

China's Public Diplomacy

Feb.2007

Rumi Aoyama

Associate Professor, Faculty of Education and Integrated Arts and Sciences
Waseda University

1 . Introduction

Public diplomacy is growing in importance in world politics, an effective tool that a country may utilize to exert its soft power. Countries like the United States and British, which have had a long tradition practicing public relations activities, are concentrating greater efforts in this option. “Middle power” nations such as Sweden and Canada are pursuing their agendas through public diplomacy as well.

In China there is also an increased emphasis on public diplomacy. In the aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident and the end of the Cold War, China continued on as a socialist country even as the former Soviet Union and countries of “Eastern Block” in Europe transformed their economic and political systems. China felt increasingly isolated and sensed that the international climate was growing increasingly hostile. At that point, China earnestly embarked upon a plan to reform their propaganda model and to utilize public relations activities to improve its image abroad. These efforts involved a series of profound institutional reforms of the public diplomacy system and a gradual reprogramming for international cultural exchange activities.

China took steps to boost its public diplomacy following the end of the Cold War, as did the industrialized countries. However, China’s public diplomacy differs from the West in terms agenda, the relationship between the mass media and the government, and even the means utilized. China experienced a historical shift from propaganda to public diplomacy after 1989. This paper will first review briefly the history of China’s propaganda activities, and then examine the objectives of China’s current public diplomacy strategy and, analyze the way in which it is practiced. The concluding remarks will identify the defining features of China’s public diplomacy and its limitations.

2 . From propaganda to public diplomacy

(1) Propaganda or public diplomacy

Public diplomacy is now widely considered to be a strategic tool of national foreign policy, however the notion of public diplomacy remains ambiguous. When coining the term “public diplomacy” in 1965, Edmund A.

Gullion used it as a euphemism for propaganda, trying to avoid the negative connotations. Some scholars contend that public diplomacy differs from propaganda: Public diplomacy seeks to build audience trust by “public, open, interactive, global communication”,¹ while propaganda coerces audience based on secrecy, partial disclosure or disinformation.

While public diplomacy may emphasize openness and accuracy for the information conveyed by the government, one can not distinguish public diplomacy from propaganda only by judging the “truth” of released information. The methods using in public diplomacy or propaganda are, in effect, the same. The distinguishing factor is, in fact, the underlying political system as a source of “truer” information. Unlike the propaganda activities under the totalitarian regime, the information conveyed by a democratic government tends to be reviewed and argued by other domestic factors such as media, social groups. As a result of this check and balance mechanism, the public diplomacy builds trust by open and interactive communication.

Based on their similarities and the idea that the main difference between public diplomacy and propaganda stems from the underlying political system, this paper defines China’s external public relations activities in the post cold war era as Public Diplomacy, and as propaganda prior to that. This assertion is also supported by the following facts.

First of all, the objective of China’s public diplomacy is fundamentally different from that of propaganda. While the propaganda activities in Cold War were informed by the ideology of communism, public diplomacy now aims to re-brand China as a peaceful global citizen.

Secondly, the external public relations activities are not controlled solely by the government; there is now, a kind of tension between the government and the mass media due to the reform and open policy since 1978 which provides, to some extent, a check and balance.

Finally, public diplomacy is now targeting at a global audience where its effect can be measured in terms of world opinion and economic performance.

¹ Zaharna, R.S., “From Propaganda to Public Diplomacy in the Information Age”, in Y. Kamalipour & N. Snow eds., War, Media, and Propaganda: A Global Perspective, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004, p.223.

(2) The Traditional Tools of Propaganda in China

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has a long tradition of propaganda². Propaganda activities started with the provision of information to the foreign public, press and government shortly after the CCP was established. The first propaganda magazine “The Pioneer”, whose main readership was overseas Chinese, was published in 1928 in San Francisco. This irregular magazine provided information concerning the goals, policies and activities of the CCP, exposed the devilish war crimes conducted by the Japanese army in China. Later on, the CCP gradually expanded the varieties of its publication, “Voice of China” was published in Shanghai in 1930s, and “China Digest” was issued in 1940s. The CCP’s encounter with Edgar Snow, who was famous for his book “Red Star over China” in 1936, opened the road for leveraging foreign journalists to gain publicity for its policy. In addition, the first foreign language broadcast, “Yanan Japanese radio station” was first established in Yanan in 1940s.

Thus, the basic tools used in propaganda can be generally classified under the heading of information activities. Regular publications, leaking the favorable information to the chosen foreign journalists, and foreign language broadcasting were the three traditional sources of propaganda.

