Japanese ships operating in the area, including recent incidents with the U.S.S. John S. McCain and a survey ship called the U.S.N.S. Impeccable.²⁰

China has undeniable interests at stake. The reunification with Taiwan is a long-standing foreign policy objective of the Beijing government, and this alone is justification for the military expansion. In addition, however, the Chinese remember the humiliation China suffered at the hands of the imperial powers in earlier decades, and there is a strong commitment that such indignities can never be permitted to occur again. Finally, China's

economic vitality demands access to oil and other minerals and the ability to move finished manufactured goods by sea. Currently, almost 80 percent of China's oil imports transit the Indian Ocean, and thus could be subject to a blockade by a dominant U.S. naval force.²¹ Building up naval resources is a means to send a clear message to potential adversaries that China intends to protect its vital interests.

The new territorial claims, build-up of naval resources, and even the confrontational acts may be part of a long-term strategy not only for asserting its strategic foreign policy interests abroad, but also for intensifying feelings of nationalism at home. As Medcalf and Heinrichs observed:

The growth of regional navies, and their more conspicuous use in asserting national interests, reflects the increased influence of nationalism in defence [sic] policy and posture. This seems especially so in China.

Nationalism remains a key pillar of legitimacy for the Chinese Communist Party.

This is beginning to manifest itself, among other ways, in the emerging forcestructure of the PLA-N: for instance, national pride would seem a major reason for China's decision to acquire an aircraft carrier. China's naval nationalism might thus be seen as a 'prestige strategy': the Communist Party seeking to reinforce its domestic position through its external security posture.²²

The build-up of Chinese military assets, the continuing presence of U.S. forces in the region, the more assertive Chinese territorial claims, and the response by other nations (especially Japan, Vietnam, and South Korea) has led to a significant increase in what are known as "incidents at sea." As Medcalf and Heinrichs also noted: "The term 'incidents at sea' encompasses a wide range of maritime activities and situations. It can include maritime encounters that are either deliberate or inadvertent and involve any combination of ships, submarines and aircraft from military, auxiliary and civil organisations [sic] of different countries – in this case, major powers of Indo-Pacific Asia."²³ These

incidents may include the challenging or “buzzing” of aircraft flying over open waters, the shadowing of surface vessels traversing the area, and even the collision between a Chinese fishing trawler and a Japanese Coast Guard vessel.

One type of incident that represents a unique danger is known as “shouldering,” or “dangerous or aggressive manoeuvring [sic] by one or more vessels in close proximity to those of another country. This kind of action is especially risky when opposing ships have no option but to take evasive action to avoid imminent collisions, as occurred during the Impeccable incident in March 2009.”²⁴ The Chinese vessels appear to have become more aggressive in their patrols and have been more willing to “shoulder” U.S. and Japanese ships.²⁵ There is a danger that such confrontations could expand into other even more dangerous interactions between rival powers such as “accidental or reckless firing during military exercises; simulated attacks on ships or aircraft; electronic jamming of communication equipment; illuminating opposing ships, especially bridges, using powerful searchlights (known as ‘dazzling’); and firing flares.”²⁶ Such activities significantly increase the risk that an adversary might miscalculate or misread the situation, and escalate the situation beyond control. The initial spark to provoke the confrontation might not even come in an interaction between U.S. and Chinese forces; an escalation resulting from an incident between China and Japan, for example, might immediately and severely test the seriousness of the U.S. commitment to protect Japan, and thus severely limit the choices available to U.S. military and civilian leaders.

Both nations have acknowledged that military-to-military engagements were necessary and could reduce tensions. For example, when Secretary of Defense Robert Gates met with his Chinese equivalent, he stated: “We are in strong agreement that in order to reduce the chance of miscommunication, misunderstanding or miscalculation, it is important that our mil-

itary-to-military ties are solid, consistent and not subject to shifting political winds.”²⁷ The Chinese Defense Minister General Liang Guanglie responded by issuing his own statement acknowledging that their meeting was “positive, constructive and productive,” while also declaring that the Chinese agreed on the importance of creating “sustained and reliable” military-to-military relations.²⁸

U.S. Media Diplomacy

U.S. media diplomacy toward China involves multiple ongoing meetings and press statements. The diplomacy began before the visits occurred, continued during each visit, and persisted when the visits were finished. The goal was to communicate that the United States was taking a moderate and even supportive position on Chinese military expansion, but also to express concern that a now powerful China was obliged to pursue more mature and nuanced foreign policy relations with its neighbors. Prior to departing for Beijing, Admiral Mullen directly expressed his commitment to improving communications between the two militaries. He declared in a public speech presented at the Center

“We are in strong agreement that in order to reduce the chance of miscommunication, misunderstanding or miscalculation, it is important that our military-to-military ties are solid, consistent and not subject to shifting political winds.”

**Robert Gates,
U.S. Secretary of Defense**

for American Progress that: “as many nations develop, they invest in their military but with greater military power must come greater responsibility, greater cooperation and just as important, greater transparency. When you talk transparency, particularly on security and defense matters, we inevitably come to the issue of military exchange. What the U.S., frankly, seeks, a sustained and reliable military-to-military relationship with China, is hardly unusual.”²⁹

The U.S. also communicated to the Chinese government, to its allies in the region, and to Americans at home, that it would not abandon its commitments to the region despite the economic challenges it currently faced or the rise of China. During his visit to Beijing, Admiral Mullen toured a university and answered

questions posed by Chinese students. In one such encounter he declared:

[The U.S. has] had a presence in this region for decades ... and certainly the intent is to broaden and deepen our interests here and our relationships here."³⁰

Although the U.S. commander emphasized the positive commitments of his government, and the benefits that could be gained from cooperation, the U.S. media discussed the Chinese skepticism of U.S. motives and the fact that Mullen's Chinese hosts openly scolded him during his visit. For example, Chen Bingde, China's top army official, was described as having expressed "misgivings" about the U.S. decision to conduct naval exercises with the Philippines in the South China Sea at the height of recent tensions in June. The general was also said to have criticized U.S. plans to conduct "inappropriate" exercises with the Vietnamese Navy.³¹

The New York Times' account of the Admiral Mullen's visit emphasized that winning "rapprochement between the world's leading military power and its fastest-rising one [was] a fiendishly difficult task," and asserted that China was engaging in a "breakneck modernization of its creaky military machine."³² The media frame was: while the United States was the steady, determined, and predictable power in the region, focused on the same set of commitments that had guided its policies, priorities, and partnerships in the Pacific since the end of World War II, China was upsetting the applecart, not only through its rapid economic development but also through its military investments and more assertive foreign policies. The newspaper article emphasized, for example, that China would soon have a new "still-secret class of advanced submarines," a "seagoing missile" that "could strike ships as far as 1,025 miles away," and "seven reconnaissance satellites." The article conceded that at some level, "China's military ambitions are understandable. The country's global trade footprint and its reliance on foreign fuel and raw materials justify building a sophisticated and far-flung military force to secure its interests, just as the United States has done."³³ Nonetheless, the article warned that the Chinese intended to use new military resources "to rein in American military power in the western Pacific," and to serve "as a counterforce to the United States Navy's Seventh Fleet, which has dominated Pacific waters for a half-century or more."³⁴

American diplomats, foreign policy experts, and military leaders were cited in Wine's New York Times article as being concerned that China has not as of that

time been willing "to sit down and tell us what they're doing and what missions these new platforms and weapons are intended to achieve."³⁵ The newspaper reported that Americans were anxious that the Chinese have been "ambiguous about their motivations" and unwilling to engage in the types of military-to-military conversations that can serve to build trust and enhance understanding.

The willingness of Admiral Mullen to use the media as a forum for his public diplomacy was most evident in an unusual op-ed piece he published in the New York Times when he returned from China. The essay used America's most prominent newspaper and the newspaper most likely to reach elite audiences both in the United States and abroad, to argue the importance of enhancing U.S. – China military-to-military diplomacy. Mullen declared:

The military relationship between the United States and China is one of the worlds' most important. And yet, clouded by some misunderstanding and suspicion, it remains among the most challenging. There are issues on which we disagree and are tempted to confront each other. But there are crucial areas where our interests coincide, on which we must work together. So we need to make the relationship better, by seeking strategic trust. How do we do that? First, we've got to keep talking. Dialogue is critical. A good bit of misunderstanding between our militaries can be cleared up by reaching out to each other. We don't have to give away secrets to make our intentions clear, just open up a little.³⁶

Mullen discussed his visits with his counterpart PLA General Chen Bingde in the United States in May and in China in July.³⁷ He explained that when General Chen was in the United States he showed him the capabilities of the Predator drone and invited him to observe a live-fire exercise. In return, he said that during his visit to China he toured the latest submarine, took a close look at a new fighter jet, and observed a counterterrorism exercise. What was most interesting about the article, however, was that Mullen emphasized that the conversations were candid and that there were disagreements. He acknowledged that the Chinese objected to continued U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and said they were told "the United States military will

not shrink from our responsibilities to allies and partners.”³⁸ He declared that General Chen said that the Chinese “strategic intentions were purely defensive; I said that neither the skills they were perfecting nor their investments seemed to support that argument.”³⁹ Mullen, however, offered no apology for the frank disagreements. Indeed, he celebrated them because “at least we were talking.”⁴⁰

In the next section of the op-ed the Admiral identified the common interests that the United States and China shared:

We’re both maritime nations with long coastlines and economies dependent on unhindered trade. We both face threats of drug trafficking, piracy and the movements of weapons of mass destruction. We both want stability on the Korean Peninsula and in Pakistan. We both recognize the need for coordinated international humanitarian aid and disaster relief.⁴¹

The Admiral then mentioned how the two nations agreed to conduct joint missions aimed at countering piracy in the Gulf of Aden. Still, he acknowledged, there were substantial differences dividing the two nations: “We still don’t see eye-to-eye with China over military operating rights in the South China Sea. We still don’t fully understand China’s justification for the rapid growth in its defense spending or its long-term modernization goals. And we don’t believe that China should be allowed to resolve disputes in contested waters by coercing smaller nations.”⁴² Yet he also declared, in a bold and assertive American voice, that: “these sticking points aren’t all bad. It’s all right to disagree sometimes, to have substantial differences. In fact, sometimes bluntness and honesty are exactly what’s needed to create strategic trust. And we need still more of it.”⁴³ Mullen even leveled criticism of the political leadership both in China and the U.S.:

Our military relations have only recently begun to thaw but China’s government still uses them as a sort of thermostat to communicate displeasure. When they don’t like something we do, they cut off ties. That can’t be the model anymore. Nor can we, for our part, swing between engagement and over reaction. That’s why the commitment by President Obama and President Hu

Jintao to improve military-to-military relations is so important. Real trust has to start somewhere. And it shouldn’t be subject to shifting political winds.⁴⁴

Although Admiral Mullen’s arguments and those of other government spokespersons in the U.S. were communicated to public audiences through many of the most influential media outlets in the United States – such as the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times – it must also be recognized that such arguments did not appear in isolation. The American public was also exposed to arguments taking a far more skeptical view toward U.S.- China relations. For example, a blog published by the influential conservative think tank The Heritage Foundation argued that “30 years of military-to-military interaction have not led to greater PLA transparency, increased safety in Sino-U.S. military interactions or greater cooperative approaches to challenge. Instead, efforts at engagement have led Beijing to believe that it has more leverage in military-to-military talks than Washington, because the U.S. appears almost desperate to have the talks, unlike China.”⁴⁵ The author further argued that:

Given the tight legal restrictions on what can be shared with the Chinese [imposed by the U.S. Congress], the one thing the talks do for the Chinese is to stave off the U.S. from pursuing its own national interest, for fear of jeopardizing U.S.-Chinese military-to-military links. This is consistent with Mao Zedong’s tactic of ‘fight fight, talk talk (da da, tan tan). Mao would negotiate, not in order to “get to yes” and reach a compromise solution, but to buy time, color his opponent’s views, and influence third parties. The ultimate goal never changed, whatever the negotiating positions.⁴⁶

The suggestion presented was that the Chinese were scheming, pretending to negotiate in good faith, while clinging to the same rigid and ideologically focused political strategies that have defined the regime since it was founded. The argument characterized attempts to negotiate with the Chinese as dangerous and perhaps not always focused on “serving American interests.”⁴⁷

These oppositional arguments shaped the domestic political debates in the United States, especially given the approach of the 2012 elections. China has

long been cast as a hostile and authoritarian regime, especially in much conservative political discourse, and rhetoric that depicted the Obama administration as weak and vulnerable in dealing with a deceptive, steely, and ideologically committed enemy committed to an aggressive policy of domination over its neighbors resonated with many Americans accustomed to the narratives of the Cold War. Countering such suspicions about China was an objective of Chinese media diplomacy.

Chinese Media Diplomacy

A quick and superficial glance at Chinese media reports would suggest that there were similarities in the statements issued by the United States and Chinese governments or the media discussions of the need to enhance trust and develop military ties between the two countries. Yet a closer reading reveals noteworthy differences in how the issues were discussed and in the concerns in each nation.

The Chinese media cited statements by Chinese leaders as supportive of greater military-to-military collaborations, but these same reports indicated that the Chinese authorities were more modest in assessing the likely impact of such visits. These reports emphasized that creating trust was a worthwhile objective, but that trust would not occur without mutual respect. For example, the Xinhua news service reported that Vice President Xi Jinping told Admiral Mullen: "I hope the two countries' defense departments and armed forces will remove obstacles and promote their ties with mutual respect and mutually beneficial cooperation."⁴⁸ This same theme was echoed by General Chen Bingde who told Xinhua "Only a country that respects others can gain respect from others."⁴⁹

General Chen also chided his guests with the statement: "I hope heartfully [sic] that our U.S. friends understand this and treat others in a modest manner and act cautiously."⁵⁰ The importance of crafting a relationship based on respect also made it into the China Daily: "It is probably difficult for the superpower that is the U.S. to accept the rise of China as well as alter its attitude toward its emerging economy. However, once the U.S. realizes the consequences of the strategic confrontation and they respect and care for each other's core interests, there is no reason for the two sides to become opponents."⁵¹

Chinese leaders communicated that they did not believe that the U.S. had been respectful of China's inter-

ests in the region or of its national resolve. They condemned U.S. joint military drills with the Philippines and Vietnam near the South China Sea, U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, and U.S. surveillance operations off China's coast. Xinhua declared these issues represented "China's core interests and therefore [they] need careful handling on the side of the United States if it expects to have a healthy relationship with China."⁵²

The Global Times' English-language publication that is read by many foreign visitors and residents of China, and which also has a substantial audience outside China, published many articles about these "core" issues during and after Mullen's visit. The arguments over China's legitimate interests in the "South China Sea" were described as a reason for the lingering tensions, and for the "small-scale war of words" between Admiral Mullen and General Chen. "The US has repeated that it does not intend to intervene in the South China Sea issue, but its behavior has given off opposite signals," Global Times quoted General Chen Bingde as saying after talks with his US counterpart.⁵³ In the same issue, the Global Times warned "In the South China Sea, the US has spoken of participating in 'reconciling' the disputes among China, Vietnam, the Philippines and others. There could be armed clashes if they stepped over China's bottom line."⁵⁴

The Global Times reported:

"Since last June, there have been 20 joint military exercises held by the U.S. with other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. U.S. military power appears ubiquitous. This year, the U.S. has held joint exercises with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Vietnam, all of which envisaged China as the potential enemy. These military exercises have unsurprisingly created quite a stir around China."⁵⁵

The same article reported that in response to the U.S. actions China conducted joint exercises with Indonesia, Thailand, and Chile, and that there were advocates in China who wanted joint drills with many other nations. The article concluded: "in recent years, China has strengthened its military diplomacy. But compared to the U.S., China holds fewer joint exercises with other countries. This is related to China's diplomatic mindset that focuses on building a harmonious world."⁵⁶ The slow pace of Chinese efforts to reach out to conduct joint exercises was thus not a reflection of a desire for secrecy, but resulted from the Chinese

mindset that it was important to avoid war, for “we are strongly against the use of violence and direct conflict, and this points to the type of military strategy we have adopted at the moment. What we do in exercises is to largely focus on self-defense, military rescue or anti-terrorism.”⁵⁷

China’s “bottom line” was mentioned by Wei Guoan, who emphasized the U.S. decision to sell new arms to Taiwan was an obstacle to the creation of mutual trust. The article declared: “as regards the Taiwan question, [the] US is expected to keep the current status to curb any further moves on China’s part. If the US clings obstinately to its own course and Taiwanese leaders resort to extreme measures, there might be an increasing possibility of collision.” Wei Guoan, also warned that “If [the] US continued to take similar moves, [and] keeps [sic] on selling weapons to Taiwan . . . [improved] Sino-US military relations could only be a wish and fantasy as their insincerity might politically cripple the mutual trust.”⁵⁸ Shi Yinhong, director of the US Study Center at the Renmin University of China, told the Global Times that because the issue had divided the two nations over many decades it should be understood that “Contradictions over arms sales to Taiwan will neither disappear nor be solved overnight.”⁵⁹ He argued, however, that the nations should work to repair their relationship to avoid the potential escalation into conflict.

