

The Rise of China's Public Diplomacy

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# Introduction

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Perceptions and the behaviour of both China's domestic and international publics are having a growing impact on China's foreign policy. Rising to play a more substantial role in world politics and economics, and often feeling misjudged by the international community, the Chinese leadership is increasingly making effective use of public diplomacy tools to project an image of China that in its view does more justice to reality: China as a trustworthy, cooperative, peace-loving, developing country that takes good care of its enormous population; a China that is building a 'harmonious society' at home and contributing to a peaceful and 'harmonious world' as a responsible player in international affairs. This image is illustrated by examples such as China's role as honest broker and responsible world power in the Six-Party Talks on North Korea, the recent 'ice-melting' offensive towards Japan, its support for the March 2007 UN Security Council Resolution imposing arms and financial sanctions on Iran and the ongoing charm diplomacy towards South-East Asia. This image of China as a responsible world power, however, is also increasingly being challenged by the international community, most recently in particular with regard to China's relations with Sudan. Various groups have even called for a boycott of the Beijing Olympic Games of 2008, thereby threatening to change a major public diplomacy tool for Beijing from a Chinese carrot into a possible international stick.

The practice of public diplomacy (*gonggong waijiao*) seems to have preceded discussion of the concept in China. Whereas China has already developed a remarkable array of public diplomacy activities over the past decade, the debate on strategic use of this tool and the professionalization of China's public diplomacy have only just begun.<sup>1</sup> However, the increasing use

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1) See Ingrid d'Hooghe, 'Public Diplomacy in the People's Republic of China', in Jan Melissen (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

of the terms 'public diplomacy' and 'soft power' (*ruan shili*) in official speeches and documents illustrates a growing awareness among China's policy-makers of the possibilities of these tools. 'We should conduct public diplomacy in a more effective way', said Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao recently in an article in China's main national newspaper *The People's Daily*.<sup>2</sup> 'Soft Power: A New Focus at China's "Two Sessions"' read the headline of the same newspaper a few weeks later, with the 'two sessions' referring to the 2007 annual sessions of China's National People's Congress and China's People's Consultative Conference, an advisory body.<sup>3</sup> In academic circles, too, the concepts of public diplomacy and soft power are increasingly being debated.<sup>4</sup>

This paper discusses developments in China's soft power and public diplomacy. It argues that in spite of the fact that China is a one-party state with a centralist authoritarian regime that has far-reaching control over public diplomacy instruments, its public diplomacy is no longer solely confined to a hierarchical state-centred format. China's government, as well as an increasing number of Chinese individuals and civil society groups, is starting to participate in global networks with public and private actors, bringing new dynamics to China's public diplomacy. This paper looks at China's image in different parts of the world and describes how state and non-state actors try to address or pre-empt image problems with various public diplomacy tools.

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2) Wen Jiabao, 'Our Historical Tasks at the Primary Stage of Socialism and Several Issues Concerning China's Foreign Policy', *People's Daily*, 27 February 2007.

3) 'Soft Power: A New Focus at China's "Two Sessions"', *People's Daily*, 14 March 2007. Also see Zhao Qizheng, 'Better Public Diplomacy to Present a Truer Picture of China', *People's Daily*, 30 March 2007; Zhao's remark on public diplomacy in 'China, US Can Act as Shared Stakeholders', *Shanghai Daily*, 23 March 2007; and 'Forum Highlights Role of "Public Diplomacy"', *People's Daily*, 4 August 2006.

4) See, for example, Tang Xiasong, 'Zhongguo gonggong waijiao de fazhan ji qi tixi goujian' [The Structuring and Development of China's Public Diplomacy], in *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* [Contemporary International Relations], no. 2, 2006, pp. 42-46; 'Gonggong waijiao: xinxi shidai de zhanlüe gongju' [Public Diplomacy: A Strategic Tool of the Information Age], *Guoji wenti yanjiu* [International Studies], no. 1, 2005.

## Concepts and Practice

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In this paper, public diplomacy is understood as ‘the process by which direct relations with people in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented’.<sup>5</sup> This definition goes beyond the more traditional ones describing public diplomacy as a state-centred process of communication with foreign audiences. This ‘new public diplomacy’ is part of the view that in the world of post-modern transnational relations, the roles and responsibilities of actors in international relations are no longer clearly delineated and most actors are not nearly as much in control as they would like to be.<sup>6</sup> China’s foreign policy establishment is struggling with these developments, as it too is no longer in full control of China’s diplomacy. The new public diplomacy is about engaging publics, not just informing them; it is about establishing long-term relationships that will build trust, a concept not unfamiliar in Chinese culture. The concept of ‘soft power’ is understood as defined by Joseph Nye: ‘the influence and attractiveness a nation acquires when others are drawn to its culture and ideas’.<sup>7</sup>

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5) Paul Sharp, ‘Revolutionary States, Outlaw Regimes and the Techniques of Public Diplomacy’, in Jan Melissen (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy*, p. 106.

6) Jan Melissen, ‘The New Public Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practice’, in Jan Melissen (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy*, p. 5.

7) Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Cambridge MA: Perseus Publishing, 2004).

In China, the general understanding of public diplomacy coincides with the state-centred approach, but this does not mean that diplomacy by non-state actors is not part of the picture. In current writings, scholars often differentiate explicitly in terminology between ‘public diplomacy’ (*gonggong waijiao*) — foreign audiences targeted by diplomatic actions of a government — and ‘people-to-people diplomacy’ (*minjian waijiao*) — interactions between people and civil societies of various countries.<sup>8</sup> People-to-people diplomacy dates back to the early days of the People’s Republic of China and has always been seen as an important aspect of foreign relations, especially in times when China was relatively isolated. China’s ‘ping-pong diplomacy’ of 1971, signalling a breakthrough in relations with the US, is a well-known example, but China also used the instrument of people-to-people diplomacy to break out of isolation after the Tiananmen crackdown of 1989.<sup>9</sup> The Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) traditionally plays a major role in people-to-people diplomacy, but many other organizations such as educational and cultural institutions, media, women’s and youth organizations, and academic and professional societies organize exchanges and activities too. Until the end of the 1980s, activities at this level were almost entirely initiated and organized by the state, of which the CPAFFC in practice is a continuation, but from the 1990s onwards a growing number of exchanges took place without much official involvement, although in most cases permission from the authorities is still needed.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, in China the term public diplomacy is often used in a wider context of addressing publics. Although increasingly discussed in relation to China’s ‘soft power’ abroad, many scholars and China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs use the term public diplomacy when referring to public affairs: informing domestic audiences about China’s foreign policy and diplomacy.<sup>11</sup> In order to shorten the distance between Chinese diplomats and ordinary Chinese people, the Chinese Foreign Ministry gives lectures, organizes conferences and internet discussions and invites citizens from all walks of life

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8) Tang Xiaosong, ‘Zhongguo gonggong waijiao de fazhan ji qi tixi goujian’ [The Structuring and Development of China’s Public Diplomacy].

9) For example, the symposium organized by CPAFFC in Rome in 1991 at which (then) Prime Minister of Italy Andreotti called on the world to maintain friendly cooperation with China rather than to isolate it; ‘China’s People-to-People Diplomacy Progressed over Past 13 years’, *People’s Daily*, 29 October 2002.

10) The often problematic differentiation between state and non-state in China will be discussed in the paragraph on non-state actors below.

11) Interviews in Shanghai and Beijing in March 2007 and documents of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, see, for example, ‘Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing gives Year-End Interview to People’s Daily’, 20 December 2005, website of the MFA, at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t227889.htm>; or ‘Academic Seminar on China’s Public Diplomacy’, 19 March 2004, at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/wshd/t80368.htm>, accessed 5 March 2007.



to visit the Foreign Ministry.<sup>12</sup> Although most probably not deliberately developed for this aim, the activities aimed at domestic audiences may actually contribute to a more successful public diplomacy as the two are increasingly interconnected. In some countries, such as Canada, engaging domestic audiences is a structural part of the public diplomacy strategy.