These three traditional methods of propaganda were then inherited after the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was founded in 1949. Two state magazines were published, “People’s China in English” in 1950 and “Beijing Review” in 1958. International broadcasting was also established in 1950s.

Compared to the publications and the international broadcasting, the option of using specific journalists as a source of publicity was less predictable and more time-consuming. Shortly after the foundation of PRC, the CCP prohibited all the activities by foreign journalists in China, except for few reporters from Soviet Union and East European. In early 1950s the Prime Minister Zhou Enlai and Vice Prime Minister Chen Yi voiced that China should take “a more active policy” toward foreign journalists, but that was to wait until the Geneva Conference in 1954 when China actually

² The term of propaganda in Chinese has two different meanings: one is the external public relations activities (Duiwai Xuanchuan), the other is domestic publicity activities (Duinei Xuanchuan, or simply Xunachuan). Propaganda used in this paper refers to the former meaning, that is the activities aimed at the foreign public.

restarted contact with foreign journalists. In July 1955, one year after the Geneva Conference, Zhou Enlai gave further instructions to Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Wentian, Foreign Minister Assistant Qiao Guanhua that the Information department in Foreign Ministry should encourage visits to China by foreign journalists, and urged them to draft some specific guidelines. Zhou Enlai, reiterated this initiative in 1957, in response to a visit request raised by West German journalists. He approved the request saying that China should take advantage of the western media, and let them help serve China's national interests. Since then, China revived the old custom, using the chosen foreign journalists to serve its own foreign policies.

Thus, the three basic tools of propaganda--regular publications, leaking the favorable information to the chosen foreign journalists, and foreign language broadcasting--were re-installed after the PRC was founded. Through the endorsement and funding of the Chinese government, the nationalized propaganda enterprise has developed rapidly into a gigantic and complex corporation. For example, each accountable to three different levels of administrative government, are publishing a broad range of magazines, booklets, pamphlets, brochures and other special publications, often in multiple language editions. On the top administrative structure is China International Publishing Group (CIPG) that produces the well-known "four major propaganda publications (Beijing Review, China Pictorial, China Today³ and People's China)", the mid level publishers belong to the International Culture Association, which are under the supervision of province or autonomous regions. Those publishers run by social groups that actually operate under the supervision of the province, can be grouped into a third level of the vertical administrative system. All in all, there is a wide assortment of propaganda publications in China.

To make its propaganda strategy effective and successful, China pursued an isolation policy by separating China from the outside world (Neiwai Youbie) especially in terms of information. That is to say, propaganda in China in the Cold-War period was based on a policy that blocked information flowing in and out of China. Obviously, this policy was not sustainable after the reform and open policy, and especially in the view of web-based information services now in place.

³ When first published in 1952, the magazine was titled as "China Reconstructs".

(3) Transformation from Propaganda to Public Diplomacy

The remarkable change from propaganda to public diplomacy can be seen in its external public relations activities. In the revolutionary Mao era, “Mao Zedong thought (Maoism)”, class struggle and the continue revolution are the main themes for propaganda. The adoption of reform and open policy marked a departure from the Maoism. In the post-cold war period, China clarified its four objectives for public diplomacy each year. These four objectives appeared in each year’s policy program: (1) Form a desirable image of the state; (2) Issuing rebuttals to distorted overseas reports about China; (3) Improving the international environment surrounding China; and (4) Influence the policy decisions of foreign countries.⁴

In October 2001, another step was taken at the National Conference, where, in addition to building a desirable image of the Chinese state in the minds of foreign audiences, a new task was imposed on external public diplomacy, which was to contribute to the country’s economic development.

Thus, building a desirable image of the state, publicizing China’s opinions to the outside world, and promoting business activities both within and outside China are the objectives of China’s public diplomacy in the post-Cold War era. These goals of public diplomacy were gradually shared and supported by the Chinese people in the latter half of the 1990s. In 1996, a book titled *China Can Say No!* (*Zhongguo Keyi Shuobu*), a harsh critique of the United States authored by Zhong Guo, et al., became a sensational bestseller, and in the same year a book titled *Behind A Demonizing China* (*Yaomohua zhongguo de beihou*), that was edited by Li Xiguang, a professor at Tsinghua University at that time, also became a bestseller. In the latter book, Li Xiguang and other contributors, whose expectations of the United States had been upset, argued that the American masses were imbued with an “ugly, demonized image of China” cooked up by the

⁴ Zhang Kun, “A brief discussion on the nine important relationships in external propaganda” (*Luelun duiwai xuanchuan de jiuda guanxi*), Research Section, the State Council Information Office, ed., Collected Papers on Foreign Propaganda Maneuvering (*Duiwau Xunchuan Gongzuo Lunwen Ji*), Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 1998, p. 73.