China also cast U.S. spy missions off its coast as insulting and as an assault on its sovereignty. At a joint press conference with Admiral Mullen on July 11, General Chen Bingde pointed out that recent missions by unmanned US surveillance spy planes had come as close as sixteen nautical miles off the Chinese coast, and that two Chinese Sukhoi-27 fighters attempted to intercept a US U-2 reconnaissance plane over the Taiwan Straits on June 29. The Global Times cited the official statement offered by the Ministry of National Defense: “we demand that the US respects China’s sovereignty and security interests, and take concrete measures to boost a healthy and stable development of military relations.”⁶⁰ The order to send out Chinese planes to intercept US spying activities was explained by Song Xiaojun, a Chinese military expert as “to show China’s resolution to defend its sovereignty” since “it is impossible for China to deploy the electronic coun-

termeasures needed to set up a so-called protective electronic screen in the air to deter reconnaissance.”⁶¹ Another Global Times story mentioned the spy plane collision over the South China Sea in 2001 as an example of an incident that might have created a serious military clash to illustrate how direct military conflict would certainly disrupt the bilateral relationship. The article warned, however, that: “Ten years ago, China was much weaker than today. The incident was soon forgotten due to the 9/11 attacks. Had the collision happened today, the consequences would be far more difficult to predict.”⁶²

The slow pace of Chinese efforts to reach out to conduct joint exercises was thus not a reflection of a desire for secrecy, but resulted from the Chinese mindset that it was important to avoid war.

The declaration that China’s military expansion was for self-defense was not surprising, and certainly not new. Geng Yansheng, a spokesperson for China’s Ministry of National Defense declared “China . . . firmly abides by a defensive national defense policy, does not take part in military confrontations and does not pose a military threat to any country. We ask the U.S.... to stop remarks and behavior that are not beneficial for mutual trust between the two militaries.”⁶³ The Chinese media explic-

itly contrasted China’s foreign and military policy with that of the United States. While the United States was a global hegemon eager to interfere in the interests of sovereign states around the globe, China was internally focused and had no such ambitions to dominate its neighbors. As the Global Times reported:

The US quartered hundreds of thousands of military troops, set up dozens of military bases and continuously planned battles across the world. After the Cold War ended, it actively expanded its forces to the east and started the strategic envelopment of China.

In contrast, China did not dispatch a single soldier or establish an overseas military base in foreign countries, let alone to attack and capture other territories.⁶⁴

Chinese spokespersons also suggested that the U.S. should not be anxious about China’s investments in its military since China remained far behind the U.S. in its military capabilities. For example, after Chen Bingde’s

visit to U.S. early in May in 2011, Xinhua (Chinese version) reported that Chen had observed that although China made rapid progress in building its military strength in recent years, this progress was a compensation for the deficiencies of the past. Chen summarized the military distance between the U.S. and China as huge; and that while “US defense spending stands at \$700 billion a year and China spends 800 billion yuan (\$123.6 billion), China’s military equipment is about 20 to 30 years behind the U.S.”⁶⁵ Still another article argued: “the U.S. needs to adjust its attitude. It has to accept that China is growing into a militarily powerful country, and it should stop trying to frustrate this. Chinese military modernization is unstoppable, and any policy of blockade, sanction, or containment will only have a negative effect on Sino-American military relations. The only way forward is to welcome and accept the rise in China’s military strength.”⁶⁶

Admiral Mullen had declared before his visit to China that along with “greater military power must come greater responsibility, greater cooperation and greater transparency,” the need for further transparency of China’s military development was one of the most important positions that Mullen communicated to his Chinese counterparts during his visit. To answer this, a story in the China Daily reported that the decision to allow U.S. Admiral Mullen to visit a military base near Beijing was a significant step forward for China and an expression from the Chinese military that it was willing to be increasingly transparent. “The (U.S.) must have noticed it,” said Zhao Weibin, a researcher at the Academy of Military Science run by the PLA.⁶⁷ This optimistic view was challenged by a more sober assessment offered by the Global Times that warned:

A handshake cannot hide the truth of how these militaries have studied to guard against each other. Should even a sliver of the worst scenarios imagined actually happen, it would mean calamity for the Asia-Pacific region. However, how to prevent this from happening is more important for the two militaries, and a key step for major powers in moving from a zero-sum game to win-win politics.”⁶⁸

The newspaper also spoke directly to Chinese military leaders coaching a more transparent style of interaction, declaring “military officials do not have to fake smiles when they meet. They can guide both the media and public opinion. The Chinese military can make things better by being more direct, in addition to show-

ing U.S. counterparts around Chinese military facilities the PLA’s low profile tradition unnecessarily compromises the intention it wants to display, and easily clashes with U.S. curiosity.”⁶⁹

To answer Admiral Mullen’s declaration that “the United States did not intend to abandon its commitments to the Asia-Pacific region,” China Daily published an article written by Wen Zhao, a senior research scholar from the Center for US-China Relations at Tsinghua University. Wen commented that “In fact, the U.S.’ increased military presence in the Asia-Pacific region is a very important part of its ‘return to Asia’ strategy, as indicated by Washington’s strengthened military presence in Northeast Asia in 2010 following the rise in tensions on the Korean Peninsula and in Southeast Asia this year. Maintaining military superiority in Asia-Pacific, in Washington’s eyes, is an important way of sustaining and prolonging its predominant status in the region.”⁷⁰ According to the author, however, it is Mullen’s belief that China is developing military capabilities targeting the U.S. that challenges the long-established predominance of the U.S. in the Asia-Pacific region. “The establishment of a long-term and reliable military relationship between China and the US is in the interests of both countries, as Mullen has claimed. It is hoped that the US will do more concrete work in a bid to clear away obstacles and push bilateral military ties to develop in a stable and sustainable fashion.”⁷¹ It is noteworthy that brazenly aggressive views were rare in the Chinese press. Most articles urged that “China should remain calm and continue its development to cope with any changes and work out a way for cooperation under the current framework of bilateral relations.”⁷² Such moderate views were also offered in detailed interviews conducted by the Global Times with three Chinese academics who specialized in international relations. For example, Shen Dingli, the Dean of Fudan University’s Institute of International Studies observed:

After ten years of fighting against terrorism, U.S. national strength is exhausted. With factionalism in U.S., the slowdown of the financial industry and the steady progress of economic globalization, the U.S. can hardly find a way out. So it has become more anxious and lacking in confidence. Over the past decade, the Chinese economy grew by 450 percent in dollar terms, which was 10 times the U.S. economic growth rate over the same period. The U.S. hasn’t adjusted to this new reality.

But China's stand-off with the U.S. is still within the normal range of international relations. A stable situation in Asia is still the core U.S. goal.⁷³

This moderate view was echoed by Shen Jiru, a research fellow in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, who argued:

Through dialogues at various levels, we should warn the U.S. that its greatest interest in Asia lies in making joint efforts with China to build a kind of cooperative relationship based on mutual respect and mutual benefits, in order to advance the two countries' common interests and meet the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century. We should actively commit to the guiding principle of friendship and partnership with neighboring countries and the policy of securing an amicable, tranquil and prosperous neighborhood. We should try to build a harmonious Asia together with various Asian countries and prove by actions that China's development is an opportunity for Asia and the world instead of a challenge.⁷⁴

Huang Ping, the director of the Institute of American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences argued: "China will stick to the opening-up policy and the road of peaceful development, mutual benefits and harmonious relationships. Specific problems will be resolved specifically. Divergences are settled through negotiations. As long as what the U.S. does is beneficial to China's peace, prosperity and stability, China will always welcome it."⁷⁵

The Chinese press did give a voice to a few hawks who expressed very different views. For example, an unnamed author identified as a strategic analyst of the Energy Fund Committee wrote in the *Global Times*:

The strategic goal of the U.S. in the South China Sea is maintaining a situation of no war and no peace. The U.S. has no direct concerns in Asian ocean disputes. So why does it take such a strong role in the dispute? This is part of the global strategy of the U.S. balancing power

in different regions, as it has done in the past. It also interfered in the Taiwan Strait and causes tension on the Korean Peninsula. However, the U.S. feels that this is not enough to disturb China's development, and now it's trying to stir up Southeast Asia to make trouble for China. . . . China insists on peace. However, the U.S. and other countries make use of this insistence as a tool to press China now. We should stop insisting on peace when other countries are challenging our bottom line again and again. As long as China becomes strong and powerful in right way [sic], the countries that pay most attention to their own security interests will stop their defiance and get back to the friendship and partnership with neighboring countries.⁷⁶

Another *Global Times* article sharply criticized Japan for a strategy that seemed intended to contain China by "...joining hands with the U.S. and its allies, and prove[ing] its power through competition and friction with China."⁷⁷

One Step Forward, One Step Backward

The visits by U.S. and Chinese political and military leaders in 2011 revealed that both nations wished to improve their military-to-military diplomacy and used the media to communicate their respective positions to multiple audiences. The combination of public statements by the officials and media coverage of the visits indicate that there were many substantial differences to be resolved along the way, however, including the persistent fly in the ointment: U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. Chinese leaders expressed opposition to these sales at every opportunity. As an example, General Chen Bingde said that China was prepared to cooperate with the U.S. in such areas as fighting sea pirates and providing disaster relief, but if the arms sales continued, Chen said that future relations would suffer.⁷⁸ When asked how bad the impact of another sale would be, he replied that it would depend on the nature of the weapons sold.⁷⁹ Despite the warnings, in September, 2011, the U.S. announced a new arms sales package worth \$5.85 billion to upgrade 145 of Taiwan's fighter jets. Hong Lei, a spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, warned that the move would damage

U.S. military and security relations with Beijing. He declared: “The Chinese government and people strongly opposes [sic] it. The mistakes made by the U.S. inevitably hurt bilateral relations and cooperation in military and security of the two countries. The U.S. takes full responsibility for that.”⁸⁰ In the wake of the announced arms sales, China suspended several of its military exchange programs with the United States that were the fruit of the multiple visits and conversations that had occurred throughout the year.⁸¹

A U.S. spokesperson downplayed the weapons sales and told the Global Times that the equipment sold to Taiwan was out-dated and should not be “seen as a challenge to China.” Furthermore, he suggested that the arms sales reflected the “obligation that the U.S. has to the security of Taiwan.”⁸² The spokesperson also explained the dynamics of U.S. domestic politics with regard to Taiwan: “Our political system is a very complicated one, and I’m sure there were many influences on what must have been a very difficult decision for our president. And of course, he made the decision which was less than what had been asked for, and less than what was pressured. For example, some 46 senators wrote to the president and wanted a higher level of arms sales and many friends of Taiwan encouraged it. So it is a balancing process.”⁸³ The Chinese were not persuaded, and frankly, given how U.S.-China relations have arisen as an issue in the U.S. Republican presidential campaigns, it is not surprising that this explanation was unconvincing.

Perhaps motivated by domestic political pressures, in January of 2012 President Obama set aside the carrot and reached for the stick. The Pentagon released the 2012 Strategic Defense Strategy Document which emphasized the importance of military investments in Asia and doubled-down on its commitment to the region. As the Iraq and Afghan Wars wound down, the U.S. announced that it:

will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region... The maintenance of peace, stability, the free flow of commerce, and of U.S. influence in this dynamic region will depend in part on an underlying balance of military capability and presence. Over the long term, China’s emergence as a regional power will have the potential to affect the U.S. economy and our security in a variety of ways. Our two countries have a strong stake in peace and stability in East Asia and an interest

in building a cooperative bilateral relationship. However, the growth of China’s military power must be accompanied by greater clarity of its strategic intentions in order to avoid causing friction in the region. The United States will continue to make the necessary investments to ensure that we maintain regional access and the ability to operate freely in keeping with our treaty obligations and with international law. Working closely with our network of allies and partners, we will continue to promote a rules-based international order that ensures underlying stability and encourages the peaceful rise of new powers, economic dynamism, and constructive defense cooperation.⁸⁴

The strongly worded document admitted that the U.S. actions were intended to counter China: “States such as China and Iran will continue to pursue asymmetric means to counter our power projection capabilities, while the proliferation of sophisticated weapons and technology will extend to non-state actors as well. Accordingly, the U.S. military will invest as required to ensure its ability to operate effectively in anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) environments.”⁸⁵

Despite all of the earlier rhetoric about cooperation, the U.S. signaled to the Chinese government, to its allies in the region, and to the American people that it would not reduce its military commitments even in the face of China’s assertions of dominance in the region. The linkage of China, its most important trading partner, with Iran, an international pariah state, must have stung in Beijing; and, of course, it most likely reduced the likelihood that in the near future there would be significant military-to-military collaborations between the two nations.

Conclusion

Scholars of media and the discourses of international relations understand that the confluence of domestic politics, international events, and even the personality characteristics of leaders can alter relations between nations. In February 2012, China joined Russia and vetoed a resolution in the United Nations Security Council which condemned Syrian violence against its own citizens and which called upon Syrian President Bashar

Assad to resign. The vetoes were strongly condemned by the Obama administration.⁸⁶ Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N. declared that her country was “disgusted” by the vote.⁸⁷ In March 2012, China made clear that it would continue to develop its military capacity when it announced that it would increase military spending by 11.2 percent this year over last.⁸⁸

From January 2011 to February 2012 the U.S. and China systematically pursued strategies that would improve military-to-military relations and deepen trust and understanding between the two nations. Yet it can only be concluded that the two nations failed to make significant progress. The U.S. seems locked in a Cold War historical narrative that compels continuing arms sales to Taiwan and that mouths understanding but really seems unable to accept that a now economically strong China will wish to expand its military capabilities in order to deter any possible threats to its economic well-being and to protect itself from a possible blockade. China, on the other hand, seems unable to acknowledge that a combination of U.S. pride, commitment to its allies in the region, economic interests, and domestic political pressures will cause it to continue and even step up its military presence in the Asia-Pacific. However there is some promise for the future. Each nation advanced its arguments for its foreign policy positions forcefully through the media, so even in the absence of substantive agreement, one can find slivers of evidence that they may come to better understand their competing perspectives and interests.