As this paper illustrates, in practice China's soft power and public diplomacy have rapidly developed into a complex tangle that is difficult to unravel. Lack of transparency in Chinese policy-making further hampers analysis. Nonetheless, three broad simultaneous developments can be discerned: (1) China's soft power is growing as its culture, as well as its economic-political model, is becoming more attractive to various parts of the world; (2) China is rapidly expanding and improving its public diplomacy; and (3) there is growing involvement by non-state actors in China's public diplomacy.

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12) See, for example, 'Close Friends Gather Together: The Foreign Ministry Holds the First "Public Day" Activity in 2006', 3 June 2006, at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t256785.htm>; and 'Gathering in 2007: Joining Hands with China's Diplomacy. Sidelights on the 2007 First Public Open Day of the Foreign Ministry', 19 May 2007, at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t321753.htm>.



# Factors Shaping China's Public Diplomacy

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China's image and the development of its public diplomacy cannot be detached from the rapid development of China's diplomacy as a whole during the last decade, which, in its turn, cannot be detached from the enormous economic and political changes that have taken place and are still taking place in China.

## *Economic and Political Reform*

The most important domestic factor that has shaped and still shapes China's foreign policy and diplomacy is the country's economic rise. China's transition from a centrally planned economy to a (socialist) market economy, its integration into the world economy and the resulting spectacular growth have made China an economic power house. It is this economic success that has opened many doors in the world and has given Beijing the leverage and confidence to assert itself as a global player. But at the same time this economic rise is perceived as a threat by many countries.

Although much slower and more subtle than the economic transition, China's political system is in transition too. Domestically, the transition manifests itself in measures to improve the legal system and to increase personal freedoms, social reforms, more openness, growing civil consciousness, better education, and delegation by central powers to lower

levels and to society. These changes have enabled ‘non-state’ actors to play a — still limited but increasing — role in diplomacy. However, most of the time these subtle changes are hardly recognized in the West, let alone that China gets credit for them, a fact that frustrates both the government and public in China. Positive developments are overshadowed by international concerns about the slow pace and limited radius of reform of the authoritarian political system and about the lack of progress in the area of human rights.

### ***Rapid Developments in Foreign Policy and Diplomacy***

China’s foreign policy and diplomacy have also seen rapid changes and most of these developments have been conducive to China’s image in the world. China’s foreign policy is largely based on its primary aims: economic development and modernization. As China needs a peaceful and stable international environment, energy, and raw materials for its economic growth, it is doing its best to avoid conflicts and dependency on one country or region and to expand and strengthen its foreign relationships.

The official cornerstone of China’s foreign policy is the theory of a Harmonious World (*hexie shijie*), President Hu Jintao’s contribution to Party theory. The theory, introduced by Hu in 2005<sup>13</sup> and expected to be officially adopted at the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in late 2007, builds upon the domestic ‘harmonious society’ theory and the still widely used concept of China’s ‘peaceful rise’ (*heping jueqi*).<sup>14</sup> It revolves around four broad issues: (1) effective multilateralism with a strong role for the UN; (2) development of a collective security mechanism; (3) prosperity for all through mutually beneficial cooperation; and (4) tolerance and enhancement of dialogue among diverse civilizations. With the ‘harmonious world’ concept, China underscores that its rise will not be destabilizing but peaceful, and thus counters the perception that a rising China is a threat to the world. Wherever and whenever Chinese leaders get the chance, they stress to regional audiences that China envisages mutually beneficial growth leading to co-prosperity and does not seek hegemony. Furthermore China wants to be seen as a country that takes responsibility for world affairs.

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13) ‘Build Towards a Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity’, speech by Hu Jintao at the United Nations Summit in New York, 15 September 2005, at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceun/eng/zt/shnh60/t212915.htm>, accessed 5 February 2007.

14) The still widely used idea of ‘peaceful rise’ was put forward in 2003 by Zheng Bijian, the Vice-President of the CCP Central Party School. Zheng pointed out that in the past, rise of a new power often resulted in drastic changes to global political structures, and even war, because these rising powers chose the road of aggression and expansion. China, however, would develop peacefully and would help to maintain a peaceful international environment. See *China’s Peaceful Rise: Speeches by Zheng Bijian 1997-2004* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2005).

Other mainstays of China's foreign policy are protection of sovereignty and non-interference in other countries' domestic affairs. These principles are rooted in China's era of humiliation by foreign powers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and they are used by Beijing to justify relations with repressive regimes in countries such as Sudan and Myanmar and give 'no-strings-attached' aid to developing countries, thereby sometimes undermining 'good governance' projects by Western donors. These concepts clearly clash with China's asserted responsibility for world affairs, a fact that has been acknowledged by China's diplomats and policy-makers. Since the early 1990s, therefore, the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention have been adjusted and loosened, which has, among other things, enabled China to become active at the multilateral level and contribute to multilateral peacekeeping and humanitarian intervention.<sup>15</sup>

The practice of China's diplomacy has seen rapid developments too and has become more pragmatic, constructive and sophisticated. China's 'new diplomacy' can be characterized by a soft approach and growing flexibility. China's leaders listen closely to the interests of partners and are creative in finding win-win solutions and deals, using economic and political incentives when needed. With this soft approach, Beijing avoids antagonizing partners and buys itself time to adjust to new realities.<sup>16</sup> China's diplomatic style is increasingly recognized by the international community, and could well lead to a future role for China as a mediator in international conflicts.

Both the scope and volume of China's diplomacy have expanded and the variety and effectiveness of China's diplomatic actors and instruments have rapidly increased. China's diplomats have become better trained and they are increasingly allowed or even encouraged to engage with the local community and address the press.

Furthermore, there is a growing engagement of 'unofficial' players in China's diplomacy. As the state's control over foreign policy-making and diplomacy is deeply affected by internal developments and globalization processes, a more pluralistic environment has emerged allowing business leaders, academics and NGOs to help shape foreign policy. This development is partially a bottom-up process but is also promoted and sometimes initiated by the government. Like elsewhere, the authorities in China have come to

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15) Allen Carlson, 'More Than Just Saying No: China's Evolving Approach to Sovereignty and Intervention Since Tiananmen', in Alistair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross, *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); and Ingrid d'Hooghe, 'Het Chinese begrip van soevereiniteit verklaart veel' [Much Can Be Explained by the Chinese Concept of Sovereignty], *Leidschrift*, vol. 18, no. 3, January 2004, pp. 133-142.

16) Ingrid d'Hooghe, 'Catalytic Trends in China's Diplomacy', paper presented at the 2007 *ISA Annual Convention*, Chicago, February 2007.

realize that they increasingly need the knowledge, expertise, skills and sometimes even the legitimacy of other groups in society.<sup>17</sup>

These developments in foreign policy and diplomacy have led to a dramatic increase in China's bilateral and multilateral relationships. Since the mid-1990s, China has been cultivating bilateral relations all over the world, but with special focus on the Asian region and the developing world. China established new ties and upgraded other relations to 'a new type of state-to-state relations': non-alliance, non-confrontational and not directed against a third country.<sup>18</sup> As part of its 'good neighbour' policy, China solved territorial and border problems with many of its neighbours and took a cooperative approach to remaining conflicts. In developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, many of which are neglected or deliberately isolated by the US and Europe because of their repressive regimes, China stepped up its development aid and business activities.

At the same time, China began to realize that bilateralism could not solve all of its problems and began to see the benefits that multilateralism could bring. Beijing gradually accepted the constraints of working in a multilateral environment and its membership of international institutions increased dramatically. China has since found that multilateral forums can be used as platforms to expand influence and pursue economic interests. It has proven to be an important tool to counter the 'China Threat' perception and to add to China's image as a responsible global player. Working within a multilateral environment, China increasingly conforms to international norms. Furthermore, Beijing has shifted from passive response to active participation in multilateral organizations. This is first and foremost visible in China's regional Asian multilateralism, where China now shapes some of the functions and rules of multilateral organizations. Some scholars even speak of China's 'regional offensive' of multilateral diplomacy, characterized by a flexible approach that allows China to take different approaches to multilateralism according to different geopolitical and geo-economic conditions.<sup>19</sup>

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17) d'Hooghe, 'Catalytic Trends in China's Diplomacy'.

18) Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 136.

19) Jianwei Wang, 'China's Multilateral Diplomacy in the New Millennium', in Yong Deng and Fei-ling Wang (eds), *China Rising: Power and Motivation in Chinese Foreign Policy* (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

# Assets and Liabilities for Public Diplomacy

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China has many assets and liabilities for public diplomacy, some of which have already been briefly mentioned above. Together they serve as an indicator for China's future challenges and successes in the field of public diplomacy.

## *Liabilities*

China's economic rise makes many governments and business circles in the world nervous. They worry about losing industries and jobs to China and about their growing trade deficits with China. They are frustrated by Beijing's currency policy, which is believed by many to give China unfair trade advantages, and by the slow progress in opening up the domestic market and improving investment rules. In the United States the 'China Threat' debate flares up regularly, sometimes leading to congressional moves to introduce legislation that will punish China if it does not comply with US requests to change a specific policy.<sup>20</sup> In many Asian capitals, policy-makers are

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20) This debate varies from the question of to what extent a rising China will harm the economy of the United States, to the question of whether China has a long-term strategic plan to defeat the US; named after the book by Bill Gertz, *The China Threat: The Plan to Defeat America* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2000).

concerned that China's economic strength will sooner or later encourage it to dominate the region or even to assert its power militarily. In Europe, too, worries about China as an economic threat are on the increase and recently African countries expressed their concerns about China's motives for its Africa policies.<sup>21</sup> Various international concerns are closely linked to China's fast growth: the rising need for energy and resulting energy policies; the serious environmental degradation that is taking place in China; public health issues; and the safety of China's food exports. China's environmental crisis regularly spills across its borders, such as the 2005 disaster of heavy benzene pollution in the Songhua River that flows from China into Russia. Furthermore, China's major contribution to climate change and ozone depletion may become a global threat. According to the International Energy Agency, China will become the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases by 2009. Public health problems such as the SARS and Bird 'Flu epidemics earlier this decade, and various recent food safety scandals, have not only negatively influenced China's image but are also scaring business away.

In the political realm, China's human rights' record is its biggest liability, followed by the Tibet issue, China's policies toward Taiwan — in particular Beijing's refusal to renounce the use of force against Taiwan — and China's close relations with corrupt regimes. China's investment in military modernization and an action like the surprise anti-satellite missile test of January 2007 raise protest and worries as well.

All of these problems for China's image are addressed by public diplomacy. Policies are explained and defended in white papers, articles, on websites and during press conferences. In some cases China chooses to counter-attack, for example by publishing human rights' reports of other countries such as the United States.<sup>22</sup> In other cases Beijing asks for patience and understanding, pointing out that China is a developing country facing many problems and challenges. But China's leaders also understand that their public diplomacy efforts need to be supported by corresponding actions in order to be credible and thus successful. Beijing therefore sometimes decides to respond with positive actions, acknowledging the problem and showing the world that it cares and is willing to address the issue. China's recent international announcement of an action plan to confront climate change is a telling example. On issues where China's public diplomacy is not supported by positive policies or actions, successes are hard to win. A few years ago it was already considered a big step forwards internationally when the authorities became willing to discuss sensitive issues such as human rights, but now bolder steps are expected from Beijing.

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21) See, for example, the poll by *TNS Opinion* on 'Perspectives on Trade and Poverty Reduction', December 2006 and Walden Bello, 'China provokes debate in Africa', *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 9 March 2007.

22) China's State Council Information Office, 'The Human Rights' Record of the United States in 2004', 3 March 2005.



## *Assets*

China's economic rise does not only lead to worries; it inspires admiration and attraction too. Being a winner is always appealing and China's growth offers many economic opportunities for international business. Furthermore, although a liability in Western eyes, in other parts of the world China's approach to international relations and economic and social development is being followed with great interest and approval. China's pragmatic and authoritarian model shows that you can have economic development without far-reaching political reform. Internationally, the model is based on the principles of non-interference in domestic affairs and 'no-political-strings-attached' foreign aid and trade. Joshua Cooper Ramo calls it the 'Beijing Consensus'. China is becoming an example for other nations around the world that are trying to figure out how to develop their countries and fit into the international order in a way that allows them to be independent and to protect their political choices.<sup>23</sup> Countries in Africa, Central Asia and Latin America, which are tired of Western criticism, are looking at the Chinese model and rethinking their own development paths.<sup>24</sup> Coupled with Beijing's expanding aid policies, China's image in developing countries is mostly positive. The attraction is further enhanced by a number of factors: China has no colonial past; in some cases there is a close relationship going back to solidarity with national liberation movements; and close ties with China serve as a counterbalance to Western, in particular American, hegemony. In addition, African leaders feel treated as equals by the Chinese and assert that China is investing in areas that are important to Africa's future but that are often avoided by Western aid and investment, such as infrastructure.<sup>25</sup>

One of China's biggest assets, however, is the positive image of its culture. Both China's ancient and modern cultures are attractive to the outside world. Looking at how China exploits its culture one finds an ambiguous approach. China's policy-makers certainly use the popularity of Chinese culture outside their borders to promote international relations and tourism, but mainly focus on harmless, apolitical, traditional culture, including Chinese language, cuisine and acupuncture. An interesting example of stressing the image of China as an ancient culture was Beijing's contribution to the closing ceremony of the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens: an act mainly composed of traditional cultural images such as dragons, the figure of the monkey king and Chinese opera.

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23) Joshua Cooper Ramo, *The Beijing Consensus* (London: Foreign Policy Centre, May 2004), pp. 3-4.

24) See Bates Gill and Yanzhong Huang, 'Sources and Limits of Chinese Soft Power', *Survival*, vol. 48, no. 2, summer 2006, pp. 17-36, at p. 20.

25) David H. Shinn, 'The China Factor in African Ethics and Human Rights', conference paper for the *Oxford-Uehiro-Carnegie Council Conference*, December 2006.

At the same time, however, a new generation of Chinese artists, writers, filmmakers and actors who combine traditional arts with modern ideas and developments are conquering the world. They are attracting and dazzling foreign audiences and winning international prizes. The Chinese films 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon' and 'Hero' are in the top-ten biggest non-English-language box office successes, and Chinese actresses Gong Li and Zhang Ziyi are celebrated at major film festivals. Composer Tan Dun and pianist Lang Lang, both internationally acclaimed for their talent and creativity, are proud promoters of Chinese musical culture. In 2000, the Chinese author Gao Xinjian was the first Chinese to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Chinese painters such as Fang Lijun and Zhang Xiaogang are invited to exhibit in major galleries and museums around the world. In the area of fashion design, China has also become a source of inspiration. A good example is the luxury Shanghai Tang brand, which aims to 'create the first global Chinese lifestyle brand by revitalizing Chinese designs — interweaving traditional Chinese culture with the dynamism of the twenty-first century'.<sup>26</sup> Having overcome some 'starter problems', the brand has consolidated its position with shops in major capitals all over the world.

Many cultural expressions, however, including novels, poems, films and visual art works as well as theatre performances that are popular abroad are considered subversive by the regime. They are often denounced and domestically forbidden and are not (yet) considered assets for public diplomacy by Chinese officials.

It is not only the Western world that is attracted by China's cultural expressions. South-East Asian youths, in particular, are fascinated by Chinese films, fashion and pop music. Furthermore, mainland Chinese consumer brands have become popular in the region, as has the study of the Chinese language.<sup>27</sup> Related to this growth of China's soft power in South-East Asia is the rise of ethnic Chinese groups in the region. Formerly often anti-Beijing, these communities have now come to accept a modernizing and successful China.<sup>28</sup>

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26) Linda Tischler, *The Gucci Killers*, <http://www.fastcompany.com>, January 2006.