American media.

It is still widely believed by the Chinese people that the Western media actively demonizes China with biased reports on China. Such a perception is also shared by the government leaders, and continues to be an objective of China's public diplomacy. Government research indicates that 90% of the news on China reported by the US media is negative. As evidence, the Chinese government cites the practice, now more than 10 years running, of airing the same video, a young man standing in front of the tank moving toward to Tian Anmen square, just before June 4th each year, despite dramatic changes in China since that time. Zhao Qizheng, who is in charge of public diplomacy as Minister of the State Council Information Office, believes China needs to counter the undesirable image of "an undemocratic China" propagated by the media in the industrialized countries, and stated so in a speech in early 2004:⁵

"More than 80 percent of international news is now supplied by news agencies of advanced countries. It is indispensable for China to explain itself to counter the image shaped by these media of advanced countries. It is especially important for us to give high priority to offering explanations to the international community about matters such as the human rights issue, the Tibetan and Taiwanese questions, the issue of religion, the Falun Gong cult question, and the theory of a 'China threat'."

As this speech suggests, the Chinese government regards public diplomacy as a means of countering the Western media, a means of doing away with the "negative, demonized image of China" that they spread around the world. According to a study by Hongying Wang, throughout the 1990s the Chinese government strived to build an image of China as "a major power devoted to collaboration with the international community and to the safeguarding of peace."⁶ This led to the adoption in 2004 of the concepts of "peaceful rise" and "peaceful growth" in China as the guiding

⁵ Zgai Zizheng, "To formulate a favorable public opinion in the world" (Nuli Jianshe youliyu Woguode Guoji Yulun Huanjing) , Journal of Foreign Affairs College, third quarter, 2004, p. 3.

⁶ Hongying Wang, National Image Building and Chinese Foreign Policy, China: An International Journal (Vol.1), March, 2003, p.52.

principles for China's public diplomacy.

In 1990s, the purpose of China's public diplomacy became more and more clear, that is to defuse the negative image of China stereotyped by the major broadcast networks like CNN, BBC, or in the words of the Chinese government, the purpose of "explaining China." Obviously, China's public diplomacy is devoted to attaining a more focused purpose than that in the West. This focus on upgrading its global image determines the strategy and sets the tone of Chinese public diplomacy today.

3. China's Public Diplomacy in Action

In addition to changing objectives, fundamental change can also be observed in the style of China's public diplomacy which is now more imploratory and responsive to the needs of its international audience. Acknowledging that China is losing the war of public diplomacy, Zhao Qizheng, Minister of the State Council Information Office and Director of the CPC Central Committee's Foreign Propaganda Office, asserted that in order to create a favorable international public opinion, "we must from now on have greater awareness of the need to provide better services, study the needs of overseas audiences, provide them with large quantities of information, help them understand China better, and make it possible for them to make use of various opportunities available in China."⁷ The speeches of Zhao demonstrates China's willingness to move away from propaganda era, shows its willingness to compete in the global market place governed by the rules of "supply and demand".

Traditionally, China disseminated information abroad primarily through three channels: publication of periodicals, selective contacts with foreign correspondents, and foreign-language broadcasting. Since the 1990s, however, in the age of the rapid evolving information technology, China has adopted more diversified means of implementing its public diplomacy.

According to the definition adopted by the former United States Information Agency (USIA), public diplomacy is a form of diplomacy that a country carries out in order to promote its national interest and garner international support through understanding, informing, and influencing the

⁷ People's Daily (*Renmin Ribao*), October 15, 2001 and January 30, 2002.

foreign public and broadening dialogue between its own citizens and institutions and their foreign counterparts. As is evident in this definition, public diplomacy is understood to encompass two kinds of activities, namely, information furnishing activities (dissemination of information abroad and international broadcasting), and international education and cultural exchange activities. In fact, U.S. public diplomacy encompasses each of these two aspects. By contrast, Great Britain's public diplomacy now places strategic emphasis on mobilizing the BBC World Service, the British Councils, and other means in such a way as to "disseminate information to the foreign public and inculcate positive images of Britain amongst them." (*insert: In the British model there isn't an emphasis on international education or cultural exchange*).