We believe that progress will occur only when the narrative itself begins to shift away from a focus on the past – a focus on historical slights, offending incidents, and time worn perceptions of good and evil – and toward a narrative that emphasizes the future. We also think that each nation should exert less energy in constructing criticisms of the other and should attempt to be more self-reflective about the ways in which its own policies or articulated arguments explaining and accounting for those policies might contribute to mutual tension or spark suspicion. Simply put, these two nations need each other to continue to grow and prosper. China needs markets for its manufactured goods and the U.S. needs access to the affordable commodities that China produces and to Chinese capital. Both nations need access to secure sea-lanes to maintain their economic health and well being, as do the other nations in the region. War – even the hostile words that entertain the possibility of war – is bad for business and bad for economic growth and development. An incident that might spark a kinetic conflict between the world’s two largest economies would undermine decades of economic progress even if it could be con-

tained before it led to tens of thousands of deaths. The political leadership and the citizens in both nations must come to understand that such a conflict is unthinkable.

Even as the foreign policy and military relations between the nations seemed to be worsening – a sign that the defense and military leadership in the two nations had been unable to overcome the historical and political obstacles to the development of significantly closer relations between the two militaries – there were renewed efforts by the political leaders to create dialogue. In February 2012, Xi Jinping, the vice president of China, who will assume leadership of the Communist Party in the fall and ascend to the presidency in 2013, visited the United States. In Washington, Xi spoke to business leaders and declared that he wanted to deepen the relationship between the two countries. Xi’s theme, once again, was respect: “China welcomes the United States playing a constructive role in promoting the peace, stability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region, and at the same time we hope the U.S. will truly respect the interests and concerns of countries in the region, including China.”⁸⁹ Xi also visited Muscatine, Iowa, and met with the family that had hosted him almost thirty years ago when he visited local farms to learn about agricultural techniques. He was fondly remembered as a friendly and unassuming man as the cameras snapped photographs and the reporters conducted interviews that would be played on media outlets in the United States, China, and around the world.⁹⁰ Xi then headed to Los Angeles to meet with business leaders, members of the local Chinese community, and toured the Port of Los Angeles where much of the manufactured goods from China enter the U.S. Xi’s visit was a reminder that even though there may be difficult moments in U.S. – China relations, these nations are economically yoked together and must continue to work with each other.⁹¹

Xi’s visit to the United States captures the essence of contemporary diplomacy. The direct face-to-face meetings and exchanges between the government leaders and officials are important, but so too are the mediated statements, interviews, photos, and opportunities to make one’s case for domestic and international audiences through the media. To fully understand diplomacy in the age of globalization, one must acknowledge the power of the media and one must cultivate the skills of media engagement.

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Zhan Zhang is a doctoral student in the Communication Sciences Institute of Media and Journalism at Lugano University in Switzerland. She also serves as a member of the University's Chinese Media Observatory. She worked both for Chinese media (CCTV, KaiMing Publisher) and western media (The Independent, Variety) before pursuing her doctoral studies.

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Q&A with CPD

Zhao Qizheng



CPD posed a number of questions to Zhao Qizheng, Dean of the School of Journalism at China's Renmin University. Below is an edited excerpt of our interview about his views on public diplomacy in China, the country's impressions of the United States and his personal experiences as Minister of the State Council Information Office and Vice Mayor of Shanghai.

You have written extensively about public diplomacy in China. What are some misperceptions about China that you've seen dispelled over the years, and which have you seen continue?

It's been almost 10 years since I first spoke publicly on the necessity of public diplomacy for China. In China, public diplomacy associations have been established in many cities, with local elites, entrepreneurs, academics, social activists, and even artists' active participation. They all have the external exchange experience, and are also willing to strengthen communication with foreign countries and tell Chinese stories.

I think it is a slow process to dispel misperceptions of China. The country has only just started to engage in public diplomacy in the past few years, so there have been no significant effects yet. However, some misperceptions or prejudices are already weakening. The evidence lies in the news and reviews in mainstream Western media.

In recent years, the misperception that "China controls the exchange rate" has diminished. The Chinese currency has appreciated by about 30% in the past ten years. Another example is that criticism of China's human rights issues is less and less common, except for U.S. country reports on human rights practices. I have to say that China has really done a lot to improve its human rights... but it still needs time. The misperceptions mentioned here include two aspects, namely the real misperceptions and the shortcomings. Meanwhile, the "China threat theory," regarding territorial disputes between China and neighboring countries, has grown.

How would you describe the public perception of the United States in China? How does it vary between major cities, such as Shanghai and Beijing, to more rural provinces?

Most Chinese people think that the U.S. is a strong and developed country, and some view the U.S. as a hegemonic country. So the Chinese both respect and fear the U.S., since this power imbalance could bring adverse effects to China.

With regards to the difference between big cities and small and medium-sized ones, I think people in big cities have a

broader international vision and more contact with Americans, and American universities and companies. They also see the gap between the U.S. and China more clearly. Generally speaking, people in small cities just think that the U.S. economy is well-developed, Americans are rich, the basketball teams play well, and Hollywood movies are great. When it comes to learning from the United States, people in big cities have a stronger desire to do so. More and more students from big cities study in the United States, some of whom go there to graduate from American high schools.

As Vice Mayor of Shanghai responsible for developing Pudong, one of China's most important development zones, you engaged in high-level public diplomacy. Can you share an example of a particularly rewarding exchange you had during this time?

I was the first leader of Pudong and hosted many foreign leaders, top executives of multinational companies, and reporters from international media during that time.

After he retired from politics, Henry Kissinger was a consultant on China for several American multinational companies. We met two or three times every year and had many in-depth conversations. He observed China's economic development through Shanghai and made a very interesting observation: that while there were several skyscrapers and high-tech factories built in cooperation with foreign countries in Pudong, this was not the most important achievement. The most important achievement rather, was the public relations success which established trust with foreign investors that was precious and worth consolidating. I said that no matter whom we were receiving, whether it was a foreign president, a representative of a multinational corporation, or a member of the international media, we only talked about Pudong. We were willing to adjust our policies if they were inconsistent with foreign policies; if it was hard to modify a given policy, we would prepare a contract with more details. Foreign countries really appreciated that.

General Motors decided to invest in Shanghai. At that time, Volkswagen had already established a presence in Shanghai, so the Chinese government asked GM or Ford to invest in another city. But in Shanghai, we welcomed them. Shanghai had already built car production and supply systems, so the presence of foreign vehicle companies would not only reduce the cost, but would also mean that they would purchase locally-made parts. Finally, through the joint efforts of both sides, GM began to produce Buicks in Shanghai. It is worth mentioning that after the debt crisis, other GM factories all over the world were in trouble—only the one in Pudong still had a surplus. This was the most proud achievement for GM and for me.

I'm very glad to have had the opportunity to present China to the world through Pudong. I wrote a book called Shanghai Pudong Miracle: A Case Study of China's Fast-track Economics, which analyzed why and how China realized such rapid economic development.

What do you consider China's greatest exports that define the nation's global image, and why?

There are two important ways to communicate China's external image. The first one is the Chinese President's image among foreign leaders and publics, including his public speeches. What he says must honestly reflect his actions. The President is best-suited to express Chinese policy, because he can develop friendships between leaders. One successful example took place in June 2013, when Chinese President Xi Jinping and American President Barack Obama met at a private estate in Sunnylands, California.

This past March, First Lady Michelle Obama visited China and conducted what Americans call "citizen diplomacy." Citizen diplomacy is the second way China can project its image internationally. When Chinese First Lady Peng Liyuan went to the U.S., she also conducted citizen diplomacy, meeting Americans from all walks of life. What the two First Ladies have done can be a very effective type of diplomacy, by expressing what governments cannot say, or cannot say directly. I think they are both good channels of communication between China and the United States.

China's most important export is Chinese people themselves. In the past, very few Chinese were able to study abroad, which has changed in recent years. Now there is a large number of students and tourists going to other

countries. I have to admit that the cultural literacy of Chinese people is not the same. When they go abroad, Chinese tourists do not behave well, so sometimes they are unwelcome in other countries.

What advice would you give to students interested in going into your field?

There are more than 200 countries, 2,000 ethnicities, and 6,000 languages in this world, so we must live harmoniously, and this depends on better communication.

Cross-cultural communication requires training and experience. Right now we have an urgent need for cross-cultural communication, so I hope students of journalism and other majors will spend time learning about foreign cultures.

The Cold War has been over for years, but the Cold War mentality still exists and it will take more time to overcome completely. Remember that this is no longer the age of World War I or World War II, but an age with increasing understanding of peaceful development; this is not an era of conflict but of dialogue and problem-solving. Therefore, people who study and practice public diplomacy must be able to engage in cross-cultural dialogue with confidence, and have a sense of national and global responsibility.

PD is a noble career and I hope students will become both researchers and practitioners, because PD needs academic support. The discovery of knowledge and new approaches in PD can only be carried out by the joint efforts of Chinese and foreign youths, because one cannot study another culture from afar.

About Zhao Qizheng

Mr. Zhao is currently Dean of the School of Journalism of Renmin University of China and Binhai Development Institute of Nankai University. His past positions include Vice Mayor of Shanghai, Minister of the State Council Information Office of China, and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the 11th Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

This article first appeared June 2014 as a [Q&A with CPD](#).

Global Ambitions: Interview with Confucius Institute CEO Xu Lin

The first Confucius Institute opened in Seoul, Korea in November 2004. Ten years later, the CI boasts more than 1,000 affiliates across 120 countries. CPD interviewed Xu Lin, Chief Executive of the Confucius Institute, about its goals and growth. The interview took place at the National Chinese Language Conference, co-organized by the College Board and Asia Society, in Los Angeles in May 2014. An edited excerpt follows:



The Confucius Institutes have experienced rapid growth over the last 10 years. What exactly does CI want to be?

Image by [Asia Society Partnership for Global Learning](#)

Our vision for the Confucius Institutes is to catch up with the British Council. We want to be able to help those who want to know more about China, who want to study Chinese language and culture. This will be, I think, a symbol of influence and power. But I admit that there is still work to do. The CIs are still in the phase of learning from others, for instance, the British Council and the Cervantes Institute, especially about cultural exchange. It can be tricky for us to introduce Chinese culture to countries that hold different values from us, especially when many countries still have certain misunderstandings about China. We seek opportunities to work with those countries with sensitivity and based on common ground we have with each other.

The CI began in just a few countries, and now it is global. How have you managed the growth?

I always view the CI as a village enterprise. The reason why Chinese culture has grown slowly overseas is that we haven't been able to manage it with a business mindset. This business mindset I am referring to is what we call "Let it run free" (fang shui yang yu). The Confucius Institutes have been running on a franchise model. Each institute has full control over its own management, as long as it remains in line with China's foreign policy. Academic research, speeches, course plans, degree requirements, and even teaching plans are under the jurisdiction of a joint committee board of personnel from both the foreign university and its counterpart in China. The Chinese authority does not intervene with the operation of the CI. Although CIs vary between countries, it is exactly that variety that leads to CIs' thriving. Generally, every CI has two directors, one from China and the other from its partnering foreign university. The Chinese director serves as a facilitation mechanism. As a whole, the CI has become a sharing platform for both universities.

How do you evaluate CI's success and effectiveness, both individually and collectively?

There have been different opinions on how to evaluate the effectiveness of CI over the last decade. While some believe that quality comes first, I believe that quantity comes first, with the number [of CIs] adding up to form a large-scale effect. For this reason, we emphasize indicators like the number of students recruited, teachers hired, events held, and media exposure of CIs in our evaluations. The CIs' influence has been our focus over the last ten years.

During the next decade, developing CI's influence will still be the core policy. In terms of the global layout of CI, we will most likely slow down the speed of growth. In addition, we estimate that there will be more and deeper contacts, which may result in some contact and even collisions with different cultures in the future. Although there may be dropouts, we are confident that a considerable amount of CIs will stay.

What will CIs be like a decade from now?

Language teaching has been our focus for the last decade, as well as cultural events. For the next ten years, especially in the United States, people will have a growing interest in Chinese culture and history. We will continue to give CIs the latitude to promote culture however they choose. CI's mission will be to construct meaningful discourse with local audiences, either by reconstructing the old ones or building new ones. In the meantime, we are trying to provide a physical space for the CI in their host universities (like American Centers), so that there will be a place for students to gather and discuss Chinese culture, forming communities in which Chinese culture is introduced.

Also, we would like to see more young people devoted to promoting Chinese culture overseas. We always welcome those with talents in international communication, cross-cultural communication, and with a brave heart to join us.



Essays

100,000 Strong: Networks and Partnerships within U.S.-China Public Diplomacy

By Di Wu

The U.S. government has been making a great effort recently to promote study abroad in China. This March, First Lady Michelle Obama went to China with her daughters and mother, where the emphasis of her trip was not on politics but on [education and shared values](#). During her [speech at Peking University](#), Mrs. Obama stressed the importance of study abroad as a powerful vehicle for people-to-people exchange and citizen diplomacy. The logic behind this agenda is not difficult to grasp. Education exchange and study abroad programs have always been the focus of U.S. public diplomacy. China's status as a rising global power makes this attention on study abroad in China especially crucial.

In 2009, President Barack Obama proposed the [100,000 Strong Initiative](#) for China during his visit there, and Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton supported the founding of the 100,000 Strong Foundation, a non-profit, in early 2013. Both the Initiative and the Foundation aim to increase the number of American students studying abroad in China to 100,000 within four years, and to increase the diversity of the student body. Rather than creating a separate study abroad program, the 100,000 Strong Foundation functions as a tool to implement the Initiative by building a social network.

In his book *Communication Power*, Manuel Castells identifies four types of network power: networking power, network power, networked power, and network-making power. He considers network-making power to

be the most crucial form, which he describes as containing two mechanisms: programming and switching. Programming refers to the control of the communication process in society, while switching is the control of connecting points between various networks. I argue that the 100,000 Strong Foundation holds network-making power and uses it to strengthen public diplomacy.

The 100,000 Strong Foundation connects and creates partnerships between institutions and organizations related to study abroad. Carola McGiffert, the Foundation's President, told me in an interview, "The function of the 100,000 Strong Foundation is to build a platform for people to understand the importance of the U.S.-China relationship and let more American students learn Mandarin and study in China." The Foundation was created to facilitate and maintain the success of existing study abroad organizations, and to build a stronger network so that they are able to better connect and collaborate. In this way, the Foundation acts as a network switcher that connects organizations in different fields.