27) Jane Perlez, 'Chinese Move to Eclipse US Appeal in South [corrected as 'South-East' on 19 November 2004] Asia', *New York Times*, 18 November 2004; and Eric Teo Chu Cheow, 'China's Rising Soft Power in South-East Asia', *PacNet* 19A, 3 May 2004, <http://www.csis.org/pacfor/pac0419A.pdf>.

28) Cheow, 'China's Rising Soft Power in South-East Asia'.

## China's Public Diplomacy Goals

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As the overview shows, China has as many assets as liabilities for public diplomacy. This enables Beijing to develop both defensive and promotional public diplomacy strategies. In the pre-Deng Xiaoping period, public diplomacy strategies had the relatively limited goal of creating a favourable image of an otherwise autarkic country. However, since Deng put forward his 'open door policy' at the end of the 1970s, the task of public diplomacy has become more complex and demanding. Current public diplomacy still has to boost the legitimacy of the Communist Party as China's central ruler, but in addition has to lure foreign investment to China while making China's rise palatable to the region and the world at large. On top of that, negative news and images have to be redressed.

Beijing is deeply sensitive to foreign perceptions of China and its policies abroad. Both foreign appraisals of China's diplomatic performance and negative perceptions of China's domestic situation are often mentioned and quoted in articles in the Chinese press. Chinese government officials hold the Western media responsible for creating a negative image of China. Minister Zhao Qizheng of China's State Council Information Office, while on a visit to Moscow in August 2003, lashed out at Western media coverage of China. He complained that Western media not only controls public opinion but also damages China's image in the world: 'Using their media dominance, they are stressing the negatives in China without pointing out recent positive

developments'.<sup>29</sup> That China carefully follows and evaluates foreign media coverage of its development was illustrated again at the 2006 meeting of the China International Public Relations Association, where Wang Guoqing, the deputy chief of China's State Council Information Office announced that negative foreign news reports 'were slightly down last year'. According to Wang, there was more negative coverage demonizing China in the 1990s, as high as 60-70 per cent, whereas the latest findings show less than 40 per cent of articles in 'mainstream Western media being prejudiced'.<sup>30</sup>

Looking in more detail at China's public diplomacy, three major goals can be distinguished. First, China wants to be seen as a country that strives after building a harmonious society and that works hard to give its people a better future. China seeks understanding for its political system and policies. The image stressed is that of a developing country in the middle of a slow but fundamental economic transition, confronted with enormous challenges to which no easy responses exist. In other words, the world may not expect China's leaders to take radical steps in political and economic reform, as rash policies will destabilize the country and bring misery to its people. In this context, China has coined the term building towards a 'harmonious society', in essence, a massive redistribution of wealth in order to narrow the gaps between rich and poor, urban and rural, and coastal and inland regions of China. China's efforts to inform the public of its political goals and policies via speeches by its leaders, websites, white papers, magazines and scholarly exchanges should be seen in this light.

Second, China wants to be seen as a stable, reliable and responsible economic partner, a rising economic power that does not have to be feared. This is the crux of China's policy of good neighbourliness and the 'harmonious world' and 'peaceful rise' strategies. These strategies demonstrate the economic and security benefits of cooperation with China as opposed to the negative results of conflict and opposition. They are well illustrated by its balanced diplomacy in South-East Asia. With its charm offensive during the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit meeting in Indonesia in October 2003, China clearly strove to convince neighbouring countries that both sides will gain from an economically strong China and that they will all attain 'co-prosperity'.<sup>31</sup> At the same time Beijing wanted to show the West that China is trusted in the region. In this field the Chinese government clearly supports its public diplomacy with actions. Over the last decade, China has doubled its foreign direct investment to ASEAN, initiated a road map to a Chinese-ASEAN Free Trade Area by 2010, and concluded a

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29) 'Beijing Lashes Out at Western Media Coverage of China', *Agence France Presse*, 22 August 2003.

30) Xinhua News Agency, 'State Council Information Office says Western Media Coverage has taken a Turn for the Better', 24 June 2006; posted at the website of the *China Media Project*.

31) See, for example, Evelyn Goh, 'A Chinese Lesson for the US: How to Charm South-East Asia', *The Straits Times*, 31 October 2003; and Jane Perlez, 'The Charm from Beijing', *New York Times*, 9 October 2003.

bilateral swap agreement with ASEAN countries. Furthermore, it has softened its stand on the dispute over the Spratley Islands in the South China Sea and has actively promoted a multilateral solution that led to a Code of Conduct for the South China Sea

Third, Beijing wants China to be seen as a trustworthy and responsible member of the international political community, capable of and willing to contribute actively to world peace. The obvious illustration of this policy is Beijing's role as host and chair of the six-party talks on North Korea. More recent is China's redress of the international critique on its Sudan policy. A special envoy of the Chinese government called upon the Sudanese government to show more flexibility on a plan proposed by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on the Darfur issue, and 'continuously improve the humanitarian and security situations and speed up the political process in Darfur'.<sup>32</sup> In this regard, it is interesting that a recent international poll showed that the majority of Chinese citizens interviewed held an opinion that opposes the official Chinese policy of non-interference. They felt that the UN Security Council has the *responsibility* to intervene in countries where severe human rights' violations such as genocide may be occurring, even against the will of those countries' governments.<sup>33</sup> China's increasing multilateralist cooperation, as discussed before, is another illustration of its efforts to become regarded as a responsible player.

Last, but not least, China wants to be acknowledged and respected as an ancient but vibrant culture. Although cultural diplomacy has long been neglected by China's leaders, they are now developing initiatives to spread actively China's language and culture. The opening of Confucius Institutes (see below) and the increasing number of international cultural events that China organizes all over the world — for example, the current (2007) China Year in Russia — are cases in point. Recently, Chinese Politburo member and top publicity official Liu Yunshan stressed the aim to develop and commercialize culture as an industry in China, thereby increasing its 'cultural soft power'.<sup>34</sup>

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32) 'Sudanese President Receives Chinese Special Envoy', *People's Daily*, 9 April 2007, online edition, [http://english.people.com.cn/200704/09/eng20070409\\_364865.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200704/09/eng20070409_364865.html), accessed 9 April 2007; 'China Calls for Change on Darfur', *BBC News*, online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6538401.stm>, accessed 9 April 2007.

33) *Global Views 2006* (Chicago IL: Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2006), pp. 75-76.

34) 'Liu Yunshan: yi kexue fazhan guan wei liu ling tuijin wenhua jianshe' [Liu Yunshan: Promoting the Building of Culture through a Scientific View Development], at <http://www.sina.com.cn>, 8 April 2007.



# China's Public Diplomacy System

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## *State Actors*

In most countries, ministries of foreign affairs are the most important state players in public diplomacy. In China, however, major roles in developing and deciding upon China's public diplomacy activities are reserved for the Office of Foreign Propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the State Council Information Office (SCIO). The Office of Foreign Propaganda is a highly secret organization, supervised by the Foreign Propaganda Small Leading Group which consists of senior Communist Party leaders; the SCIO is the more public or government pendant, established in 1991.<sup>35</sup> As common in China's political system, many of the officials serve simultaneously in both offices, alternately wearing Party or government hats. The creation of SCIO coincided with the end of the period of post-Tiananmen isolation and illustrated China's aim to become more open in its publicity work. The exact division of work and mandates between the two offices is not known but one can safely assume that the CCP Office sets the rules of the game and that it also has the final say in major decisions. The offices are responsible for developing public diplomacy plans and guidelines, monitoring the foreign media and guiding and censoring domestic media, including the internet.

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35) Anne-Marie Brady, 'Guiding Hand: The Role of the CCP Central Propaganda Department in the Current Era', in *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2006, pp. 58-77.

Guidelines for publicity work are often published in the classified *Internal Report (neibu tongxun)* published by the Propaganda Department of the CCP.