China's public diplomacy in the post-Cold War era, with its emphasis on both providing information and international education, is closer to the American model. However, given the difference in the two countries' social and political institutions, and in the objectives the public diplomacy is expected to serve, China's public diplomacy has characteristics that differ markedly from that of the United States.

(1) The Traditional Tools for Promoting Public Diplomacy

The reorganization of offices responsible for guiding external publicity activities began in the 1990s. In 1991, the Information Office of the State Council was established as the chief office administering national external publicity activities. The Vice Governor of each provincial government was assigned to double as the head of the provincial government's propaganda bureau, and the government began to earmark expenses for external public activities under a separate heading of its annual budget.

In the wave of the reform and open policy, and affected by the rapid development of IT, the three traditional tools for promoting public diplomacy evolved along different paths.

Restrictions on foreign correspondents and journalists have been removed gradually beginning in the 1980s. All reporters are now able to get a press card in China, and allowed to cover all stories except on sensitive political issues, such as the Falun Gong cult question, human rights, Taiwan and Tibet. Recently, the Chinese government announced

that they would revoke the nominal interview permission rule during the Beijing Olympic in 2008 to temporarily replace press restrictions. In this case, the Chinese government chose active information dissemination over a more strict restriction.

International radio broadcasting, whose audiences are limited to foreign listeners, has undergone impressive development under the guidance and support of the government as a state-owned corporation. The total broadcasting hours reaches over 1100 hours per day and it covers 38-languages and four Chinese dialects.⁸

In comparison, other mass media with audiences living both inside and outside of China, such as TV broadcasting stations and publishers, were required to adopt a corporate management system and challenged to become financially self-supporting in the early 1990s. The reform had the effect of transforming China's mass media into a news reporting industry, which by 1998 emerged as the country's fourth largest industry in terms of taxes paid, topping the tobacco industry. Under the "self-supporting accounting system," the media earn approximately 70% of their revenues in the form of advertising revenues, which amounted to an estimated 45.6 billion yuan in 2002, an explosive increase when compared to revenues of 118 million yuan in 1983.

By agreement, China's membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO), means the restrictions imposed on foreign medias will eventually be withdrawn. In 1982, when "Sesame Street", the famous cartoon for children broadcasting in 140 countries, was introduced in China, Shanghai TV Station had to work with Fudan University to remake the cartoon into a Chinese version. Now cartoons, like the well-known Japanese animation "Chibi Maruko-Chan" (Little Maruko), are broadcasting directly in China without any need of revision.

Facing the inevitable future challenge from the foreign media, the Chinese government announced that, in addition to the first phase of becoming "financially self-supporting", mass media reform should now enter a second phase that involves the goal of becoming internationally competitive. Following a trend of media integration during the latter half of the 1990s, a number of large-sized multimedia groups have been

⁸ "In commemoration of China's international radio broadcasting" (Jinian Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Guangbo Shiye), People's Daily (*Renmin Ribao*), December 4, 2006.

established in China. These groups, in an effort to boost their international competitiveness and to promote international publicity activities, have expanded overseas. More specifically, these multimedia groups set up operations abroad in collaboration with foreign media that sought entry into the Chinese market. In exchange for granting these foreign media limited licenses to broadcast foreign-made commercial programs in China, the Chinese media obtained similar rights in the countries of their counterparts. Thus, exchange between the Chinese and foreign media is carried out on a reciprocal basis, and the ability to broadcast their own programs in foreign countries is an indispensable prerequisite for cultivating a cooperative relationship with foreign media. Through reciprocal exchange with foreign mass media, CCTV-9, for instance, has earned in the United States alone nearly 700,000 subscribers for its cable-broadcasting and more than 500,000 subscribers for its satellite broadcasting.

The Chinese mass media is now, on one hand, endeavoring to transform itself into a competitive industry, on the other hand, is actively engaging in foreign publicity activities. Although, to some extent, a relaxation of rules can be seen, China's mass media continue to be bound by the obligation to serve as the "mouthpiece of the Party." International news reporting by the mass media is strictly regulated by the government in accordance with a set of detailed guidelines on reporting. As a matter of fact, only four organizations are allowed to distribute international news in China: China National Radio (CNR), China Radio International (CRI), China Central TV (CCTV), and the Xinhua News Agency's head office.

It should be pointed out, however, that the very strict regulations imposed on the news reporting activities of the Chinese mass media at home are preventing them from sharpening their competitive edge in the international market. Their international broadcasting programs, under the impact of such regulations, are often too dull and formal, and too heavily focused on reports of meetings and conferences to satisfy the needs of local audiences.⁹ Even though the Chinese government in 2004 made it a high priority to carry out international publicity activities in a way better tailored

⁹ The Chinese government has announced, for instance, that only 4 percent of CCTV-9's audiences are non-Chinese.

to the customs and needs of overseas audiences,¹⁰ it will take some time before the Chinese mass media can start winning large non-Chinese audiences abroad.