The power of switching can be seen as the ability to create social capital. The specific value of a switcher is to broker information and control the project that brings networks together. The 100,000

Strong Foundation is a network switcher, or broker, in the network sense. Through the act of switching, the Foundation connects different networks and facilitates the information flow. Organizations which connect with the Foundation can provide information and resources to each other. In addition, by socializing with high-level

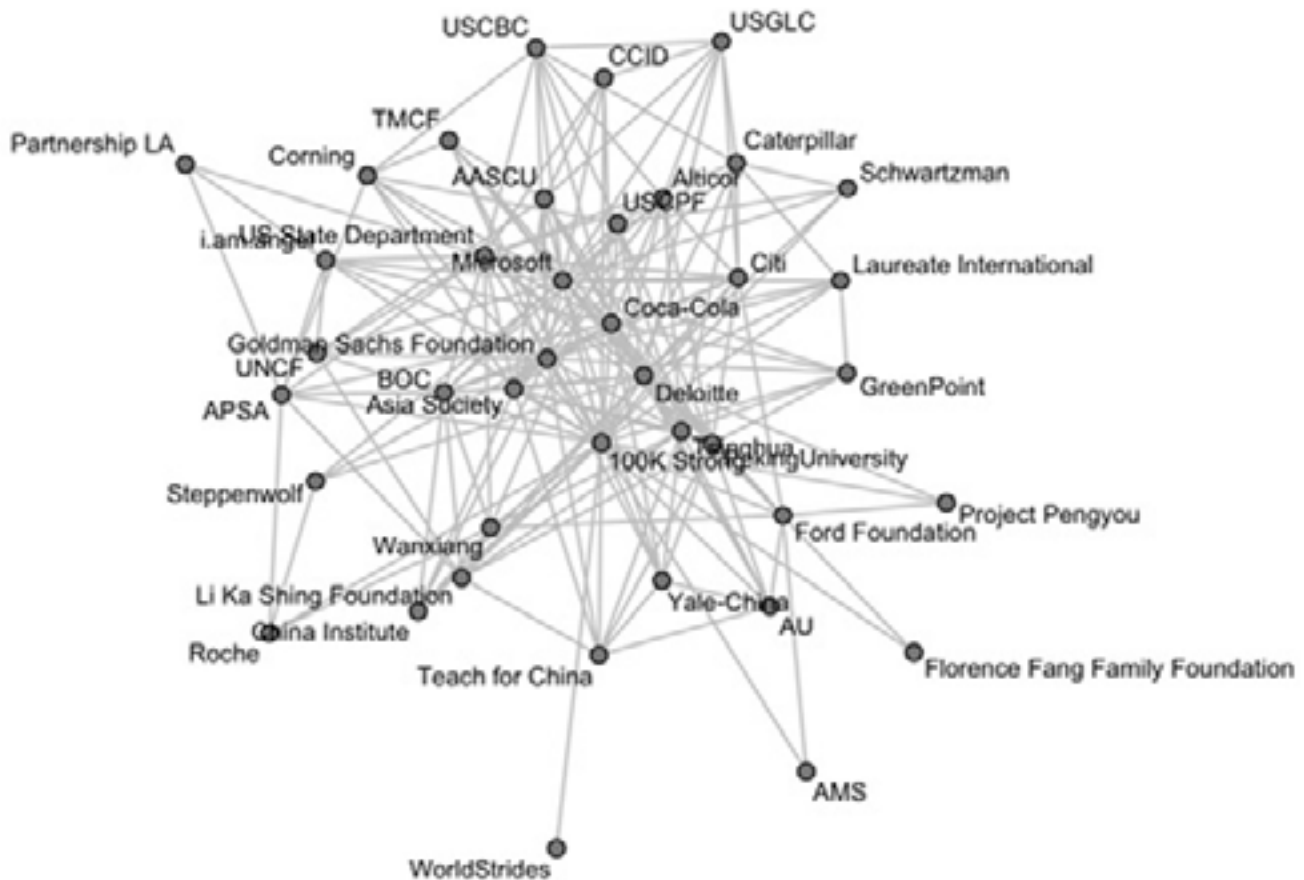
"The 100,000 Strong Foundation holds network-making power and uses it to strengthen public diplomacy."

leaders and premium organizations, some network actors are able to gain social credential.^[4]

The graph below illustrates the full picture of the network. The data was collected through Internet searches on connections of the organizations in the network.^[5] The following section will analyze the network by the fields of organizations (nodes) and will attempt to demonstrate what kinds of social capital are being created.

tion, sponsored the [Schwarzman Scholars program](#) in Beijing Tsinghua University to rival the Rhodes Scholarship. Both the U.S. and China political leaders openly expressed their support for the program, which brings in the networks of Chinese politicians and universities.

Although funding for the 100,000 Strong Foundation comes from private sectors, the Foundation does have governmental support, because it was founded on



The 100,000 Strong Foundation’s funding mainly comes from private sectors, according to McGiffert. The Foundation reaches out to corporations, entrepreneurs, and philanthropists. Transnational corporate partners such as Coca-Cola, Microsoft, Citigroup, and Deloitte play a big role in the 100,000 Strong network. Their partnerships indicate a two-way beneficial relationship: on the one hand, these corporations are able to connect with high-level leaders in both countries, while gaining advantages from investing in U.S. study abroad in China. On the other hand, the 100,000 Strong Foundation can leverage global networks through these corporations and expand their influence in the target country. The Foundation also has ties with philanthropic organizations, such as the Ford Foundation. Last year, Steve Schwarzman, Chairman, CEO and Co-founder of Blackstone and an advisory council member of the 100,000 Strong Found-

ation, sponsored the Schwarzman Scholars program in Beijing Tsinghua University to rival the Rhodes Scholarship. Both the U.S. and China political leaders openly expressed their support for the program, which brings in the networks of Chinese politicians and universities. Although funding for the 100,000 Strong Foundation comes from private sectors, the Foundation does have governmental support, because it was founded on President Obama’s Initiative. It also values interpersonal relationships with government officials and receives support from the Obama administration. For example, former U.S. Ambassador to China Gary Locke and his wife, Mona Locke, made videos to support the Foundation. Ms. Locke also participated in the Foundation’s first annual conference. The Foundation likewise works closely with its [advisory council members](#), some of whom are former government officials. McGiffert accompanied Mrs. Obama to China, demonstrating the Foundation’s political connections. The Foundation has developed relationships with Chinese politicians as well. Chinese Vice Premier Liu Yandong spoke at the Foundation’s first annual conference, showing that the Chinese consider the Foundation mutually beneficial.

The 100,000 Strong network also values relationships

with students. American students are nodes of this network, not only as beneficiaries but also as influencers. The Foundation partners with Project Pengyou, an online alumni social network which connects American students who have studied or are studying in China. By connecting through an online social networking platform, students are able to share their experiences and knowledge of study abroad in China. Holly Chang, head of the program, told me that the informal partnership between Project Pengyou and the 100,00 Strong Foundation means engaging the network of programs and program directors, as well as students on the ground. Project Pengyou is also building an online resource accessible to potential students who want to study in China. Schools and companies that want to hire American interns can also post announcements through the website. Besides Project Pengyou, the Foundation also partners with another similar online networking organization, the [American Mandarin Society](#).

Organizations like Project Pengyou and the American Mandarin Society manage individual-level networks. We can consider it a sub-network under the overarching umbrella of the 100,00 Strong network. The nodes here include students, schools/universities, and companies. Chang herself recognizes the role of Project Pengyou as connecting the dots. She said, "It is not like [programs on the ground] are completely isolated to begin with. We're providing an online and visual way for them to connect even further. We are really just complementing a lot of the efforts that have been going on on the ground."

Moreover, the 100,00 Strong Foundation works with organizations such as foundations, educational institutions, and corporations promoting study abroad in China and boosting Mandarin education in the U.S., especially among a diverse student body. The [i.am. angel Foundation](#) is one funding provider that offers scholarships for students in need. It works with the 100,00 Strong Foundation to bring Mandarin courses to the Boyle Heights Center in Los Angeles, offering students in the neighborhood opportunities to engage with Chinese language and culture, which paves the way for them to study abroad in China.

The 100,00 Strong Foundation has expanded its connections to educational organizations such as the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. Third-party providers for study abroad such as Americans Promoting Study Abroad, Community Colleges for International Development, and Teach for China are listed as the Foundation's partners. The Foundation also connects with organizations that specialize in U.S.-China relations, such as the China Institution and the Asia Society. The Foundation is housed in the School of Inter-

national Service at American University in Washington D.C., which makes the Foundation a natural hub for connecting educational and political worlds.

The 100,00 Strong Foundation has existed for a year, and its social network of study abroad in China continues to grow. By mapping the network's nodes and ties, we can see it brings in stakeholders from various fields in both countries. Through building a social network, the Foundation facilitates the formulation of social capital among organizations, takes full advantage of the existing resources, and possibly expands the existing network structure. In this way, this public diplomacy mission does not make repetitive investments in creating more study abroad programs, but wields the network-making power to navigate existing resources and take advantage of social capital.

As a newly established organization, the 100,00 Strong Foundation has a long way to go. It needs to make sure their efforts of creating social capital through connecting organizations in the network directly benefit the U.S. study abroad in China. Besides, in order to bridge the cross-border network, the Foundation needs to connect more Chinese organizations. Lastly, as McGiffert and many American study abroad students in China told me, the biggest challenge for study abroad is funding. Therefore, the Foundation needs to secure more sources of funding for students in need.

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- [ii] The full list of the 100,00 Strong Foundation's partners can be found at <http://100kstrong.org/>. The network graph not only contains direct partners, but also common connections that some of the partners share.

Author Biography

Di Wu is a Ph.D. student at American University, focusing on public diplomacy and East Asia. She graduated from the USC Master of Public Diplomacy program in 2010. She is a native of China and holds a Bachelor's degree in International Politics and a Master's degree in International Relations.

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The Latest Round of China's Panda Diplomacy: Winning Hearts in Belgium

By Falk Hartig

On February 23, two giant pandas arrived in Belgium on a 15-year loan, where they received a red-carpet welcome. Among those waiting on the tarmac were 2000 people, many of them excited kids, and also the Belgian Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo. In September 2013, Di Rupo and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang signed the agreement to send the two mammals to the Pairi Daiza Animal Park, some 30 miles southwest of Brussels.

With only about 1600 giant pandas left in the wild, China is very concerned about renting them out, and the Belgian zoo is one of just 17 zoos around the world hosting these cuddly creatures. According to Chinese

statistics, 43 giant pandas, including cubs, are currently living overseas.

Both Chinese and Belgian stakeholders emphasize scientific research on the importance of protecting the species do not discuss the public diplomacy dimension of the loan. Although global media is panda-crazy (about 100 journalists were waiting at the airport), the pandas have their own twitter feed and parts of Belgium are in the state of "Panda-Monium." The caution around directly speaking about diplomacy is understandable because the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) — an international treaty and international organization — determines that the export of pandas will only be authorized if China and the receiving country



Photo by [M. Bos](#)

“are satisfied that the transaction will generate positive conservation benefits to the species.”

Nevertheless, the case of 4-year-old male panda Xing Hui (meaning Twinkling Star) and same-aged female Hao Hao (meaning Cute) is a prime example of China’s panda diplomacy, and it presents some insights into this fluffy part of the PRC’s public diplomacy. What this latest round of all show is that besides all of the efforts to promote and support animal conservation and biological research, sending pandas abroad is a strong symbolic aspect of China’s foreign policy, used by the Chinese government to win hearts (less minds though) in selected foreign countries. In addition, it points to the interesting fact that China is able to integrate international partners into its attempts to shape its global image, and even to make these partners pay for China’s image management.

The conditions of the China-Belgium contract illustrate that panda diplomacy is a cost-effective undertaking, at least for China. Normally, a pair of pandas is on loan for 10 years and costs \$1 million annually. Xing Hui and Hao Hao will stay in Belgium for 15 years and their price is somewhere between an estimated €10m in total and an annual fee of around \$1 million for China. For Belgium, borrowing these pandas will cost more than what it would take to look after 40 elephants.

Furthermore, the zoo is spending over \$10 million for a panda enclosure. Annual upkeep is estimated at \$50,000 and the pandas are insured for \$1 million each. On top of that, the zoo will have to invest in enormous amounts of bamboo. What makes this deal even more striking is the fact that when the pandas breed – and this is the official reason why they are sent abroad – it is normally the case that the hosting zoo has to pay another \$500,000 dollars to China. Overall, it is stunningly expensive to host the pandas and they can become a serious financial burden for the hosting zoo. In Adelaide, for example, the pandas were a major reason why the zoo there had a debt of 24 million Australian dollars.

Considering these factors, the question is why engage in panda diplomacy at all? For China, the answer is quite clear. First, it can position itself as a kind friend who is generous enough to share two of its most precious “national treasures.” This generosity becomes even more pronounced in the case of Belgium, where serious debates between rivaling Dutch and French speaking communities emerged, as did the question of which Belgian zoo had the right to host the pandas. Some Dutch speakers were angry that they would be

going to a zoo in the French-speaking part of the country. From the Chinese point of view, what more could you wish for than having foreigners quarrel with each other over the right to host Chinese pandas?

Second, China reaches a much wider audience with pandas than with the Confucius Institutes, China Daily, CCTV, or any touring arts group. Third, and particularly remarkable, the otherwise critical global media forget about human rights, Tibet, terrible air quality in Beijing, and so on when it comes to the pandas. The old journalistic rule of thumb that babies and animals always “work,” in combination with the child-like image of the giant panda, makes these animals ideal for the media age.

Less clear is why international zoos engage in panda diplomacy. Yes, it helps the zoo to raise its scientific profile and prestige if giant pandas produce cubs. However, this is not an easy undertaking, as giant pandas are unusually reluctant to have sex, at least in captivity, and females only go into heat for between one and three days a year. And yes, pandas are absolute crowd pullers and therefore are good for business. France’s ZooParc de Beauval recorded almost 50 percent more visitors after its pair of pandas arrived two years ago, and visitor numbers to Edinburgh zoo leapt 51 percent in 2012, the year after they began hosting pandas. However, while these numbers normally decline after a certain period of time, the cost of hosting remain the same, making the benefits of hosting questionable.

And not only are these animals expensive, but the receiving country has to offer China something in return. This, of course, is not noted officially, as pandas are supposed to be sent abroad for breeding and conservation purposes only. But China is not just renting the pandas out to anyone: in the case of Canada, for example, various commentators were of the opinion that the pandas were a gesture of gratitude that was described in the context of a “raw materials for panda” deal.

Although the deal was negotiated between the relevant offices in charge of conservation in Canada and China and the hosting zoos, the change of attitude by Canadian officials towards China possibly made it easier to secure the agreement. In 2006, when Prime Minister Stephen Harper took office, his conservative government cooled its relations with China. But times changed and Harper, who once promised to put “Canadian values” ahead of “the almighty dollar” in trade with China, made it clear that trade is now what matters most in dealings with the ruling Communist Party.

During his second official trip to China in early 2012, Harper signed more than 20 commercial deals worth almost \$3 billion, and a declaration of intent on a foreign investment protection agreement, after 18 years of negotiations. These deals included agreements to ship additional Canadian petroleum, uranium, and other products to China. As some analysts have argued, the main purpose of the visit was “to secure new markets for Canadian oil” as it found a very interested customer in China.

In contrast, when looking at Belgium and China, it is less obvious what the small European country could offer China in return for the pandas. Belgium is China’s sixth-largest trading partner in the European Union, with total trade in goods of 21.2 billion euros (\$29.1 billion) in 2012 and a bilateral trade volume of 26.3 billion U.S. dollars. Belgian Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo said he aimed to enhance cooperation with China in such fields such as foreign investment and people-to-people exchange, especially among youth. Also, a new Belgian visa application center was opened in Beijing two days before the pandas left to boost tourism from China.

Another, admittedly speculative, piece of the puzzle might be the following: just one day before the panda deal was announced in September 2013, China got permission for the direct import of Belgian riding horses, mainly the world-class Belgian Warmblood (BWP), instead of buying them from a third country.

While this might seem irrelevant, the China Horse Association explained that Belgium has about 350,000 horses in total, one horse for every 31 people, while China has 6.5 million horses, one horse for every 200 people. “Belgium is a small country, yet it is superior in terms of horse riding. China may be big in numbers, but it’s not ‘strong’ in the horse industry,” a representative of the Association said. “The horse trading agreement between the two countries is significant. We wish that we can learn more about the advanced concepts and technologies from Belgium in order to promote the further development of the Chinese horse industry.”

Whether this decision had any influence on the panda deal is up for debate, but the timing is remarkable. The international star of animal diplomacy, however, is and will remain the giant panda, as will be seen in early April when Xing Hui and Hao Hao make their public debut in Belgium.

Author Biography

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The Use of Film for Public Diplomacy: Why Hollywood Makes a Stronger Case for China

By Stanley Rosen

With the establishment of its first academic research center on public diplomacy at Beijing Foreign Studies University and a well-publicized International Forum on Public Diplomacy in 2010, China has been taking some major steps forward as it tries to, in Vice Foreign Minister Fu Ying's [words](#), "effectively present its image to other countries" and overcome a lack of experience "in handling relations with the media and the public in foreign countries".