Shortly after the SCIO was established, the Chinese government started issuing a steady flow of white papers clarifying China's policies on such critical issues as ethnic minorities, human rights and national defence. Educational and cultural exchanges were resumed and China gradually started to pay more attention to its image abroad. But China's public diplomacy only got a real kick-start when Zhao Qizheng became Minister of SCIO and started his 'information' and 'publicity' work in 1998. He called upon China's overseas information officials:

to publicize China's economic and social achievements and explain China's official positions and policies on issues more fully to foreigners, to create a more favourable image of China in world opinion.<sup>36</sup>

When Zhao took over, a sea change in the way that Beijing deals with official information occurred. Examples of his change of style include: Zhao more than doubled the frequency of press conferences; he urged Chinese officials to be more accommodating towards journalists; he reinstated the use of English at press conferences; and he introduced the risky Western-style approach of speaking off the record in Beijing.

Zhao left the SCIO in 2005, but the new information chief, Cai Wu, has so far continued the professionalization drive.<sup>37</sup> He recently called for China's cadres to learn how to interact better with news media and in particular foreign media and to spread an 'objective' picture of the country:

What is China doing, how is it doing it, what problems is it facing, what dilemmas? What are the Chinese preparing to do, what goals are they pursuing? Stating these things clearly can actually go a long way to building a more objective international opinion environment.<sup>38</sup>

Not all of the problems facing China can be freely discussed, however, and after the green light is given to discuss a specific sensitive issue openly, editors of journals and magazines and spokespersons will receive instruction on how to approach the subject.<sup>39</sup> Carefully deciding what official spokespersons can disclose on a sensitive issue is also very common in democratic systems, but the difference is that in China the press is also under heavy scrutiny. Chinese

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36) 'Biographic Profile: Zhao Qizheng', 11 July 2003, at <http://www.chinaonline.com/refer/biographies>.

37) Zhao Qizheng is still involved in public diplomacy in his functions as Vice-Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the CPPCP (an advisory body) and Dean of the Journalism Institute of Renmin University.

38) Xinhua News Agency, 'Information Office Chief says Cadres must be More Comfortable Dealing with News Media', posted on *China Media Project*, 9 March 2007.

39) Brady, 'Guiding Hand', p. 69.



media are therefore often unable to balance the picture portrayed by the authorities. Over the last two years, Cai Wu has expanded the spokespersons and news release system to include many Party and government organizations, both at central and local levels. He further increased the number of press conferences and travels all over the world to establish international media cooperation projects.<sup>40</sup>

Second, China's leaders are important actors. Both President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao play major roles in China's charm offensives abroad. They travel extensively, take time to address foreign audiences and include contacts with 'ordinary people' during their foreign visits. During his 'ice-melting' visit to Japan in April 2007, Premier Wen Jiabao did morning exercises in a park in Tokyo, chatted to the locals, planted tomato plants with farmers and practised baseball with students from Ritsumeikan University.<sup>41</sup>

A third player in the field of public diplomacy is China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Although the MFA does not take the lead in developing the strategies, it of course plays a major role in the conduct of public diplomacy. The Ministry is, however, often hampered in its work by lack of information and influence within the central leadership. The MFA has lost ground to the Ministry of Commerce and has never been trusted by organizations such as the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The MFA is not always part of consultations on major policy decisions or actions that affect foreign relations. Even worse, it is not always provided with the timely information that it needs to do its work properly. Striking examples are the US spy plane incident of 2001 and the anti-satellite test of January 2007 of which the MFA was neither informed in advance nor shortly afterwards. It took the MFA almost two weeks to issue an official reaction and Chinese diplomats called in by foreign governments to explain the test were completely in the dark.<sup>42</sup>

Over the past decade, the MFA has invested in the professionalization and rejuvenation of its diplomats, which has resulted in the increasing effectiveness, sophistication and motivation of China's representations abroad. Chinese diplomats not only receive better training at home, but increasingly attend foreign courses as well. As a Chinese diplomat put it: 'It used to be easy to be a Chinese diplomat. You just memorized the two phrases that defined the current policy and repeated them over and over. It's

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40) 'Cabinet Spokesman Cai Wu Meets the Press', *China Daily*, 29 December 2006. For example, for Cai's recent visit to London, see 'China to Strengthen Media Cooperation with UK: Official', *China Daily*, 17 April 2007.

41) Linda Sieg, 'China's Wen has Hard Sell on Thaw in Japan, at Home', 12 April 2007, Reuters; and Chinadaily.com, at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-04/12/content\\_849014\\_4.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-04/12/content_849014_4.htm).

42) Bates Gill and Martin Kleiber, 'China's Space Odyssey: What the Anti-Satellite Test Reveals about Decision-Making in Beijing', *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2007, pp. 2-6.

much harder now. You have to know about everything'.<sup>43</sup> In addition, Chinese diplomats nowadays interact much more with their foreign counterparts than before, often attending social events but also inviting foreign counterparts for informal gatherings.

The MFA is gradually giving its embassies more freedom to get involved with foreign audiences and a new generation of Chinese diplomats has started to address the foreign press, such as China's Ambassador to the Netherlands, Mrs Xue Hanqin.<sup>44</sup> Shortly after her arrival in The Hague, she gave several interviews to the Dutch press and wrote a week-long diary for one of the Netherlands' major newspapers.<sup>45</sup> The diary and many interviews that followed<sup>46</sup> impressed people favourably, with the result that for the first time a wider audience than just the diplomatic community in The Hague knows a Chinese Ambassador to the Netherlands.

In 2000, China's Foreign Ministry established its first media centre — the International Press Centre — to smooth relations with the international press. The centre is part of the Information Department of the MFA and operates an extensive and accessible website. It organizes chat sessions with citizens, deals with the foreign press in China and organizes press conferences and reporters' trips.

### ***Non-State Actors***

A growing number of non-state actors are, consciously or not, involved in China's diplomacy and public diplomacy, or at least in reinforcing its soft power. The room for dialogue and the engagement of China's own population is expanding along with the rapidly growing number of non-governmental organizations and steadily increasing freedom for people to speak out on international issues. China's non-state actors are not fully independent and therefore less 'non-state' than the term implies when used with regard to democratic systems. This is true for the business community as well as China's emerging civil society. The NGO sector in China is officially recognized, to be sure, and exerts an increasingly important influence on policy-making in

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43) Bonnie S. Glaser and Phillip C. Saunders, 'Chinese Foreign Policy Research Institutes: Evolving Roles and Increasing Influence', *The China Quarterly*, 171, September 2002, p. 597.

44) See, for example, Liu Xiaoming, 'Remarks at Farewell Reception for Ambassador Li', 29 January 2001, at <http://www.china-embassy.org>.

45) See, for example, the interview of Xue by Garrie van Pinxteren, 'Xue praat ook over mensenrechten' [Xue Also Discusses Human Rights], *NRC*, 30 August 2003; and interview of Xue by Anne Meydam, 'In China is een hoop te verbeteren' [There is Much to be Improved in China], *Trouw*, 9 September 2003. *The Diary* (Hollands Dagboek) by Han Xueqin was published in NRC during autumn 2003.

46) For example, a more recent interview can be found in *Forum*: 'Jullie jagen buitenlandse zakenlieden weg' [You Chase Foreign Business People Away], 15 February 2007.

various fields, but is nevertheless restricted and controlled by the government. As the Chinese government does not have enough capacity to keep an eye on the more than 346,000 NGOs so focuses on those that might endanger the regime politically, many organizations can become relatively autonomous in daily practice.<sup>47</sup> When it comes to the crunch, however, they are always dependent on approval — or neglect — by the authorities.<sup>48</sup> In view of this blurred picture, it could be argued that the distinction between ‘state’ and ‘non-state’ actors is not valid in the Chinese case. However, in spite of the lack of independence, these ‘non-state actors with Chinese characteristics’ do distinguish themselves from the ‘state actors’ by three factors. The majority of NGOs, in particular the ‘younger’ ones, are: (1) not initiated by the state; (2) not operated by the state; and (3) they aim to serve their own societal or commercial interests.

The non-state groups that have an impact on China’s image abroad include: academics and (transnational) epistemic communities; NGOs; overseas Chinese communities; friendship associations; twin sister organizations; students; and tourists.