The publishers were also challenged to transform themselves into financially self-supporting operations. Publications that could not reach the break-even point were downsized, then eliminated. As a direct result of this reform, the size of the publishers was reduced and the number and variety of publications decreased. For example, among the four major propaganda publications, only People's China continues to publish magazines in Japanese while others have totally withdrawn from the Japanese market.

Out of the necessity to strengthen its public diplomacy, in 2004, the Chinese government relaxed the restriction in order to rebuild the publishing sector into a vigorous enterprise. Under the policy called "localization of international publishers", many publishers transferred their editorial department abroad to create, edit and publish the international magazine locally. This policy intended to reduce the publish time, to create timely news focusing on the local readers, and ultimately, to increase the sales of a more appealing magazine. It is still too early to evaluate the effect of this policy, but it is not hard to predict that the publishers will continue to struggle in the "tug of war" between public diplomacy with its inherent restriction on content and the harsh reality of profit-making in an information age.

(2) Increasing Options for promoting Public Diplomacy

The current information age challenges China's PD strategy and begs questions such as how to improve the use of websites as a means of external publicity, how to operate in this environment to effectively address important issues in connection with how China is portrayed, and how to establish and effectively operate a system of spokespersons.

The government is putting special emphasis on addressing sensitive topics that have aroused international public opinion hostile to China, such as criticisms for violations of human rights and for being a threat to the international community. A recent example is the way that China

¹⁰ "Li Changchun emphasizes that public diplomacy should focus on the real China and make it accepted by foreign audience" (Li Changchun Xiangdiao Waixun Gongzuo Yao tiejin Zhongguo Shiji he guowai shouzhong), <http://www.sina.com.cn>, April 21, 2004.

approached foreign publicity activities for its “Planned Parenthood” program, an issue of international attention. During FY 2001, in an effort to improve the country’s image abroad, the government revised a website on “China’s population and Planned Parenthood,” and issued six revised editions of a publication titled *China’s Population Today*. Moreover, not only did the government actively respond to interviews by foreign correspondents concerning the planned parenthood program, but also made positive approaches to Chinese and foreign reporters, sponsoring two international conferences and press briefings. The government periodically gathered foreign media reports on Planned Parenthood in China, and offered “corrections” to “inaccurate” foreign reports through the pages of the *China Daily*.¹¹

The release of a “White paper” is another way of disseminating information. The major white papers released during the last two or three years include: China’s National Defense, China’s Space Activities, Environmental Protection in China, China’s Peaceful Development Road, Building of Political Democracy in China, Gender Equality and Women’s Development in China, Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in China and etc. A quick glance at all these titles, one can easily grasp the intention of China’s public diplomacy, which is to focus on the controversial issues such as “China threat”, environmental pollution, human rights, ethnic independence and religion issues.

The Chinese government’s news briefing and spokesman system has basically been established at the central, provincial and city government level. In early 1982, the Central Leading group for External Propaganda drafted the “Proposal Concerning the Establishment of a Spokesperson System.” Subsequently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other ministries of the State Council, who were deeply involved in foreign exchange activities, introduced a spokesperson system, and began to release information on a somewhat periodical basis. It was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that introduced a spokesperson system for the first time in China in March 1983, with Qian Qishen, Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, serving as the first spokesperson for the Ministry. In the latter half of the 1990s, other government offices such as the National Bureau of

¹¹ “Overall discussion of foreign propaganda activities in FY2001 on planned childbirth”, http://www.sfpc.gov.cn/cn/news20030110_2htm (July 23, 2003).

Statistics, the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, and the Information Office of the State Council (beginning in 1993), followed suit, establishing news press systems of their own. This spokesperson system was meant to boost the national government's capacity to establish a positive image of the state abroad, internationally disseminate credible information about China, and make the situation in China known throughout the world.

Toward the end of 2003, the government began to expand the spokesperson system from the level of central government offices to the provincial government level. As a means of facilitating the introduction of the spokesperson system at the provincial government level, a special program for training spokespersons was launched with the participation of experienced reporters from CNN as part of its temporary staff of instructors.

When the spokesperson system was first established, it was supposed to serve three purposes: establishing a positive image of the state, disseminating credible information about China, and making the situation in China known throughout the world. As the spokesperson system was introduced across the country, a new challenge was posed and the Chinese government urged the spokesperson to present consistent and unified explanations at all government levels, both provincial and the national.