The specific emphasis on public diplomacy is part of a wider initiative to enhance China's "soft power," with tens of billions of dollars in state funding including: the development of media and entertainment companies to [compete with](#) global giants such as News Corporation and Time Warner; the erection, one day before the arrival of Hu Jintao on a four day state visit to the United States, of a prominent 50-meter display in New York's Times Square called "China Experience," which offered a looped one-minute [promotional video featuring](#) some of the nation's most prominent faces; the [relocation of the North American headquarters](#) of the official Xinhua news agency from a small building in Queens to a sprawling office complex in Times Square; the expansion from 10 to 50 bureaus of CCTV-9, a 24-hour satellite English news channel [established](#) as early as 2000; and the placement of multi-page advertisements by China Daily in the form of news stories from China in the front sections of such key newspapers as The New York Times.¹ This is all in addition to China's well-publicized [Confucius Institutes](#) established throughout the world. China's film industry is also expected to play its role in this effort, with the official [China Film Promotion International](#), established under the China Film Group in April 2004, taking the lead.

There are, however, compelling reasons to suggest, ironically, that Hollywood blockbuster films have in fact been far more effective in promoting China's public diplomacy initiatives than China's own films. The reasons for this seemingly strange phenomenon are actually quite simple. On the one hand, with the rapid development of the film market in China and other develop-

ing regions Hollywood can no longer rely on the North American market to turn a profit for "big" films that have enormous production and marketing budgets; indeed, as much as 70 percent of the box office for such films now comes from outside North America and, for certain films, increasingly from China. As a result, it is becoming [more common](#) for Hollywood studios to open its films outside the United States.

On the other hand, unlike Hollywood, the state's top priority for Chinese films remains political, that is the socialization of the young to understand and acknowledge the role of the state and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in promoting the interests of the country, both domestically and internationally. Generating such support for the government should then, ideally, promote social stability. Hollywood films, in the form of theatrical releases and through widely available pirated DVDs, are used in part to promote such stability by giving the people what they want, albeit not unconditionally. At politically significant times of the year – for example before and after national day on October 1, around the anniversary of major political milestones such as the founding of the CCP on July 1, during the convening of major CCP meetings such as Party Congresses – Hollywood films, along with Chinese blockbusters of a commercial nature, are removed from theaters to ensure a strong box office for "propaganda" films. This generally includes the distribution of free tickets through schools and work units and pressure on theater managers to promote these films.

An [examination](#) of the top ten box office hits of all time in China reveals that six are Hollywood blockbusters, with "Avatar" making more than twice as much as any film has ever made in China, bringing in over \$200 million USD. "Kung Fu Panda 2," at number 4 on the list (around 72 million and still in theatrical release at the time of this writing) and "2012" (around 71 million) at number 6 join "Inception," "Transformers 2," and "Pirates of the Caribbean 4" (also still in release) among the top ten.

At least two conclusions are of interest in terms of public diplomacy and Hollywood's strategy. First, every film among the top ten was released in the last few years, with two of the films from 2011, five from 2010, and three from 2009, an indication of the rapidly expanding box office as the Chinese middle class has more income to devote to entertainment. Second, and related to the first point, Hollywood has been careful to ensure that its films are China-friendly, and has learned from experience that deviations from a China-friendly strategy are punished, either by the Chinese public at the box office or by film authorities by outright bans.

"Kung Fu Panda 2" and "2012" are prime examples of Hollywood's successful strategy to work with China and present a positive image of the country. While the first "Kung Fu Panda" (2008) was reasonably successful in China, with a box office of \$28 million USD at the current exchange rate, it ranks only number 36 all-time at the Chinese box office and generated some negative publicity from those who felt that usurping core icons of China such as pandas and martial arts, particularly so soon after the Sichuan earthquake of May 2008, was a form of "cultural imperialism".

Before filming "Kung Fu Panda 2," DreamWorks accepted an offer from Sichuan provincial officials to send a team to the province to see the real home of the pandas and, as production designer Raymond Zibach noted, the visit to China was "inspirational," and "it became the basis of a lot of what you see" in the sequel.² For officials in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan, "'Kung Fu Panda 2' has helped to put Chengdu onto the global stage" and is expected to boost tourism to the area significantly. As the story in the Straits Times noted, "more Chinese cities are now looking for similar tie-ups, drawn by the allure of riding on Hollywood movies, the ultimate soft power vehicle"³ Moreover, in a [striking contrast](#) to those who criticized "Kung Fu Panda 2" for the same sins of cultural imperialism as its predecessor, film critic Yu Deqing wrote: "Hollywood's participation in promoting Chinese culture and soft power should be supported. Let's have more!"⁴

"2012" was even more proactive in placating China and appealing to Chinese audiences. For example, in the face of the natural disasters that are destroying North America, the film makes explicit that only China is capable of building the arks necessary to save the planet, with the positive role of the People's Liberation Army, often depicted in the Western press as more nationalistic in expanding China's influence than a cautious civilian government, particularly highlighted in the film. One Chinese blog, for example, in listing

["the top Hollywood films that intentionally suck up to China,"](#) had "2012" at the top of the list. The reward for the Hollywood studio, as noted above, came at the Chinese box office.

Such concern for Chinese sensibilities – and the Chinese box office – has now become the norm. In the most recent instance, the MGM remake of "Red Dawn," the 1984 Cold War drama about a Soviet invasion of a small Western town, the completed film made the invaders Chinese. After potential distributors expressed concern that this would limit their access to an important market, and Chinese websites posted pictures from the set of actors posing as Chinese troops, the decision was made to digitally erase Chinese flags and military symbols, and alter the dialogue to depict most of the invaders as North Koreans. As MGM struggles to recover from bankruptcy and find a distributor for "Red Dawn," and as they develop the next James Bond sequel and "The Hobbit" – both of which would be expected to do well in China if released – such digital legerdemain, costing less than \$1 million USD was [seen as a wise business decision](#). MGM no doubt remembers when the studio was banned from distributing films in China in 1997 after the release of "Red Corner," one of three Hollywood films that year that were considered offensive to China; Columbia/Tristar and Touchstone/Disney also endured bans at the time for "Seven Years in Tibet" and "Kundun".

By contrast, those Hollywood films that have been less successful than expected in China, including the recent "Karate Kid" (2010) and "Mission Impossible 3" (2006), have foundered in large part because they did not devote appropriate attention to the image of China and the Chinese they were presenting. "Karate Kid," the Sino-American co-production starring Chinese icon Jackie Chan and action hero Will Smith's son, was expected to do very well in China. However, while it brought in over \$176 million USD at the American box office and over \$183 million USD at the foreign box office, only \$7 million of that total came from China, an outcome totally unexpected by the American producers.

Indeed, "Karate Kid" was in many ways a highly successful co-production, accounting for 67.2 percent of the total revenue of Chinese films marketed abroad that year. Of the other 479 films produced in China in 2010, [not a single one](#) made any money overseas. Those familiar with the Chinese market were not surprised at its poor performance at home. As one Beijing-based consultant [noted](#), "The Chinese kid got beat up by the foreign kid.... You think Chinese people want

to see that?" Yu Dong, CEO of the NASDAQ listed Bona Film Group went even further, [suggesting](#) that, "If the director had made the American kid beat a Japanese kid in The Karate Kid, maybe Chinese audiences would like to see it."

"Mission Impossible 3" did somewhat better in China, bringing in just over \$10 million USD at the Chinese box office; however, that represented only about 3.8 percent of the total overseas box office. In this case the film was delayed and almost banned because it showed Shanghai in an unflattering light, depicting the Shanghai police as quite incompetent in catching criminals, having foreign criminal elements fighting publicly in Shanghai, showing raggedy clothes hanging from roofs and bamboo sticks, having chemical weapons stored by the villains in Shanghai and the village of Xitang, and so forth. All these points were raised in Chinese commentaries about the film. By the time the film was allowed to be screened, with some cuts, it had been [widely viewed](#) on pirated DVDs by much of its targeted audience.

If Hollywood now (mostly) "gets it" and has learned valuable lessons in understanding the relationship between China's image on screen and the Chinese box office, as suggested above, China has multiple priorities for its film industry, often using non-market, administrative means for ensuring domestic box office performance for favored films which are produced for political reasons. For film bureaucrats the ideal film is what can be called a "patriotic commercial blockbuster," represented most recently by "The Founding of a Republic" (2009) and "Beginning of the Great Revival" (2011), with the former celebrating the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and the latter celebrating the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921. Needless to say, such films do little to promote Chinese soft power abroad. "Revival" opened in selected American theaters on June 24, 2011, and offers some valuable lessons on why Hollywood films have been more effective than China's own films in promoting China's public diplomacy efforts.

First, such political films are produced and marketed with a Chinese audience in mind, primarily domestic but also overseas. Subtitled films don't travel well; taking the U.S. as an example, the biggest Chinese language "hits" of the last few years were John Woo's "Red Cliff," released here in a severely truncated version that brought in \$627,000 in 2009, and Donnie Yen's "Ip Man 2: Legend of the Grandmaster," which opened on January 28, 2011 and brought in a meager

\$205,000. Taking a longer view, those Chinese films that have done best overseas with Western as well as Chinese (and other Asian) audiences have been historical epics set during the dynastic period, often with a strong martial arts component. "Revival" is being marketed to Chinese communities, primarily in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York and Hawaii, as part of an arrangement of China Lion Distribution Inc. and AMC theaters.

Second, "Revival" has begun to generate some [Western press coverage](#), which is an important component in promoting a nation's public diplomacy. Significantly, however, the Western – and even much of the Asian – [press coverage](#) has focused on areas which are counterproductive to public diplomacy efforts. For example, it has [been noted](#) that to ensure a strong box office, tickets are being distributed gratis to the masses, and that the film is often derided if it registers with the public at all.

In addition, popular movie review websites in China have disabled the star rating system for the film, and have not allowed users to leave written reviews, with one report suggesting that before the [rating system was disabled](#) the film had garnered overwhelmingly negative reviews, with 87.8 percent of raters giving it the minimum one star. Many reports note that to ensure success, screenings of new Hollywood films such as "Transformers 3" and "Cars 2" will be delayed, that this is one of close to 30 propaganda films being released at this time, and that this is part of the party's coordinated effort that includes TV soap operas, books, and [musical events](#). As with "Founding of a Republic," it appears that most of those who are enthusiastic about seeing the film are attracted by the star power of the cast: many of the leading actors in the mainland and Hong Kong film industries appear in these films, with the entertainment value consisting of recognizing which star is portraying which historical character.

Such Western coverage of Chinese films is not atypical; there is probably a greater interest in political issues than artistic ones in reporting on Chinese film. Thus, at a recent cultural forum in Shanghai, award-winning "Sixth Generation" director Jia Zhangke made headlines when he openly attacked film censorship, citing it as the reason that China cannot make genre films, expressing his frustration that his proposed films on a man's sex life and a spy film about the Communist and Nationalist parties had to be scrapped. [As he put it](#), "If I want to make the movie here, I have to portray all the communists as superheroes," further adding that "This kind of cultural over-cleanliness that bans the

erotic, violent and terrifying is cultural naivety.” It is therefore perhaps not surprising that China is playing up the opening of a [Chinese film festival in Myanmar](#) (Burma) from June 11-17 this year, and its cooperation with Myanmar in film; in military-controlled Myanmar there should be no debate about censorship.

Given the self-imposed restrictions on China’s film industry, the image of China shaped by films comes primarily from two sources, one positive and one negative. As noted above, Hollywood blockbusters have a financial interest in making China look good. However, some independent films in English with a Chinese theme have done surprisingly well at the box office, and presented a far less attractive picture of China. For example, the Australian film “Mao’s Last Dancer” (2010), based on the autobiography of a Chinese ballet dancer who defected to the U.S. in the early 1980’s, presents Chinese consulate officials in Houston doing everything possible, including kidnapping, to prevent the dancer from remaining in the U.S. with his American wife. In contrast to the poor performance of Chinese films abroad, “Dancer” brought in close to \$5 million USD in the U.S. and over \$22 million USD worldwide. So long as the Chinese film industry is subject to the same political constraints as other Chinese media, China’s public diplomacy in this arena will continue to be shaped by others.

Author Biography

Stanley Rosen is the Director of the East Asian Studies Center at USC’s College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, and a professor of political science at USC specializing in Chinese politics and society. His courses range from Chinese politics and Chinese film to political change in Asia, East Asian societies, comparative politics theory, and politics and film in comparative perspective. He is the author or editor of eight books and many articles, the co-editor of *Chinese Education and Society*, and a frequent guest editor of other translation journals.

Endnotes

1. “China Watch,” *The New York Times*, May 27, 2011
2. Grace Ng, “Power of Kungfu Panda 2: Chengdu Scores Publicity Coup as Setting for Hit Film,” *The Straits Times*
3. *ibid*
4. *ibid*

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Spotlight

Not Lost in Translation: Why Is Jon Stewart Popular in China?

By Chaoran Liu

With 1.3 million followers on his Weibo account (the Chinese equivalent of Twitter), Gudabaihua (谷大白话) is one of China's most prominent translators of American late-night talk shows. The subtitled video clips he produces regularly get millions of hits. Gudabaihua is credited with spreading many Internet memes associated with late-night talk shows, and for promoting the overall popularity of this genre in China.

In an interview with Chaoran Liu, a USC Annenberg graduate student, Gudabaihua spoke about the role and influence of American talk shows in China. The interview, conducted on December 2, 2013, was part of Liu's graduate thesis. Edited Excerpts:



CHAORAN LIU: How were you first exposed to American late-night talk shows?

GUDABAIHUA: The first time I watched late-night talk shows was seven years ago. Like many millennial college students, I enjoyed playing basketball, online gaming, and watching American television. And like them, I watched those programs through various BitTorrent websites, both domestic and abroad. Having watched a number of TV series, I was then exposed to the Oscar Awards of TV series, the Emmys. For many years, I thought that each award would go to different people at different times. But to my surprise, the “Outstanding Variety, Music, or Comedy Series” category was hogged by the same winner for years in a row. Curious, I tracked down the program to see what it was all about. I was impressed by such trenchant and smart comedy after watching several episodes, and then it became my all-time favorite. The comedy program was none other than The Daily Show with Jon Stewart.

CL: What are some of the difficulties you have encountered in translating late-night talk show programs?

G: When I first started, the main obstacle was understanding and differentiating words. Talk shows hosts generally speak very fast. When spoken quickly, linked words lead to changes in tone and phonetic reduction.

The other obstacle was accent. Talk show hosts, for the sake of parody, often imitate different accents. For example, Stewart likes to imitate Jewish and New Jersey accents; Craig Ferguson often imitates British accents; Jay Leno imitates Arnold Schwarzenegger; Jimmy Fallon imitates all kinds of celebrities. Some hosts themselves have accents: Craig Ferguson has a Scottish accent, and John Oliver has a British accent. Guests can be a problem, too: Egyptian, Indian, Pakistani accents are very difficult for me to understand.

And then there is the problem of slang, which I find very hard to understand, especially when they function as puns and homonyms. An example would be a punchline like “a Democrat sucks, and a Republican blows.” Understanding why such punchlines are funny requires a large slang vocabulary, and preserving the humor while translating them into Chinese compounds the difficulty.

The other challenge was the American cultural background that involves history, current affairs, politics, movies, literature, gossip, and all sorts of subjects. Historical examples include former Vice President Dan Quayle misspelling the word “potato” and President George H.W. Bush vomiting on the Japanese Prime Minister. As for current affairs, there’s the scandal of Toronto mayor Rob Ford and political divisiveness between Republicans and Democrats over health care. Another example of a difficult cultural reference was a Daily Show report on the death of Bin Laden called “Hairy Plotter and the Deathly Hello,” a parody of the book title Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. The only way to work through these challenges is by the slow accumulation of knowledge.

CL: What do you think explains the popularity of The Daily Show among Chinese audiences?

G: First, Stewart looks handsome. A number of female fans are drawn to Stewart for his looks.