Academics of China’s top universities, intellectuals at think tanks and (transnational) epistemic communities<sup>49</sup> are increasingly involved in foreign policy-making, ‘Track 2’ diplomacy and public diplomacy. In China you will find epistemic communities oriented on specific issues — such as gender or environment — or on specific countries or regions. All of these groups are increasingly engaged with international academic networks. They attend international conferences, frequently speak for foreign audiences and participate, often rather openly, in international debates and exchanges of information. They publish in international journals and are interviewed by, or cited in, major Western newspapers. At home they are invited to advise the government and increasingly influence foreign policy-making; abroad they

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47) Xinhua News Agency, ‘Chinese NGOs increase to 346,000 Last Year’, 4 February 2007, at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-02/04/content\\_5691283.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-02/04/content_5691283.htm) and see, for example, Elizabeth Economy’s ‘Testimony on China’s Environmental Movement’ for the *Council on Foreign Relations*, Washington DC, 7 February 2005, with an executive summary to be found at <http://www.cfr.org/publication/7770>.

48) For an overview of China’s emerging civil society and the NGO sector, see Yiyi Lu, ‘The Growth of Civil Society in China: Key Challenges for NGOs’, *Chatham House Asia Programme*, ASP BP 05/01 (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, February 2005); and Yu Keping, ‘The Emergence of Chinese Civil Society and its Significance to Governance’, final report of a case study on China (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2002).

49) An epistemic community is a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area. They can function as channels through which new ideas circulate from societies to governments as well as from countries to countries. See Peter Haas, ‘Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination’, *International Organization*, vol. 46, no. 1992, pp. 3 and 27.

spread the image of growing academic freedom, plurality of thinking on international issues and of China's academe as an intellectual and scientific force with which to reckon.<sup>50</sup>

China's NGOs also strengthen the image of a country that is moving towards accepting and working with internationally accepted norms. They cooperate with international and multilateral organizations, promote their messages at English-language websites and in international publications. They play a role in softening the rough images of Beijing's policies. For example, at the sidelines of the spring 2007 African Development Bank summit in Shanghai, a gathering of African and Chinese civil society groups took place. They discussed various problematic issues of the Sino-African relationship and explored ways to play a role in cooperation projects.<sup>51</sup>

Overseas Chinese communities are both actors and target groups of public diplomacy. They form an enormous and diverse group of more than 40 million overseas Chinese living in more than 130 countries. There are the older Chinese communities, dating back several generations, the business communities and the more recent groups of overseas Chinese scholars. They are a target group, as Beijing wants to keep the Chinese diaspora on Beijing's side and stimulate them to invest in China. But they are also a tool, as they play a role in promoting Chinese culture and lobbying for Chinese political interests. China's leaders regularly call upon the overseas Chinese to promote specific issues, such as peaceful reunification with Taiwan or China's modernization drive.<sup>52</sup> Over the past three years China has set up more than 80 pro-China associations among overseas communities across the world and has supported the convening of regional conferences in a drive to form a united global network of such organizations.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, Beijing sponsors and promotes a great number of economic, educational and cultural activities through such organizations.<sup>54</sup>

As mentioned above, friendship organizations such as the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) and the Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA) organize lots of activities labelled 'people-to-people diplomacy'.<sup>55</sup> The CPAFFC also oversees China's sister cities' relations. These relations serve as an important tool for Chinese local

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50) Quansheng Zhao, 'Epistemic Community, Intellectuals, and Chinese Foreign Policy', *Policy and Society*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 39-59.

51) Peter Ford, 'Chinese Activists Looking at Africa', *Christian Science Monitor*, 21 May 2007.

52) 'Premier Wen Calls for Overseas Chinese to Promote China's Peaceful Reunification', *People's Daily*, 21 May 2005.

53) 'Beijing Wooing Overseas Chinese Away from Taiwan: Officials', *Taiwan Security News*, 30 May 2002.

54) For example, the China Synergy Programme for Outstanding Youth, which gathers outstanding Chinese youth across the world to 'learn about modern China and Chinese culture', at <http://www.chinasynergy.org>.

55) 'Diplomacy with Foreign Dignitaries: Personalities Build Up China's New Image', *People's Daily*, 1 January 2004.

governments and businesses to connect with other countries to share information and ideas and to promote economic cooperation.<sup>56</sup>

Chinese students abroad and Chinese tourists also have an impact on China's image. The more than 100,000 Chinese who annually study abroad generally leave a positive image behind of a serious, modest, hard-working and often bright people. Chinese tourists, however, leave a mixed impression. China's outbound tourism has expanded enormously over the past decade. According to estimates by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, the Chinese took 34.1 million trips abroad in 2006, and by 2020 they are expected to make more than 100 million trips abroad per year. Although Chinese tourists generally have less money to spend than those from Japan or Western countries, they spend their travel budget in the grass-roots economy, where wages are lower and employment generation greater. According to some observers, they thus leave a bigger mark on the local economy than many more wealthy travellers.<sup>57</sup> But there is a negative impact as well, as Chinese travellers have also given rise to an unflattering stereotype of being bossy, loud, rude and culturally naive.<sup>58</sup> Aware of this problem, the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) has launched a nationwide campaign to educate travellers on how to behave.<sup>59</sup> The Shanghai tourism commission stated it very explicitly in one of the brochures that it hands out to Chinese travellers: 'Try to present the positive image of Chinese citizens and put an end to uncouth behaviors'.<sup>60</sup>

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56) See, for example, the website of the Asia Pacific Cities Summit, [www.apcsummit.org](http://www.apcsummit.org).

57) Donald Greenlees, 'The Subtle Power of Chinese Tourists', *International Herald Tribune*, 6 October 2005).

58) Wayne Arnold, 'Chinese on a Grand Tour', *New York Times*, 21 October 2005; Simon Montlake, 'Chinese Tourists: Asia's New "Ugly Americans"', *Christian Science Monitor*, 28 December 2005.

59) Xinhua News Agency, 'China Campaigns for Improved Travel Etiquette', 27 April 2007.

60) Xinhua News Agency, 'Shanghai Travellers Trained to Improve their Behaviors during Tours Overseas', 22 February 2007.



## The Instruments

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Most instruments used by China to conduct public diplomacy do not differ much from those used by other countries. Before looking at the more familiar instruments such as the media, publications, internet, development aid, commercial deals, and cultural and other events, China's latest addition to public diplomacy will be discussed: the Confucius Institutes.

### *Confucius Institutes*

To take advantage of the growing interest in China's language and culture, Hanban (the China National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language) is setting up Confucius Institutes and Confucius Colleges all around the world. They are aimed at 'promoting friendly relationship with other countries and enhancing the understanding of the Chinese language and culture among world Chinese learners'.<sup>61</sup> By naming the institutes after the ancient Chinese philosopher and educator Confucius, China wants to stress the value of its ancient culture in today's world. China has serious plans with the institutes: in January 2007, 128 Confucius Institutes existed around the world, with 46 in Asia, 46 in Europe, 26 in North America, six in Africa and four in Oceania; and Hanban had received more than 400 applications to set

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61) 'Introduction to the "Confucius Institute" Project', website of Hanban, <http://english.hanban.edu.cn/market/HanBanE/412360>, accessed 3 April 2007.

up Confucius Institutes.<sup>62</sup> In July 2006 Hanban organized the first International Confucius Institute Conference, which was held in Beijing and attended by foreign and Chinese staff of the institutes.

Hampered by limited funds and lack of staff, not all Confucius Institutes have developed into equivalents of the German Goethe Institutes or the French *Alliance Française* yet, but this may just be due to growing pains. Furthermore, as illustrated below, there are success stories as well. The institutes take the form of joint ventures with foreign-based educational institutes, which also have to participate financially. This approach encourages a network-based form of public diplomacy, as foreign partners become engaged in developing ways to unlock China's culture for the global public. A nice illustration is the initiative by the Michigan Confucius Institute to purchase an island on the online virtual world Second Life, which they plan to equip as a kind of virtual language-learning and cultural experience.<sup>63</sup>

Promotion of the Chinese language is not limited to the Confucius Institutes. The number of primary and middle schools all over the world offering Chinese as part of the curriculum is also rapidly increasing. In the US some 50,000 students in primary and middle schools are learning Chinese; in Europe and Africa the same trends are visible; and in Asia the number goes into millions.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, virtual environments are providing more and more platforms for language and culture exchange, such as multi-player online games and Chinese-language programmes using podcasting.