At present, a system of news release by spokespersons both at the central and provincial levels is in operation, disseminating information through either of the following three methods: periodic press conferences, official State Council briefings on specific policy measures, and information disclosure related to unforeseen incidents. In this way, steady progress is being made to prepare an institutional system for boosting the news-release functions of the spokesperson system.

There is no denying, however, that the contents of information dissemination activities are much more important. As a means of attaining consistency in external publicity activities, the existing rule requires each individual government office under the jurisdiction of the State Council to hold a press conference only after holding a consultation meeting with the Information Office of the State Council, where the spokesperson of the government office concerned is supplied by officials of the Information Office with proposed answers to several dozen potential questions, which

are prepared by the Information Office based on its research of public opinions both within and outside China.¹²

Thus, a complex of news releasing and briefing system has been gradually installed in China. Publicity focusing on the sensitive topics, white paper, the spokesperson system, all these news briefing activities are expected, on one hand, to help enhance social stability and mobilize support to government policies through facilitating disclosure of *carefully controlled* information, and on the other hand, to improve China's global image by providing the first hand information on China.

(3) International Cultural Exchange as an Effective Tool for Public Diplomacy

In October 2003, Paris hosted a "Chinese Culture Year," a cultural fair consisting of various programs on the three themes of: "China in History," "A Multi-Faceted China," and "China Today." A Chinese language education program was launched concurrently with the opening of various events of "Chinese Culture Year," with the result that the Chinese language courses offered at the Chinese Culture Center in Paris and the events of the cultural fair complemented each other.

The governments of China and France displayed much enthusiasm for "Chinese Culture Year," with both Chinese President Hu Jintao, and French President Jacques Chirac who was praised as "an appreciator of Chinese culture and an old friend of the Chinese people," issuing congratulatory messages on the occasion. The opening ceremony for the cultural fair was attended by prominent members of the two governments, including State Council member Chen Zhili, Minister of Culture Sun Jiazheng, and Chinese Ambassador to France Zhao Jinjun, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the French Ambassador to China. The event proved attractive, not only due to the large size of the fair, but also for the novelty of its programs that placed emphasis on introducing those aspects of China that had previously been relatively unknown. To the two governments' delight, the "Chinese Culture Year" event turned out to be such a great success, that Paris was thrown into a Chinese cultural boom.

In January 2004, when the lingering effect of the boom was still present in Paris, President Hu Jintao visited France to celebrate the fortieth

¹² *Jinghua Times(Jinghua Shibao)*, February 1, 2005.

anniversary of the establishment of the Sino-French diplomatic relations. His state visit to France, which was received as a gesture of friendship, made a strong impression on the international community about the amicable relations between the two countries. Given the great success of “Chinese Culture Year” and the positive effect China’s cultural exchange programs was having on its diplomacy, China’s cultural exchange programs with foreign countries began to draw much attention.

It should be kept in mind, however, that China has been actively cultivating cultural exchanges with many countries around the world for many years. Since their inception at the time of China’s adoption of the policy for economic reform and opening-up, the country’s cultural exchange activities have continued to adopt traditional techniques of cultural diplomacy, including the sponsoring of “Chinese Culture Week” programs and exhibitions in various countries, and exchange of cultural groups, teams of performing artists, and exchange students. The Ministry of Culture administers all these cultural exchange activities. Of the approximately 120 agreements on cultural exchange, signed with foreign countries between 1949 until 1991, as many as 91 were signed in the period from 1978-91.

As China has increasingly opened itself up to the outside world, it has come to place greater emphasis on introducing and disseminating Chinese culture to the outside world, rather than introducing foreign cultures inside China. As the cultural exchange activities gained momentum, it has also begun to develop cultural exchanges not only with third-world countries, which used to be their main partners for years,¹³ but also with many countries around the world. Especially noteworthy are cultural exchanges with European countries, which, unlike those with Japan, the United States, and other countries, are carried out within a traditional framework based on inter-governmental agreements such as “cultural exchange agreements” and “action plan for the execution of exchange agreements.” Since the early 1990s, it has become the dominant approach for China and a European country to establish cultural exchange centers in each other’s country, and use these as the basis for cultural exchange

¹³ Of the 79 cultural exchange agreements concluded in the period from 1980 to 1990, 71, or 89 percent, were with third-world countries. Of the 220 annual programs for the execution of exchange agreements that were concluded in the same period, 159 programs, or 67 percent, were with third-world countries.

activities. The year 2003 alone saw a number of new developments in China's cultural exchange activities in Europe, in addition to the "Chinese Culture Year" in France. During that year, China sponsored a "Chinese Cultural Festival" in Germany, a cultural exchange project with Austria and concluded inter-governmental agreements with Italy on the establishment of cultural centers in each other's country. It also opened a China Center in Malta, and launched a "China-Spanish Forum" in Spain in collaboration with the Spanish government. The only difference between these cultural exchange activities and those in France were that these were relatively smaller in scale, and drew less attention.