Second, standard talk show monologues are composed of shorter jokes, which are usually far too frequent and unfamiliar to strike a chord with the Chinese audience, because they are more comfortable with dealing with contextualized comedy, such as cross talks (a traditional Chinese form of comedic performance typically with two performers. Jokes during monologues are only about 30 seconds long, so many Chinese viewers find it hard to keep up. There is also the problem of understanding cultural references. Explanatory captions can be helpful, but talk show jokes are often too short for a caption to fully explain them.

However, Stewart often stays on the same topic for eight minutes or so, so he is able to explain the context of what he’s discussing. When background information is laid out like this, a Chinese audience has a better chance of understanding the whole thing. Sometimes Stewart interacts with the so-called “senior correspondents,” and the conversations and storylines these correspondents produce make sense to Chinese audiences.

Third, Stewart shows no mercy in railing against the bad guys. Standard jokes fall short in their ability to delve into issues due to time limitations. And broadcast network talk show programs such as The Tonight Show have to play it safe by catering to people of different age groups and political ideologies: expletives are avoided, offensive words are euphemized, and controversies are shunned. Yet Comedy Central, being a cable network, carries no such burden, as demonstrated by South Park. Bleeped-out expletives and controversial stances are common features on Stewart's show, and his political satire can be over the top sometimes. HBO's Bill Maher doesn't even bleep out the dirty words, yet his biting remarks might be too much for Chinese audiences.

Lastly, Stewart's show often features topics that Chinese people are into, such as the presidential elections, the government shutdown, and the London Olympics.

CL: How do you think the rising popularity of American talk shows has influenced Chinese audiences?

G: First, many viewers' tolerance of political incorrectness is greater once they realize that almost everybody in the world has, at one point or another, been the laughingstock of American talk shows. It has gradually dawned on the Chinese audience that talk shows do not claim to be serious news reporting, but are in fact a form of entertainment that caters to the taste of low-, middle-, and high-brow audiences.

Second, these shows present a real America to the Chinese public. American talk shows have provided an opportunity to see America at its best, as well as at its worst. And many have come to understand that America is a diverse and multi-faceted entity, instead of a perfect heaven or a veritable hell, as so many claim on the Internet.

Third, the Chinese are increasingly interested in American politics and current affairs, thanks to these programs' focus on elections. Many netizens showed considerable knowledge about U.S. Presidential candidates, in my observation.

CL: In general, what is the Chinese audience's take on negative reports related to China?

G: The talk show sphere has generally two approaches when it comes to China. One is the use of stereotypes in jokes, for example, Colbert likes to imitate a Chinese accent, and Conan and Leno are fond of making fun of child labor. The other approach is to capitalize on the country's growing influence. Stewart, Kimmel, and others never get tired of referring to China's status as the largest creditor nation.

Colbert and Stewart's shows sometimes feature full-length negative reports on China, and such content is generally accepted by the Chinese audience. For example, Chinese viewers often write comments agreeing with parodies about the smog in Beijing.

For more resources on comedy as a tool for public diplomacy, read "[Taking Comedy Seriously in Public Diplomacy](#)" by Jay Wang and "[Stand-up Diplomacy: Humor as Public Diplomacy](#)" by Paul Rockower.

Author Biography

Charon Liu is an international student from China and candidate for a Master in Strategic Public Relations at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California. This interview is an excerpt from his graduate thesis titled Review and Analysis of the Past, Present and Future of American Talk Shows in China Based on The Daily Show experience.

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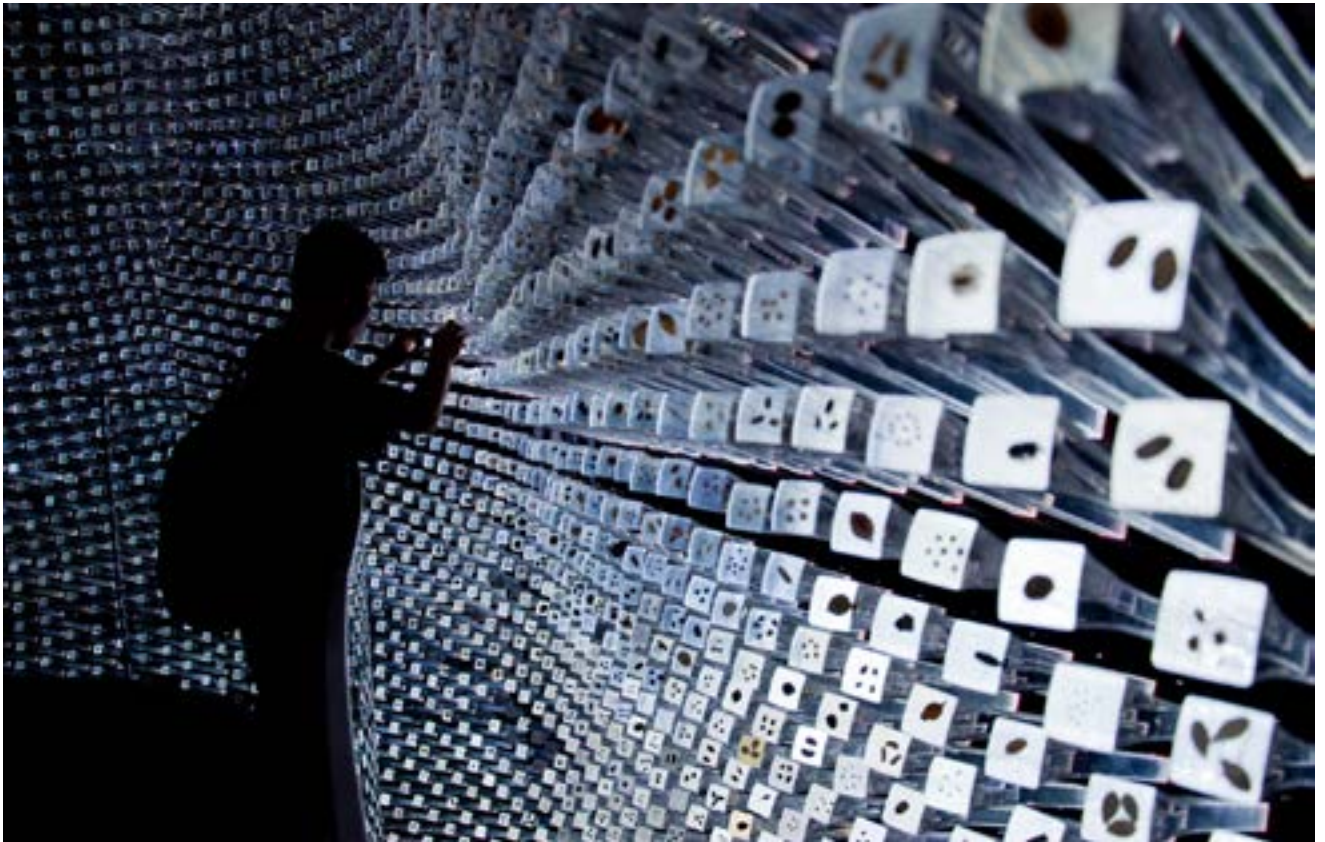
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Expo Shanghai 2010











Viewpoints

The First Soft-Power Superpower

By Philip Seib

BEIJING — During the 20 years since the demise of the Soviet Union, and after a unipolar moment for the United States, China has emerged as the newest superpower. All its predecessors at this exalted level, going back even before Rome, have established their positions by amassing formidable military strength. But China is going about matters differently.

Recognizing that it would require budget-wrecking spending to quickly catch up with the United States as a wielder of military strength, China is, at least for now, emphasizing soft power – trying to extend its influence through attraction rather than coercion.

Although it certainly retains the capability to strong-arm other nations with its economic weapons, China has become the world's most active exponent of public diplomacy. It has spent an estimated US\$8 billion on its international broadcasting efforts, many millions more on its worldwide network of Confucius Institutes, and additional large sums on projects as significant as educational exchanges and as trivial as advertising on electronic billboards in New York's Times Square. Further, some of China's best universities are embracing public diplomacy as an academic discipline, training the country's next generation of experts in this field.

But what is China getting for all this money and effort? Public opinion polls from around the world indicate decidedly mixed results. In parts of Africa, where China has built roads and stadiums, its popularity has risen. Elsewhere, however, China is viewed warily as heavy-handed and insensitive to the political and economic

lives of countries where it is expanding its presence.

In two weeks of discussions with Chinese public diplomacy practitioners and scholars in Beijing and Shanghai, I found no consensus about what China's public diplomacy strategy should be or what China wants from its public diplomacy efforts. The enthusiasm is there, but an overarching plan is not.

Part of this lack of coherence is due to China's slow acceptance of the realities of being a superpower. I heard complaints from many quarters about how unfairly China is being treated by the international news media, and claims that China is not receiving the respect that it deserves. When I said that mistreatment – real or imagined, deserved or not – is something superpowers must learn to live with, my Chinese colleagues did not seem to understand this facet of political reality.

China has become the world's most active exponent of public diplomacy. But what is China getting for all this money and effort?

Chinese public diplomacy leaders need a better appreciation of the give-and-take of superpower diplomacy. As a first step, they should understand that reciprocity is important if multilateral relationships are to take shape. If China wants to export its Confucius Institutes, it must allow the United States and others to set up comparable cultural centers (in comparable numbers) in China. If China wants to extend the reach of its international broadcasting, it must allow other countries to have broadcast and online access to the Chinese public.

Such goals may seem far-fetched, given China's reluctance to allow substantive political debate within its borders, much less permit outsiders to contribute to

any such debate. But more than anything else, China is determined to be a global player. Its embrace of public diplomacy, rather than endangering the world with another superpower arms race, is encouraging.

If the United States and other nations persist in engaging with China within the realm of public diplomacy, China might be nudged toward increased openness. This could enable the newest superpower to continue to rely on soft power.

Author Biography

Philip Seib is Vice Dean of the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and a Professor of Journalism, Public Diplomacy, and International Relations at the University of Southern California. Seib directed the USC Center on Public Diplomacy from 2009-2013.

This article first appeared May 2012 as a [CPD blog](#).

A Cautionary Tale of Soft Power Promotion

By Emily T. Metzgar

China's increasing involvement in Africa has captured considerable attention from policymakers and academics. Formalized in a 2006 policy statement, "China's Africa Policy," Beijing's interest in the region translates into Chinese government and government-affiliated institutions investing billions of dollars in large-scale construction projects across the continent. In complementary fashion, China's state-sponsored media has initiated programming created for audiences throughout the region. And increasing numbers of Chinese citizens unaffiliated with government efforts are flocking to Africa in pursuit of their own interests.

A story that involves both a rising superpower and the world's most underdeveloped region is a story worth telling and journalist Howard French has tackled this rich subject in his new book, *China's Second Continent: How a Million Migrants Are Building a New Empire in Africa*. It is hard to imagine anyone better qualified to tell this story. Now a member of the faculty at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, French worked as *The New York Times* bureau chief in Shanghai and before that as a university instructor and foreign correspondent in West and Central Africa. The

volume is imbued with his professional voice.

The book is not a travelogue, although some reviewers have described it as such. It is perhaps more appropriate to describe the work as a thoughtful presentation of a fast-moving situation likely to have profound implications for decades to come. French refrains from offering policy recommendations. He instead focuses on the facts as they unfold, often supplementing the narrative with insights gleaned from years of experience on the ground in Africa and China. It is compelling reading.

An insatiable need for natural resources is usually presented as the primary motivation for Beijing's interest in the region. So too, is China's desire to build reliable support among African leaders for use in multilateral institutions and elsewhere when the need arises. The development of future markets for Chinese exports as well as promotion of the political stability necessary to sustain those markets are also recognized as significant drivers of Chinese attention.

The flow of private Chinese citizens heading to Africa on their own has hitherto been overshadowed by



“big picture” geopolitical dynamics. But China’s Second Continent shows how numerous and widespread these individuals are – by some estimates, more than a million Chinese living in Africa today. These private citizens, the primary focus of French’s work, often find themselves operating in a space separate from the political and economic policy imperatives driving Beijing’s efforts. The result is not always pretty and it offers a cautionary tale about the dark side of soft power promotion.

A recent report from Rand summarizes the complexity of the situation: “China’s role in Africa defies conventional stereotypes and punchy news headlines. China is both a long-established diplomatic partner and a new investor in China... China portrays its principle of non-interference and friendly relations as an altogether new and positive model for external engagement with Africa,” but Westerners and many Africans themselves are less positive about the mutuality of the benefits accruing to non-Chinese as a result of this new era of engagement. While French’s work is not explicitly about public diplomacy, the relevance is obvious.

Soft power is a term French employs several times throughout the book, but always in the context of China’s official efforts to either extract resources from, or curry influence with, the region. The story presented in China’s Second Continent is a case study in the limits of soft power promotion. Placed in leitmotif by this narrative is the distinction between government-sponsored public diplomacy and citizen-driven engagement with foreign publics. Official efforts are exemplified by a series of recent Chinese-financed construction projects such as railways in Kenya, a university in Angola, and the African Union headquarters in Ethiopia.

The influence of private citizens, on the other hand, is illustrated in a series of anecdotes French provides about Chinese intolerance toward Africans, manifested in a range of behaviors from the use of racial epithets to the physical mistreatment of African employees in small, Chinese-run operations. The difficulty this presents to Chinese government efforts is predictable. A headline from a recent article in The Guardian is representative of the tension between official Chinese efforts and the actions of private Chinese citizens: “China-Africa relations hurt by bad Chinese behavior, says ambassador.”

As French documents, however, even formal Chinese-sponsored projects are tainted by the consistent exclusion of Africans from most aspects of construction aside from the simplest menial labor. This is because Chinese firms selected for implementation of Chinese-

funded projects import equipment and labor from the homeland, leaving little opportunity for economic development on the part of nations that are the ostensible beneficiaries of the projects. The resulting effect on African opinion of China is what the aforementioned Rand report has described as “a mix of approval, apathy and contempt.”

While China’s Second Continent makes a few references to incidents where Chinese citizens have been the target of theft and violent crime perpetrated by Africans resentful of China’s presence and its citizens’ relative affluence, what comes across most strongly in French’s work is a growing sense of unease among African elites in particular that the mutual respect heralded by the Chinese government does not translate into sustainable benefits for the African nations or the people therein for whom China purports to have brotherly respect. This dynamic is likely to have an increasingly negative influence on China’s efforts to promote soft power in the region. While the importance of French’s work is evident today, its value is likely to increase over time as it may come to be seen as a carefully documented study of the origins of African discontent with China’s growing presence on the continent.

Author Biography

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When the “Sleeping Dragon” Dreams

By Di Wu

Since Mr. Xi Jinping was elected as the General Secretary of the Communist Party and the Head of the Military Commission, the world has been musing about the possibilities of Chinese reform under his presidency. Some people speculated on connections of his visit to Iowa in 1985 and his fondness of Hollywood films to his possible liberal stance; while others, who understand the inner workings of Chinese politics, suspected no huge transformation would take place in the foreseeable future as President Xi himself is not the only decision maker.

President Xi announced that his first slogan will be “Chinese dream.” Every Chinese leader has one or two slogans that serve as a representation of his policies and a guideline for the public. The former President Hu Jintao had his famous “harmonious society” as a slogan, and Deng Xiaoping used “reform and opening up” to lead Chinese economic reform since late 1970s. President Xi first mentioned the “Chinese dream” during a speech at the National Museum in November 2012. The speech was given for the exhibition called “Road to Revival.” As with previous slogans put forward by Mr. Xi’s predecessors, this term is widely “studied” throughout the nation. For example, Chinese performing arts tailor shows, materials, activities, and education in schools to fit the dream. But what is this dream about?

As an article published on May 4, 2013 by the Economist pointed out, the “Chinese dream” is an opaque term compared to previous slogans. It is unique because it “seems designed to inspire rather than inform.” At first, using the word “dream” as a national guideline seems a bit sentimental. After all, Chinese do not need to be emotionally motivated for voting purposes. However, if you take the recent challenges in air pollution, food security, and corruption in China into consideration, it is quite obvious that re-boosting the confidence among the Chinese public in the Communist Party is a matter of great urgency. A sensational slogan might do the trick. Internationally, this slogan pictures a dichotomous relationship between China and the United States, not militarily, but ideologically.