### ***Student Exchanges***

Inviting foreign students to China has become another powerful diplomatic instrument. The statistics of foreign student enrolment in China provide another illustration of the international attraction to China's language and culture. In 2005 more than 141,000 foreigners studied in China, up 27.28 per cent from one year earlier. More than 75 per cent of them are from Asia, 12 per cent from Europe, 9 per cent from America, 2 per cent from Africa, and another 1 per cent from Oceania.<sup>65</sup> Most come to learn the language with the future aim of doing business with China, but an increasing number are studying Chinese arts, philosophy, history and traditional Chinese medicine.<sup>66</sup>

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62) Li Xiaohua, 'Confucius Institutes Taking Chinese to the World', 27 March 2007, *Xinhua News Agency*, accessed via <http://www.china.org.cn/english/education/204196.htm>.

63) 'Language Learning Drives Virtual China Experiments', *Virtual World*, 11 February 2007, at [http://www.virtual-china.org/2007/02/language\\_learn.html](http://www.virtual-china.org/2007/02/language_learn.html), accessed 9 April 2007.

64) 'Language Learning Drives Virtual China Experiments'.

65) Xinhua News Agency, 'More Foreigners Studying in China', 6 June 2006, accessed via <http://www.china.org.cn/english/GS-e/170530.htm>, accessed on 9 April 2007.

66) Chinese Ministry of Education, *Zhongguo Jiaoyu Nianjian* [China Education Yearbook], 1999, 2000 and 2004.



As these figures make clear, the attraction of Chinese culture is in the first place visible in Asia.<sup>67</sup>

### **Media**

Until recently, China's domestic media were the main instruments for informing the outside world about China. There have been English-language Chinese newspapers and journals targeting at foreign audiences since the early years of the People's Republic of China. The Chinese have their own 'Voice of China', called China Radio International, with broadcastings in all of the major world languages. The official Chinese news agency, Xinhua, has an English-language service, and Chinese state television (CCTV) has expanded its international broadcasting for satellite television subscribers. CCTV also hired foreign anchors and editors to enable it to cater better for foreign viewers. These media organizations are all state-owned and controlled, and although the possibilities for journalists and editors to bring their own news and messages have increased, much of the content of the programmes, newspapers and magazines is still dictated by official policy lines. In January 2002 the 'making media big and strong' policy was launched. The policy promoted the creation of powerful and profitable domestic media conglomerates in China that were readied for global competition. The idea was that without media groups of proper commercial strength and vitality, China would find it impossible to influence global public opinion.<sup>68</sup>

Nowadays, in addition to its own media, China's public diplomacy makes more and more use of foreign media. A large number of foreign correspondents are accredited to Beijing. On 1 January 2007, with an eye on the 2008 Olympics, China eased restrictions on foreign media, allowing journalists to interview and report more freely across the country, including in Tibet. This is clearly an image booster. As a result, foreign media have since been able to expand their work terrain and, for example, interview dissidents such as former political leader Bao Tong, who was arrested in 1989 for opposing the Tiananmen crackdown. Although the suspension of restrictions on foreign correspondents is officially temporary and due to end after the Olympics are over in 2008, Chinese authorities have indicated that they may decide to lift them permanently after the Games. Foreign media abroad have also increasingly become interested in cooperation projects with China, or projects with China as the theme, as the BBC's China Week in March 2005 illustrated.

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67) Jane Perlez, 'For Many Asians, China is Cultural Magnet', *New York Times*, 19 November 2004.

68) David Bandurski, 'Propaganda Head Liu Yunshan Promotes Commercialization of Media to Strengthen China's "Cultural Soft Power"', *China Media Project*, 10 April 2007.

Chinese leaders are no longer reluctant to give press conferences during foreign visits. To the contrary, they include several press moments and create nice photo opportunities. At home, too, the foreign press is invited more often to official meetings and gatherings. In March 2007, foreign journalists covering the annual sessions of the NPC and CPPCC could contact and interview lawmakers and political advisers directly for the first time, without having to contact the press centres first.

Furthermore, China makes effective use of the internet's possibilities. You do not have to speak Chinese to spend an afternoon surfing the Chinese internet, visiting accessible and sometimes beautifully designed websites in English or even several other languages. Many Chinese websites are developed specifically for public diplomacy purposes and are controlled by the Information Office. They provide news and official information or focus on teaching Chinese and promoting Chinese culture.<sup>69</sup> Some sites focus on specific subjects, such as Tibet or the 2008 Olympic Games.<sup>70</sup> Major ministries have their own websites, as do most national newspapers. Newspaper archives are easily accessible and you can download new and old articles free of charge. In addition to the official realm, there is the unofficial world of millions of Chinese bloggers. Because most blogs are in Chinese, the international network of Chinese bloggers consists mainly of overseas Chinese and China specialists. However, a growing number of international websites in English are translating excerpts of Chinese blogs or reporting on the Chinese blogosphere.<sup>71</sup> Some Chinese bloggers or blog items have become well known internationally and thus contribute to the image of China as a country with a vibrant culture.

### ***Publications***

The importance of printed publications as a means of reaching out to a wide audience has decreased with the development of the internet. Once in a while you will still find little English booklets —free of charge — on Chinese topics, ranging from the Chinese Constitution or marriage law to big construction projects, but their share in the information flow is almost dissolved. As mentioned earlier, China devotes much attention to explaining its policies in white papers, the most recent of which deal with the environment, defence policy, care for the aged, space activities and China's peaceful development.

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69) See, for example, <http://www.linese.com>, <http://www.china.org.cn>, <http://www.chinatoday.com> and <http://www.gov.cn>.

70) See <http://www.beijing2008.cn>.

71) See <http://www.globalvoicesonline.org>, <http://www.danwei.org>, <http://www.cmp.hku.hk> and <http://www.chinadigitaltimes.net>.

### ***Events***

Not to be underestimated is the power of events and forums. With the aim of increasing its visibility in the world, China has become an eager organizer of big events. In the 1990s China hosted the Asian Games and the UN International Women's Conference. In 2001 Shanghai spared no expense to impress participants at the APEC Summit, and in 2001 Beijing finally won its bid for the Olympic Games of 2008, which is a major public diplomacy opportunity. The Olympic Games offer Beijing a chance to show its goodwill and capabilities to the world and are also an ideal opportunity to capitalize on worldwide interest in China's ancient culture. The same, although to a lesser extent, will be true of the World Exhibition of 2010, to be held in Shanghai. In addition to these cultural events, China organizes informal forums, of which the Boao Forum is the most well known. This Chinese version of the Davos World Economic Forum gathers Asian political and business figures.

China also organizes innumerable smaller events that are dedicated to Chinese culture or international trade. Examples are Chinese Culture Weeks in Berlin (2001) and St Petersburg (August 2003), the latter carefully planned on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of St Petersburg, to which many international guests and press were invited. More recent events include the month-long Festival of China in Washington DC (2005); Chinese Culture Year in France (2004) and China Year in Russia (2007).

### ***Development Aid and Business Deals***

Foreign investments and business deals, development aid and emergency relief are consciously used as public diplomacy tools too, especially in less-developed regions. China's foreign investment strategy serves a mix of China's political, economic, security and market needs. Buying goodwill by investing in one sector may help obtain favourable deals in another sector, such as energy. Not all investments and business projects are planned or steered by the authorities, as China's private sector has a considerable degree of autonomy, but there are many cases in which Beijing does have a hand. Companies are sometimes simply told to invest in specific projects in a country; in other cases they are encouraged by Chinese soft loans and subsidies. Coupled with low labour costs and China's growing technological know-how, which they are often willing to share, Chinese companies are attractive business partners.<sup>72</sup> Business is also promoted by China's economic diplomacy of expanding the number of bilateral free-trade agreements. China hopes that these agreements will not only strengthen trade but also allay fears of its economic rise.