Gradually China expanded this European style of cultural exchange activities to other regions. During the period 1997 to 2001, China established 13 cultural exchange agreements and 133 action plans for the execution of exchange agreements with foreign countries. A salient feature of China's cultural exchange activities is that they are carried out under government initiative and on a reciprocal basis.

In addition to promoting the cultural agreements and exchanges, Chinese language education is also considered to be a useful tool for public diplomacy by the Chinese government. The China National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (NOCEL) was established in 1987 that administers the recently created "Confucius Institute" program. The program goal is to establish Chinese language schools abroad. It was first drafted in 2002, and two years later in March 2004, the name of the Chinese language schools was determined—"Confucius Institute".

In October 2004, the State Council officially approved NOCEL's proposal for the "Chinese Language Bridge" (Hanyu Qiao) project. In November 2004, the first Confucius Institute under the project was established in Seoul. Plans are in place to establish a total of 100 such schools around the world through the cooperation of foreign educational organizations. To the Chinese government, the Confucius Institute is not merely a language institute; it is also a base for introducing Chinese Culture to the world.¹⁴

China's public diplomacy is supported by two main pillars, one

¹⁴ "To establish a total of 100 Confucius Institute around the world and to disseminate Chinese culture through Kongzi" (Quanqiu Jiang Jian Baijia Kongzi Xueyuan Cong Kongzi Kaishi Tuiguang Zhongguo Wenhua), Shangdong News net, August 19, 2005.

being the reinforcement of publicity activities to disseminate information abroad, and the other being the promotion of external cultural exchanges through the time-honored approach and language educational program, as symbolized by the sponsoring of the “Chinese Culture Year” in Paris. Even though the Chinese government is encouraging the Chinese media to expand their operations abroad so as to boost their international information disseminating capabilities, the Chinese media still remain a much smaller influence in the international market than the powerful media machines of the West. Given such a situation, cultural exchange programs that make use of more traditional techniques are proving to be a very effective means of public diplomacy for China.

Chinese scholars find cultural exchange activities advantageous primarily because they can stimulate cultural development at home, exert positive influence on diplomacy, and potentially generate significant commercial gains. Starting from the dawn of 21st century, both central and local government sponsored a number of cultural related trade fairs, to promote export domestic cultural related products to reduce the growing deficit with the industrialized countries. China’s strategy of cultural exchange with the rest of the world will help drive its objectives for public diplomacy and economic success going forward.

4 . Public Diplomacy - Caught between the Image of China Abroad and at Home

While the effectiveness of using public diplomacy as a means of eliminating negative images of China held by citizen’s abroad has produced some measure of success, some opinions are surfacing inside China questioning whether or not the image of the Chinese state being promoted by the government is adequate.

The concept of China’s “peaceful rise” was coined as a means of refuting the theory of a “China threat” and was officially adopted for the first time in 2004. In November 2003, Zheng Bijian, then Vice President of the Central Party School of the Communist Party of China and Director-General of the Forum on China’s Reform and Opening-up, presented the concept for the first time at the Boao Forum for Asia. In December 2003, Premier Wen Jiabao referred to the concept in his speech

at Harvard University, while President Hu Jintao made mention of “independent and autonomous foreign policy for peaceful rise” in his speech inside China.

The concept of “peaceful rise” has been debated inside the country from various angles. One point of contention is Taiwan issue and whether “China can remain peaceful.” This situation reflects the absence of consensus about the adequacy of the image of the state which public diplomacy tries to forge.

The same phenomenon can also be found in terms of cultural exchange activities. Keeping pace with these developments, International Confucian Cultural Festivals and various other events to celebrate Confucius have been held within China. Even though the Confucius Institutes are expected to serve as an important base for spreading Chinese culture abroad, and Confucian philosophy in particular, there is much debate as to the role Confucian philosophy should play in China’s national learning, and whether there are any other major components that, if included, would result in a more comprehensive Chinese national learning program.