The “Chinese dream” parallels with the “American

dream,” which is defined by James Truslow Adams as “[a society where] life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement.” It visions the ultimate establishment of “a modern socialist state with Chinese characteristics.” Besides aiming at the completion of building a Xiaokang society (the well-off society), the Chinese version underlines the uniqueness of China characterized by her humiliating history and solidarity of the people, according to President Xi. By injecting the touch of humanity and softness into Chinese anticipations of the future, the “Chinese dream” tries to deliver a message that we (including Chinese, Americans, and others) are similar dream seekers. But the Chinese obviously have a different dream than the U.S. with its Western values. The American dream is about valuing individual dreams, while the Chinese dream is about building the nation.

We are the same yet we are different. How does this message translate into Chinese nation branding and public diplomacy? It may not be the intention of the Chinese government to communicate their dream to the international community, but it will eventually become one of the pillars defining Chinese public diplomacy activities overseas since it guides the domestic agenda. Moreover, it is indeed the most “borderless” slogan when comparing it to ones given by previous Chinese political leaders. For example, former President Jiang Zemin’s “Three Represents” was arcane without knowing the Chinese political background; former President Hu Jintao’s “scientific-development outlook” was basically concerned with domestic development. This time, the “Chinese dream” can be viewed as an overarching theme for communication purposes, both internally and externally.

Is it a good slogan for Chinese nation branding? The answer is mixed. On the one hand, foreign publics may not need extra knowledge to understand that China is looking forward. On the other hand, the “Chinese dream” represents a determination that China will eventually become a strong nation again. This is at least the backdrop of it, if not the core message it tries to deliver. The Chinese revival is easily seen as a threat to China’s neighbors, though many explanations were

given externally to clarify that the “Chinese dream” does not mean to going back to the “tributary system.”

The question of whether China has the intention or capability to place threats to other countries is not a consideration here, but misconceptions followed by the slogan should be addressed. If the slogan needs additional annotations so that other countries do not miscomprehend China, then it is at least not a self-explanatory vehicle carrying China’s image. Former President Hu’s slogan “harmonious society” is a comparatively better one for external communication as it contains a straightforward message and is inspired by Confucius thinking. The task for the new leadership is to twist the connection between strength and threat to common prosperity.

Additionally, the “Chinese dream” is an attempt to break the dominance of universal values. According to Dr. Wang Yiwei, the “Chinese dream” is not China’s dream. It emphasizes the Chinese people. This is highly questionable because in articles and public speeches from officials, the “Chinese dream” has always been about Chinese as a nation not as individuals. President Xi mentioned the Chinese dream with the revival of Chinese civilization, which is composed of Chinese people and the entire nation. In this sense, no matter if its “China’s dream” or “Chinese dream,” the slogan is exclusive. “Harmonious world,” on the other hand, has a global horizon and cuts to the point.

It is also not a good idea to echo the “American dream” since it has ready taken roots in people’s minds. The “American dream” is an immigration dream about acceptance and freedom. The Chinese version obviously has a totally different story. In terms of nation branding, isn’t it better to create one unique term that better represents the Chinese nation?

“Chinese dream” provides neither a clear branding externally nor an efficient guide internally. Domestically, Chinese people have been given freedom to define their individual dreams following this big theme of “Chinese dream.” Academics like Dr. Wang have been writing to explain misunderstandings of the “Chinese dream,” but the Chinese people need information more specific than that. Unlike previous slogans mainly pointing out the direction of material produc-

tions, the “Chinese dream” still lacks definition. The vagueness of this slogan can only be read as a calling for patriotism, although the underlying message is calling for confidence in the Party.

The effectiveness of this internal propaganda remains to be seen. It may fulfill the need of the Chinese people who have lost ideological faith in the Party. It may also completely disconnect with reality and become an irony. The outlook all depends on how the new leadership defines this dream. Its broadness can do both good and bad. It can be wide enough to include any

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individual vision. It can also be too spread out and lack focus. Externally, the core meaning of national revival attached to the “Chinese dream” may still be considered as a threat, although the human element of it can create opportunities to build a bridge between people.

While potentially effective for mobilizing the Chinese public, this slogan is not efficient for Chinese nation branding. The slogan may hold the nation together for a common goal—revival of Chinese nation, but when its impacts spills over to the international arena, a “Chinese dream” may not be what people would expect from China. How can you define a nebulous dream when everyone has his/her interpretations? President Xi and his team need to either make more efforts to clarify the dream’s contents or replace the slogan with a new one.

Author Biography

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Looking for God at the Shanghai Expo: Religion, Nation Branding and the Soft Power Showdown in China

By Nicholas Cull

Last week the Shanghai Expo 2010 closed. On three sweltering days this summer I toured the vast and frenzied space that was the Expo. My objective was to see how the nations of the world were representing themselves to the Chinese public and how each responding to the Expo's official theme: 'Better City, Better Life.'

As I walked from one national pavilion to another, stimulation came from every direction: from the astonishing range of the architecture on view; the numerous technological innovations; the competing national brand statements, and the breathtaking variety of exhibits.

Some pavilions were magnificent: the Italian pavilion seemed to pulsate with the energy of a piazza. Some pavilions were moving: the Chilean pavilion delivered a timely plea for city dwellers to connect with each other. Some pavilions were just plain odd: the Russians had themed its pavilion around an obscure Slavic fai-

rytale and decked their pavilion's interior as a psychedelic enchanted forest. But it was the Iranian pavilion that really set me thinking.

Located at the farthest edge of the fairground, between North Korea and Lebanon on an axis of irrelevance, Iran placed religion front and center, referencing its architecture and all other aspects of its design back to an Islamic identity. Then it hit me. The dimension of religion had been absent from all the other pavilions I had seen. I immediately set to work looking for God at the Expo.

Although pavilions are expected to respond to the grand theme, a national pavilion at an Expo has traditionally been a microcosm of the society it represents. One might expect that the religious life of peoples would figure in some way, and indeed the Asian pavilions had no reticence in evoking their Buddhist traditions. Many presented reconstructed temples and the Sri Lankan and Nepalese pavilions even offered an op-



portunity to pray.

The Abrahamic religions were a different matter. All seemed wary of introducing an element they were unlikely to share with a Chinese audience. Saudi Arabia's giant IMAX screen included images of the Hajj but without labeling them as sacred. The UAE's film show included a reference to oil as a 'gift of Allah' but otherwise spoke in code of 'the importance of tradition.' Other Arab states followed suit. Israel explained itself only in terms of its technology not theology.

The European pavilions seemed similarly reticent. The displays gave no sense of the continent's religious tradition, observance or diversity. Racial diversity was often present but not religion. The Danish pavilion even made a virtue of the secular nature of its society with a sign telling visitors: 'In Denmark we don't pray very much, but it's OK. We believe in each other.' Spain leapt straight from an evocation of the elemental forces of nature – the bull – to a nostalgic slice of secular life in the mid 1950s.

The Irish pavilion included a religious dimension, but in a telling way: a gallery in which three rooms representing typical Irish homes from one hundred years ago, fifty years ago and the present had been reconstructed. The cottage of 1910 was stuffed to the rafters with icons and religious paraphernalia. The house of 1960 had a cross and a couple of religious knickknacks. The house of 2010 (an ultra-modern apartment in Dublin's docklands) had only one religious object: a bust of Guanyin, the Buddhist embodiment of mercy. The implication was that prosperity had moved Ireland beyond faith and into a happy present in which any icon would do so long as it fitted the décor.

The Americas were no different. The US pavilion showcased diversity, friendliness, and the generosity of corporate sponsors without reference to a Higher Power. The sole exception was Mexico whose exhibition of artistic treasures included an altar piece of the Virgin Mary with a sword sticking out of her chest. It was very Mexican and seemed like a moment of authenticity.

Long before Joseph Nye pointed out that a nation's perceived cultural and moral worth afforded it 'soft power'

nations have understood the political value of identifying with an internationally respected system of values. This has often taken the form of the explicit presentation of religion as a component of the state's identity. The Kings of France were styled 'the most Christian King' and many countries have religious symbols on their flags.

Long before Joseph Nye pointed out that a nation's perceived cultural and moral worth afforded it 'soft power' nations have understood the political value of identifying with an internationally respected system of values.

Since the Second World War states have laid claim to broader global moralities which – though in some ways rooted in religious tradition – transcend any single culture: human rights, international law and principals of democracy. These issues were also treated gingerly by the pavilions. The desire/necessity to avoid offending the host government created an image of the West at Expo of being much more culturally and politically

compatible with China than may actually be the case. But the desire to leverage the 'soft power' of values was still present at Shanghai.

Three days in to the fair I realized that there was something familiar about the way in which the Western pavilions were presenting the doctrines of ecology and sustainability which were at the heart of their interpretation of the 'Better City, Better Life' theme. This was the new international morality and the nations of the West plainly expected admiration for having overcome a past of pollution and unrestrained carbon emissions and 'seen the light.' Was it coincidence that some even recycled a religious vocabulary? Britain called its pavilion – a spiky dome lined with seeds encased in Perspex – the 'The Seed Cathedral.'

What then are the implications of this? Three conclusions occurred to me: Firstly, some pavilions certainly bore testimony to a turn away from religion (Ireland, Italy and Spain were cases in point). Secondly, other pavilions censored themselves and presented a distorted picture of their religious reality to appear more approachable to the Chinese public (the US and the Arab pavilions). But finally, it seemed clear that 'sustainability' has become the new international morality and Very Christian Kings and Very Democratic Prime Ministers have been replaced by Very Green Republics and Corporations.

The distortion of reality creates its own traps. What is

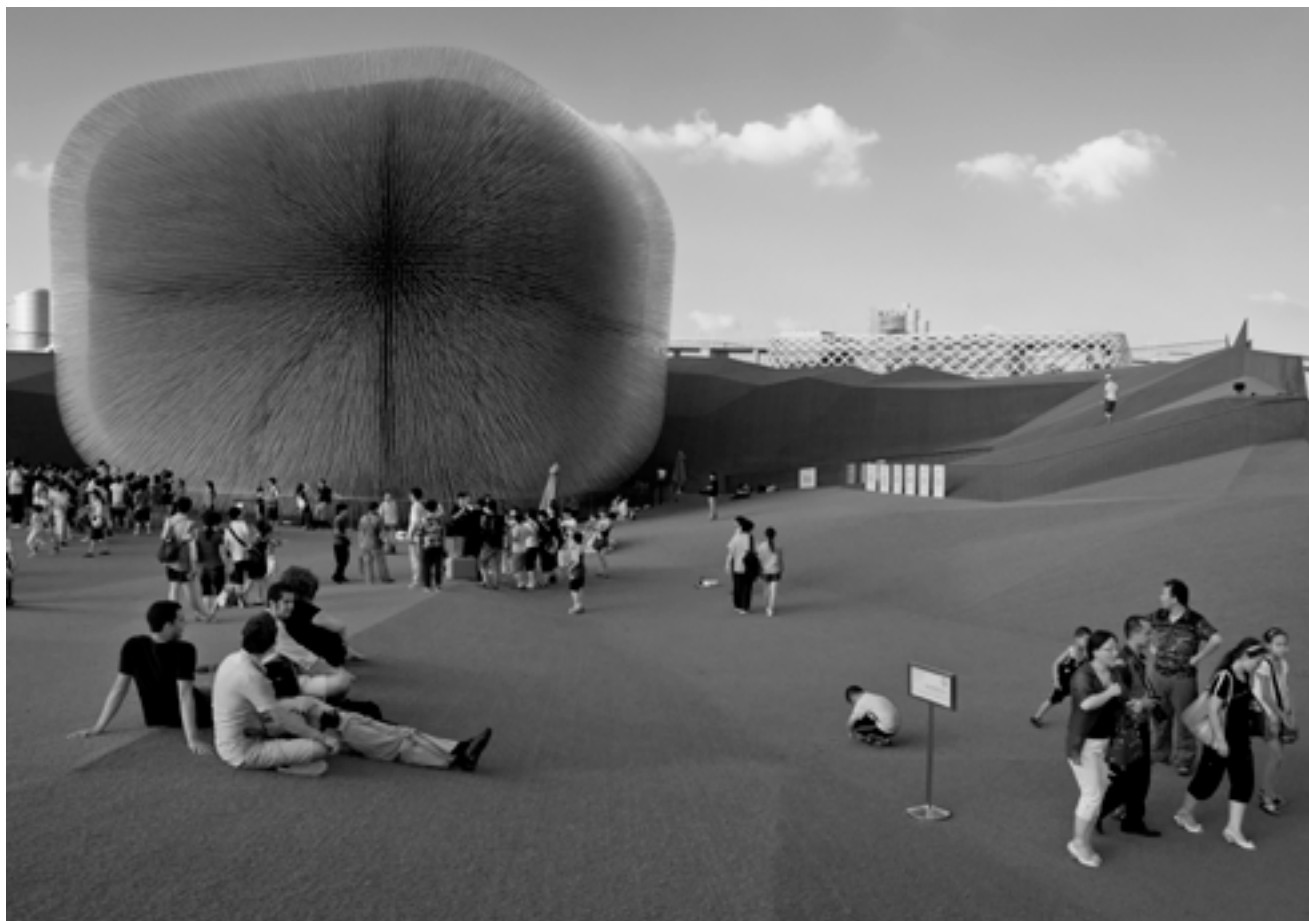
the Chinese public to think when the nations which claimed such affinity at Expo begin acting inexplicably according to sharply divergent values? A political case in point might be the recent choice made by the Norwegian Nobel Peace Prize committee. But the new morality has its trap too: the West is open to charges of hypocrisy and may be judged by its own ecological standards. The British government doubtless regretted persuading BP to co-sponsor its presence at Expo.

The final danger is one which certainly afflicted the international display of religious piety: the negative impact of appearing too preachy; too holier-than-thou. For the necessary transition to a sustainable planet to take place global publics will need to be co-opted. The need is to reach out to them respectfully, honestly and with a spirit of dialogue rather than recreating the uglier aspects of the old time church missionary. God help us.

Author Biography

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This article first appeared November 2010 as a [CPD blog](#).



Urbanizing China-EU Relations?

By Michele Acuto

The European Union (EU) has long been one of the leading international actors in recognizing the potential of cities as agents of global governance. Fostering a variety of initiatives through the Committee of Regions, which acts as the EU's assembly of regional and local representatives, Europe has promoted the participation of cities in regional and international governance since its early days.

This has now, interestingly, spread to bilateral relations with the growing giants of 21st century international relations. While the EU has regularly held meetings with China and India for the past decade, these are now extending to include a variety of subnational authorities which might play an essential role not only in strengthening and relaxing political relations between Europe and the Far East, but also in developing joint efforts with real-world applications that directly impact the lives of millions of urban dwellers.

The EU-China Mayors' Forum, held on September 19 and 20, 2012, was the first annual flagship event of a newly-inaugurated "EU-China Urbanisation Partnership" that was in turn launched at the occasion of the 7th China-EU Summit to address urbanization challenges in China through cooperative EU-China efforts between stakeholders at national, regional and local levels. As the Forum's presentation put it: "Given the array of challenges they face in adapting to the "urban century," China and Europe have a strong interest in working together to build better cities."

The meeting included European and Chinese mayors with a variety of delegations of city planners, local business and NGOs, and had been devised to facilitate the sharing of sustainable, integrated and efficient urban solutions. While the meeting remains a purely consultative and peer-to-peer project, it nonetheless holds important potential to promote paradiplomatic exchanges between local governments and urban stakeholders: involving, for instance, the Chinese Association of Mayors and the European Covenant of Mayors in a range of cross-sector activities and a multi-player events open to all relevant actors. The meeting tackled a number of problématiques, including the challenges facing modern cities as they struggle to cope with in-

creasingly mobile urbanites, increased traffic and problems of waste management. Likewise, it has ventilated a set of possible avenues for cooperation with the perspective of China and Europe joining forces to meet the demands of China's urban billion.