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72) Joshua Kurlantzick, *How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World* (New Haven CT and London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 89.

China is both a recipient and a provider of development aid. The total amount that China spends on development aid is estimated to be US\$ 2.7 billion. In Africa alone China currently spends more than one billion dollars and President Hu has pledged to double aid to Africa by 2009, from its 2006 level, to US\$ 3 billion in loans, US\$ 2 billion in export credits and a US\$ 5 billion fund to encourage Chinese investment in Africa. China also organizes extensive training programmes for professionals from developing countries, offers scholarships, builds schools and hospitals, and sends experts and youth volunteers to developing countries. In 2005 China became the world's third largest donor of food, and Beijing is now the biggest financial donor in countries such as Cambodia and the Philippines.<sup>73</sup> There are 'no strings attached' to this aid, no expensive consultancy fees, and Chinese workers do not shy away from difficult construction projects in remote areas. This all adds to a positive impression.

China's emergency relief overseas has also expanded over the past decade. China provided aid to Algeria and Iran after the earthquakes that shook them in 2003, to South and South-East Asian countries after the Tsunami in late 2004 and to the victims of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005.

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73) Tom Miller, 'China Becomes the World's Third Largest Donor of Food', *The Guardian*, 21 June 2006 and Jane Perlez, 'China Competes with the West in Aid to Its Neighbors', *New York Times*, 17 September 2006.

## How Successful is China's Public Diplomacy?

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### *Polls*

An important instrument to assess a country's image in the world is the opinion poll.

International polls indicate that China's image varies from country to country. A recent poll by the Program on International Policy Attitudes shows that China overall tends to be viewed more favourably than unfavourably. China got mildly positive ratings worldwide, with sixteen of the 26 countries polled having mainly positive views of its influence, nine having mainly negative views and one country was divided. Positive views of China are high in African and some Middle Eastern countries; negative views dominate in European countries, Turkey and the United States. Of the nine European countries polled, six view China negatively.<sup>74</sup> A more unanimous view exists about China's economic rise. People worldwide expect China to catch up with the US economically and that is not necessarily viewed negatively. When

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74) See full report on <http://worldpublicopinion.org>, at [http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/mar07/BBC\\_ViewsCountries\\_Mar07\\_pr.pdf](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/mar07/BBC_ViewsCountries_Mar07_pr.pdf).

it comes to politics, however, a majority of publics do not trust China to act responsibly in the world.<sup>75</sup>

A poll commissioned by BBC World revealed that 70 per cent of respondents identified lack of democracy, population growth, bureaucracy and corruption as China's biggest impediments to growth and identified its huge population followed by its low labour costs as biggest assets for China's growth.<sup>76</sup> Polls over a number of years show that China's image has gradually improved over time and is now more or less stable.

The importance of polls should not be overstated. Most polls interview a relatively small number of people in each country and in general the questions do not pursue an in-depth image of the countries concerned. However, poll results can confirm or contradict other indicators, such as press coverage or public response to events. It is too simple to attribute the relatively positive image of China that emerges from the polls to China's public diplomacy, but the polls are certainly encouraging for China's public diplomacy architects and may help Beijing to decide in which areas it should step up its activities.

### *The Limits of China's Public Diplomacy*

The state's command of public diplomacy instruments lies at the root of both China's successes and shortcomings with regard to public diplomacy. On the one hand, public diplomacy instruments enable China's leaders to design and attune messages and actions carefully and make sure that they are carried out as dictated. On the other hand, official messengers are never fully trusted, even less when they come from a country with an authoritarian leadership. No matter how well China is developing its public diplomacy, things sometimes still go utterly wrong because of lack of transparency. This is when China gets into the old Communist camp of maintaining full control of society and concealing unfavourable information from the public, thus hampering the growth of China's soft power but also damaging cautious international impressions that China is moving towards becoming a more open society. A telling example was the SARS crisis in summer 2003, when China hoped to limit the damage by playing down the gravity of the situation. This seriously backfired: international and domestic indignation was enormous and criticism was severe and put pressure on the Chinese leadership. But China learned fast and in April 2004, when new SARS' cases occurred, China's leaders immediately disclosed the state of affairs and took swift and effective action.

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75) See 'World Publics think China will Catch Up with the US — and That's Okay', <http://worldpublicopinion.org>, at [http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/may07/CCGA+\\_RiseChina\\_article.pdf](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/may07/CCGA+_RiseChina_article.pdf).

76) The report can be found at <http://www.gmi-mr.com/gmipoll/release.php?p=20060522> and [http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/bbcworld/worldstories/pressreleases/2006/05\\_may/emergin\\_g\\_giants.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/bbcworld/worldstories/pressreleases/2006/05_may/emergin_g_giants.shtml).

## Conclusions

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China's leaders have long recognized that improving China's image is a prerequisite for its economic and political rise and that China therefore needs public diplomacy. China arouses suspicion for various reasons in various parts of the world. The world worries about China's economic, political and military rise, its hunger for raw materials and energy, its violations of human rights and increasingly about the deteriorating environment. At the same time, China's soft power is growing. China has become an attractive partner and a source of inspiration for many. China's political-economic model — the Beijing Consensus — coupled with development aid, appeals to developing countries, and China's economic dynamism and its vibrant culture are attractive to almost the whole world. After all, everybody loves a winner.

It is evident that the Chinese government is aware of both China's soft power and its problematic image and uses public diplomacy as a strategic tool to benefit from the first and address the latter. Chinese leaders have developed comprehensive and well-thought-out plans for action and have adapted them to new developments when needed. They have identified realistic public diplomacy goals and various key issues, selected target groups for each goal and fine-tuned each message to specific audiences. They use a wide variety of instruments to get the message across, such as the media (radio, newspapers and television), the internet, white papers, cultural events, official visits, development aid and investment, and cultural and educational institutions. The government trains officials and the population in how to create a better

image. Beijing learns from its mistakes — as in the SARS case — and it is aware of its own limitations: if something big is at stake, Beijing does not hesitate to enlist the help of international companies, as it did with the 2008 Olympic Games' bid.<sup>77</sup>

Ever-more public diplomacy activities take place outside the area of government control where individuals and civil society groups meet, exchange information and engage in dialogues. People-to-people diplomacy, international academic and business cooperation, and cultural events have a growing impact on China's standing in the world. In some cases these people-to-people events are initiated and supervised by the government, but in most cases official involvement is limited to granting permission. There are too many NGOs and there is simply too much going on to be controlled in detail by government organizations.

A growing number of elementary and middle schools all over the world now offer Chinese-language programmes, thereby raising interest in China's culture and history. China's strategy of establishing Confucius Institutes worldwide on the basis of partnerships with foreign educational institutes leads to the active involvement of non-official foreign partners in promoting Chinese culture. For the Chinese diaspora, China's economic and political rise is a source of pride and Chinese communities abroad increasingly organize or participate in events that promote China and Chinese culture. If not yet, then in the near future China's blogosphere may become an important contributor to youth culture that is spread via the internet.

In spite of public diplomacy successes and an improving image over the last decade, China also seems trapped between its aim at perfection in image projection and the structural lack of openness of its society, as well as its inability to give up control. Furthermore, the Chinese regime will need to match its words more often to actions. China's economic cooperation with corrupt regimes undermines its image as an increasingly responsible member of the international community and leads to international calls to boycott the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. And as long as political dissidents are arrested and detained for their political ideas or liberal newspapers and magazines are shut down, no public diplomacy will be able to change China's image as a country where human rights are violated.

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77) The Beijing 2008 Olympic Games' Bid Committee hired Weber Shandwick Worldwide to promote Beijing to the International Olympic Committee. For more information, see *'Beijing 2008' Case Studies*, at <http://www.webershandwick.co.uk>.



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