Despite the Chinese government’s efforts to sell the idea of “a peace loving and a benign China”, and to present Confucius as the typical brand-image of China, Chinese people at home are still searching for authentic image of China and the true identity of the Chinese.

In the course of the reforms of diplomacy during the latter half of the 1990s, the concept of *yimin weiben* (reliance on the people) or *qinmin waijiao* (foreign policy close to the people) has circulated inside the country as a way of characterizing the new orientation of diplomacy. This concept has drawn much attention and has been appreciated both within and outside the country as capturing the ongoing change in Chinese diplomacy from one for the sake of the state into one for the sake of the people.

A series of new developments that began to emerge since the 1980s, such as a sharp increase in the number of Chinese students studying abroad, more Chinese firms establishing offshore operations, and a greater number of Chinese citizens engaged in economic activities abroad, have resulted in a dramatic rise in the number of Chinese firms and citizens involved in accidents and incidents abroad, forcing the government to take urgent steps

to protect and safeguard the interests of Chinese people and firms abroad. In 1997, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs began to strengthen diplomatic and consular protection, distributing a pamphlet entitled *Guidelines on Consular Protection and Services Outside China* to Chinese embassies and consulates abroad. Beginning in 2003, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs started to provide in its website up-to-date information on public safety and security in foreign countries, and to earmark funds for consular protection as part of its annual budget.

The Foreign Ministry's efforts to provide better services for ordinary people traveling abroad was viewed as an attitudinal change and had the effect of improving the image of Chinese diplomacy. Against this backdrop, Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing in March 2004 used the expression *qingin waijiao* (foreign policy close to the people) as a new buzzword describing his ministry's operations.

In this way, the government, in its domestic publicity activities, places emphasis on creating an image of diplomacy in the "interests of the people," which does not align with the overall objectives of China's public diplomacy program at this time. In the face of rising nationalist consciousness within the country, it is becoming increasingly important for the government to reconcile the image of diplomacy in the interest of the people with the image of China as a large country with a peaceful and collaborative posture.

5. Concluding Remarks

Given the fact that the Chinese mass media have expanded their operations overseas, and the fact that a serial news release and briefing system has been adopted by government offices at the national and provincial levels, it is safe to say that China is already as well equipped, and in some cases even better equipped, than many foreign countries with the infrastructure necessary to sustain its public diplomacy. With its main thrust of eliminating negative images of China circulating abroad, China's public diplomacy is underpinned by the two pillars of external publicity activities and cultural exchange activities.

Unlike the countries of the West, however, China is trying to leverage its mass media and cultural exchange programs to drive domestic

industries that will be competitive in today's global economy. In this regard, the Chinese government is charged not only with the task of boosting its international image, but also with the task of developing sustainable multimedia and cultural industries. In 2004, China launched an initiative to develop a domestic animation industry, with the goal of producing "animated cartoons of the Chinese brand." The "Chinese brand-image" has economic, cultural, and diplomatic components. One salient feature of China's public diplomacy is that it goes hand in hand with the country's policy to nurture infant industries.

While China's public diplomacy has proved effective, or even successful to some extent by boosting trade and avoiding sensitive issues, it is still faced with serious obstacles that must be overcome. China, as a developing country, lags behind advanced countries technologically and therefore in terms of information disseminating capability. Mass media is further restrained by the severe regulations on news reporting to which they are obliged to conform in their capacity as the "mouthpiece of the Party." Given these drawbacks China is faced with a wide gap between its information infrastructure and capability as compared to that of advanced countries. This is a serious issue in this information-oriented age. Initiatives that support the development of information technology and remove restrictions on content will help China's mass media become more competitive.

Initially starting from re-branding China through defusing the irritating image of China, China's public diplomacy is focusing on the passive explanation of "What China is not", without any mention to "What China really is". Actually, one of the hot debates in China now is about Chinese identity, including the questions of "Who stands for Chinese culture", "Can Confucius possibly be the traditional culture?" etc.

In early April 2006, anti-Japanese demonstrations erupted in many parts of China with tens of thousands of participants. Underlying these outbursts of anti-Japanese sentiment was an increasingly strong confidence in their mother country. In a situation such as this, the discrepancy between the purpose of creating an image of the state for domestic consumption as "representative of the people" and the purpose of creating an image of the state for international consumption as the vehicle for "peaceful rise" cannot help but be called into question. The extent to which China's public

diplomacy will prove effective in the future depends to a significant degree on whether China can successfully build up a domestic consensus on the image of the state, and depends to a significant extent on whether China can find a way to identify itself.