The launch of this EU-China partnership has the potential to reinforce relations between the two emerging international actors while actively fostering exchanges of models, expertise, and, possibly, governance arrangements. Certainly, any judgment on the practical effectiveness of the initiative is perhaps, at this stage, a little too far fetched. Besides, the Forum has convened only a handful of city leaders from smaller municipalities in Europe and second-tier cities in China and the participation of major cities like Shanghai or Berlin might be necessary to move this paradiplomatic effort to the proverbial 'next level' and impact EU and Chinese citizens at large. Yet, this tentative urbanization of EU-China relations holds some interesting promises for city leadership which, after all, might be a key component in producing truly innovative transnational responses to global challenges.

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China and India: Translating Public Diplomacy into Soft Power

By Sarah Ellen Graham

Two recent books on China and India have highlighted the rising importance of public diplomacy within the foreign policies of these rising Asian giants. Taken together, U.S. academic David Shambaugh's *China Goes Global* and Indian writer and Member of Parliament Shashi Tharoor's *Pax Indica* reveal some telling differences between the way both governments approach the pursuit of soft power. Both books suggest quite divergent outlooks for the two governments in their search for global influence through PD in the coming years.

Of the two, Shambaugh traverses what is undoubtedly more familiar ground, though he comes to a striking and perhaps heterodox conclusion. Chinese public diplomacy has been a major focus for PD scholars for several years now, and Shambaugh collects some important evidence about the government's strong commitment to public diplomacy over the last decade. He also discusses the Chinese government's focus on economically important cultural industries and exports sector within the Chinese economy, which it regards as a "pillar industry" to ensure both prosperity and global soft power. Hu Jintao, a particularly strong sponsor of cultural diplomacy, helped to usher in a rising interest in China in foreign policy issues related to soft power. In terms of the face China shows to the world through its cultural and public diplomacy activities, the book shows how the Chinese government remains firmly in charge of the messages deployed.

Much like its approach to domestic propaganda, the area where the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has more longstanding expertise and which has to a significant degree provided the model for external PD relations, the CCP's approach is to control information and strictly manage China's global image. For example, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Information Department seeks to use its public diplomacy liaisons with foreign journalists as a "strategic" tool and often constricts the work of journalists rather than facilitating accurate reporting.

The Xinhua News Agency and China Central Television are expanding globally, but are hampered by the lack of "credibility and substance" in their reporting. While semi-official channels such as the Confucius Institutes and China's universities have led to more open and collaborative forms of engagement, concerns remain about the degree to which the Institutes and China's educational system in general still convey a "national perspective" and limit the prospects for open political dialogue with foreigners. Such observations lead Shambaugh to conclude that China's "soft power and global cultural appeal remain very limited;" in this area China is a "partial power" with substantial capabilities but lacking a context of credibility with which to translate these into influence.

The picture Tharoor paints about Indian thinking on soft power and public diplomacy differs in some striking respects. Like China, India's leaders are increasingly cognizant of the significance of soft power in global politics and have lately been investing in PD policy initiatives. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations is active in promoting cultural diplomacy through its Festivals of India in foreign cities. India's Ministry of External Affairs has made significant investments in social media since it established a Public Diplomacy Division in 2006; offerings that showcase the functions of India's foreign policy agencies. Other PD formats such as publications, through the *India Perspectives* magazine available in 17 languages and 162 countries, and outreach to the international media have also been enhanced in recent years. A number of Indian MPs also maintain Twitter accounts and Tharoor, a supporter of the medium, applauds the way that this particular format can showcase a colloquy of political views and enhances the accessibility of government to ordinary citizens at home and abroad.

The key pillar of India's use of social media, for Tharoor, should be listening: effective PD "rests on the recognition that the public is entitled to be informed about what a government is doing...and is also entitled to responsiveness from those in authority." As with the

Chinese government's focus on the global promotion of cultural industries, the Brand India and India, Future of Change initiatives have set about promoting exports and in the process showcase the vibrant cultural and aesthetic traditions of India to international consumers.

What is striking in Pax Indica's discussion of PD is the question of openness and the degree to which the use of PD formats by the Indian government appears to present a model of democracy, in contrast to China's information control model. As a reflection of the Indian government's views of PD, Tharoor's account shows that while some officials have expressed concern that the promotion of public dialogue through social media could invite the airing of divisive or even defamatory views that might damage the government's image, the tides of history seem to be ultimately favoring listening and open dialogue. The crystallizing view from New Delhi, according to Tharoor, is that while China's greater investments in PD should be taken as a wakeup call for India to invest more in its own PD projects, India should not seek to emulate China's closed approach.

This puts the question of soft power and its real manifestations back at the forefront of the discussion. As Shambaugh notes, soft power is ultimately to be measured in terms of global public sentiments expressing attraction toward, and a desire to emulate, a state and its people; it is more than just admiration for the pace of economic growth and modernization.

While Chinese officials insist that China is simply misunderstood, Shambaugh raises the possibility that perhaps China's stifling political system and its raft of political problems, from human rights abuses to corruption to environmental degradation, does not exert an attractive influence over much of the global public that it is trying to court. While the Beijing Consensus may be an attractive idea to many governments in the developing world seeking to maintain authoritarian rule, norms of democracy and human rights continue to shape the hopes and aspirations of publics both there and in the West. It is here that India clearly has the greater potential to exert soft power in the coming decade.

As Tharoor notes, the triumphant spectacle of more 700 million people having access to the polls during India's general elections is something that overwhelmingly sparks respect and admiration among the world's publics. India's challenge will be to continue to invest in PD and maintain effective bureaucratic frameworks and a political commitment to the practice. Although India may be able to do more with less its global PD

footprint remains very modest, particularly in relation to China's. It will be exciting to assess India's continuing effort to develop its PD frameworks and its rise to soft power in the coming decade. Delhi Consensus, anyone?

Author Biography

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Exporting Chinese “Culture”

By Peter Winter

China’s relationship with the world continues to expand in intriguing ways – a blossoming of activity that gives the impression that the country is embracing an expanding role of responsibility and engagement. Throughout the developing world, infrastructure projects like Costa Rica and Ghana’s new [national stadiums](#) are offering more cultural means to connect with foreign publics.

The country’s recent deployment of a Navy medical vessel to Jamaica is another example of its growing humanitarian efforts around the world. There is even some fresh thinking in the China-Africa relationship, with 400 diplomats, policymakers and business leaders calling for [increased private sector activity and investment](#) in the continent.

Yet for all its gains in the developing world, there appears to be a widening disconnect with the Western public’s impression of China and the image it seeks to present. While the establishment of a Confucius Institute at Stanford University should have provided an opportunity to engage America’s intellectual community, any hope at progress was undone when the Chinese government placed one restriction on the funding: [no talking to Tibet](#). Donations continue to [roll in](#) for Ai Weiwei, the dissident artist whose stature has reached new heights simply because of Beijing’s [insistence](#) on tax evasion and public indecency charges. To cap off the month, the Confucius Peace Prize, China’s homegrown alternative to the Nobel Peace Prize, was awarded to the true epitome of peace and diplomacy, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

“His iron hand and toughness revealed in this [Chechen War of 1999] impressed the Russians a lot, and he was regarded to be capable of bringing safety and stability to Russia,” the [New York Times](#) quotes the English version of the Confucius Prize committee’s award statement. (It should be noted that the Chinese government, while supportive of the Prize’s initial creation, [urged the committee](#) to not give this year’s award.)

While Chinese public diplomacy has had its successes and (avoidable) failures, the nation’s continuing image problems have been labeled by some as its “[third af-](#)

[fliction](#).” With the country’s first and second afflictions (poverty and foreign aggression, respectively) quickly becoming issues of the past, negative perceptions of China appear to be mounting. It would seem a ripe moment for the national leadership to shift its thinking about China’s role in and engagement with international society. And that is exactly what Beijing recognizes...though the cure for this ailment may do more harm than good.

While the country’s economic success has led to a natural growth in the domestic arts and culture scene, creating a veritable wealth of public diplomacy resources, the Chinese government has instead elected to [explicitly define](#) “culture” as a tool for strategic and political gain.

At October’s plenary session of the 17th Central Committee of the Communist Party, the nation’s leadership unveiled its next five-year plan, choosing to focus on the [urgent need](#) to promote “its cultural sector to boost its soft power.” According to the government’s viewpoint, culture is an official means of international influence, a resource to be cultivated for its competitive value rather than an organic development that naturally enriches perceptions of the country around the world.

While all countries seek to emphasize those aspects that make their nation attractive to the rest of the world, in China’s case, the notion of government supervision and control is precisely the opposite for Western audiences. One of the most valued aspects of U.S. culture lies in its freedom from regulation; there is an obvious and cherished separation between the official state and public society. Though others may not value that separation to the same extent, it certainly remains a sticking point for the American public.

For better or worse, the nonstop criticism of the U.S. government in the public sphere provides outside observers a more honest view of the diversity of American society. While China’s political system intrinsically limits such perspective, the government’s decision to officially label culture as something to be exploited for international competition only further ensures its pub-

lic diplomacy efforts will have the taint of authority.

China's leaders are quick to note that the country's economic future depends on its ability to nurture creative industry. Relativity Media's \$100 million [fund and partnership](#) with Chinese film companies shows at the very least a desire to develop the cultural economy through international cooperation. However, when cultural products are viewed [as the means to a political end](#), their potential impact is diminished. Whether valid or not, there is a tendency to dismiss China's public diplomacy efforts as propagandist. This only makes it that much more likely.

Author Biography

Peter Winter is managing editor of U.S.-China Today, a publication of the USC U.S.-China Institute. He previously served as Director of the USA Pavilion's Student Ambassadors Program at the 2010 Shanghai World Expo. Winter is a 2010 graduate of the USC Master's in Public Diplomacy program.

This article first appeared November 2011 as a [CPD Monitor](#).



Beijing Film Festival: Technically Dazzling, Ultimately Disappointing

By Adam Clayton Powell, III

BEIJING – The 3rd Beijing International Film Festival was a public diplomacy showcase this week for Chinese cinema at its best. Banners throughout the capital promoted the festival, the awards ceremony and, not least, the film-selling market in a country that now proudly proclaims itself as the world's leader in movie theater revenues, ahead of the U.S.

And yet, and yet...

From the opening ceremonies to the closing awards show, China's answer to the Oscars, the festival reflected the strengths and weaknesses of video production in the Middle Kingdom.

The venue was huge, seemingly much larger than the Hollywood home of the Academy Awards. And the production values reflected world class techniques – huge musical numbers, multiple cameras, and swooping crane shots over the audience.

And yet, and yet...

Start with the huge hall. It was visually impressive, with an unusually wide stage backed by a large, high projection screen for animations and other videos that tied into each production number. But the hall was far from full: whenever the director went to a long shot, television viewers could see many empty seats.

Empty seats?

You never see empty seats at the Oscars, or the Emmys, or any other major award show in the U.S. – and for a very simple reason. Waiting just outside of camera range are legions of stylish, attractive extras, who rush into the audience to fill seats as soon as anyone gets up to leave. The Chinese evidently have not learned that simple trick. And it should be easy to implement: if there is one resource you do not exhaust here, it is people.

Presenter Jackie Chan was enthusiastic and energetic,

bantering in both Chinese and English. But even with such celebrity guests as Keanu Reeves and French film director Luc Besson, the repartee seemed flat. And musical numbers featuring stars including Sarah Brightman, billed here as “the Goddess of Moonlight” did not seem to have the warmest of welcomes. From audience shots selected by CCTV, the performers could only evoke occasional laughter and mild applause from the audience.

And then there were all of those empty seats.

The problem was not with the production technology or the performers: the problem was with the script. There were fewer good jokes in the multi-hour awards show than there are on any 25-minute Jon Stewart TV show. There are better production numbers in Africa's Grammys, the Kora Awards - not bigger, just better. One example from Tuesday's awards show: performers here have yet to master lip synching.

It's not as if Beijing does not have the resources and sheer muscle to produce the largest television programs in the world. The annual Spring Festival on CCTV – this year headlined by Celine Dion and Lang Lang – is billed as the biggest single television production on the planet. And even while CCTV's annual extravaganza is on the air, other Chinese TV channels have huge productions of their own, this year featuring Psy performing – naturally – “Gangnam Style.”

And we all remember the opening ceremony for the 2008 Olympic Games.

So there is no shortage of money, production, or technology. The problems are elsewhere. One key problem is content: scripts and concepts. Without good concepts and scripts, the most brilliant production is . . . empty. Think of all of the big-budget Hollywood movies that bombed, from “Heaven's Gate” to “John Carter.” Big budgets and slick production are not enough.

(Disclosure: Last week the USC School of Cinematic

Arts launched a joint Master Class program here with the Beijing Film Academy and Naga Films to improve Chinese cinema.)

All of this suggests lessons for CCTV as it prepares to launch a major daily television program service in America – five hours a day, starting in September (see more here): To be effective public diplomacy, CCTV America will need to attract an audience. And to attract an audience, expensive production and glitzy effects will only go so far. They will need content.

Author Biography

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Items & Ideas

MPD in China 2013: The Four Schools of Chinese PD

By Sarah Myers

One of the most vivid moments from our time in China came over dinner with a group of academics from a prominent think tank on public diplomacy. Over fried rice and stewed pork, our hosts mentioned that they may be able to help us with our plans to go out for a Beijing specialty – Peking duck – for dinner the following night. One of the most famous duck restaurants in town, it seems, had placed a special request for a stack of publications on public diplomacy, and owed them a favor. While I know public diplomats are fans of hyphenated diplomacy, this form of duck diplomacy was taking it a step too far.

Yet this episode was completely illustrative of the popularity public diplomacy has gained in China over the past few years – because it is “in,” everybody, even res-

taurateurs, wants to participate in it. With the advancement of the concept by the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and governmental bodies, there is an impetus from the powers that be for China to focus on developing more effective public diplomacy as an element of China’s peaceful rise. Yet upon deeper reflection, because the very notion of public diplomacy is still in its nascence, how to implement an effective public diplomacy strategy remains highly debated.

One of the best depictions of the contrasting views on public diplomacy in China came from Professor Zhao Kejin of the Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy, who classifies the study and practice of public diplomacy into four schools: the ‘Soft Rise School,’ who see



Image by MPD to China delegation

public diplomacy as a means of advancing China's soft power abroad and as an alternative to Western norms, the 'National Image School,' who see the main goal of public diplomacy as advancing China's national image and countering Western biases, the 'National Interest School,' who feel that public diplomacy won't be able to help solve the real problems of conflicting national interest and thus it doesn't deserve much investment, and the 'Discursive Power School,' which seeks to advance Chinese discursive power to offset the "China threat theory" and to give China greater voice in world affairs.

Throughout our meetings we found each of these views represented, indicating a real lack of consensus about the role of Chinese public diplomacy that can be seen in its actions: the Confucius Institutes advance one view of China, while the Made in China advertisements and representation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs advance markedly different views. The added pressure of representing Chinese foreign policy to the domestic public, perhaps the dominant focus of Chinese public diplomacy at the moment, means that attention is limited and resources stretched in attempting to improve China's global image.

Yet these discrepancies over how to conceptualize and practice effective public diplomacy mean there is an opportunity for students and academics, particularly those embedded in China, to be innovative in their research and delve deeper into how public diplomacy can function in the Chinese context. Defining a pub-

lic diplomacy with Chinese characteristics is the next great project for scholars of Chinese politics, made ever more important alongside China's rise on the world stage.

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