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Author(s): Yiwei Wang

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Public Diplomacy and the Rise of Chinese Soft Power

By
YIWEI WANG

In recent years, China has sought to supplement its traditional use of hard power with soft power, and thus the Chinese government has paid more and more attention to public diplomacy. Chinese governments have previously demonstrated a limited understanding of public diplomacy, seeing it either as external propaganda or a form of internal public affairs, but this has not prevented China from becoming a skilled public diplomacy player. Key aspects of traditional Chinese culture and politics have presented major obstacles for Chinese public diplomacy. In comparison to the United States, China needs an enduring and effective public diplomacy strategy and needs to improve its skills to make full use of the modern media. The peaceful rise/peaceful development policy in Chinese grand strategy has sought to integrate Chinese hard power and soft power to create a soft rise for China.

Keywords: public diplomacy; China; soft power; soft rise

In February 2007, Joshua Cooper Ramo, a Western analyst living in China who is sensitive to the issues around China's development on the international stage, declared, "China's greatest strategic threat today is its national image." In a report titled *Brand China*, he advanced what he called the "image sovereignty" problem for China. Others had already

Yiwei Wang is an associate professor in the Center for American Studies and assistant dean of the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai, China. He has been a Fox Fellow of Yale University (2000-2001) and a Korea Foundation-Yonsei University distinguished visiting professor (2005). He received his PhD from Fudan University in 2001. He has published five books and eighty articles in the United States, United Kingdom, India, Japan, Korea, and China. His research interests include international relations theory, population and international relations, public diplomacy, American foreign strategy and Sino-U.S. relations, and China's foreign policy.

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reached Ramo's conclusion. In fact, in recent years, public diplomacy has been transformed from an unfamiliar concept into a hot topic for many Chinese scholars. More and more graduate students now choose public diplomacy as a thesis topic, while Chinese newspapers and magazines frequently discuss public diplomacy. Most of the discussions focus on China's image and the need to offset the "China threat theory." The concept of soft power has been widely used by scholars, officials, and reporters. For instance, the 2007 White Paper on Chinese Foreign Affairs highlights the importance of soft power; the 17th Communist Party of China (CPC) Congress Report urges China "to enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country to better guarantee the people's basic cultural rights and interests" (Hu 2007). This is the first time that a document from the highest authoritative government body has promoted "soft power." Few Western international relations phrases have penetrated as deeply or broadly into the Chinese vocabulary in recent years.¹

In late 2006, Wu Youfu, vice president of the Shanghai Public Relations Association and chancellor of Shanghai Foreign Language University, suggested that China should use the panda rather than the dragon as its national symbol. In so doing, he immediately sparked both criticism and spirited discussion among Chinese both on the mainland and overseas.² The background to the debate lies in the Chinese assumption that Chinese concepts are too culturally specific to be understood correctly by foreigners. Since the main discourse of international relations is Westernized, so the argument runs, if the Chinese government expresses itself in the usual international language, it will lose its Chinese-ness and will be criticized by the Chinese people for being too Westernized. It is much the same problem that Karl Marx observed in nineteenth-century French farmers: "They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented" (Marx 1852). China shows great interest in public diplomacy and has clearly set its sights on learning how to promote Chinese soft power and express itself positively to the world. Ironically, the world, for its part, has now broadened its concern over the rise of China to focus on its mounting soft, as well as hard, power.

This article will be divided into four parts. The first section focuses on public diplomacy as understood in China. It will analyze Chinese perception and misperception of public diplomacy and especially how Chinese history and culture shape its understanding of soft power and public diplomacy. The second section focuses on Chinese public diplomacy strategy, from foundational Chinese strategic thinking to the present preoccupation with the task of facilitating China's peaceful rise. The third section goes beyond public diplomacy and focuses on the grand strategy of China's peaceful rise. The fourth section tries to integrate soft power and public diplomacy, focusing on the practice and strategy of Chinese public diplomacy. Chinese public diplomacy has tried to transform China's rise from a hard rise to a soft rise. In other words, China hopes to rise in peace, by peace, and for peace. The long-term task for Chinese public diplomacy is to tell the world exactly how China will use its power after its rise is accomplished.

1. The Chinese Understanding of Public Diplomacy

“Public diplomacy” is a foreign concept in China. Chinese more usually use the term *dui wai xuan chuan* or *wai xuan* (external propaganda) and emphasize advertising Chinese achievements and boosting the country’s image overseas. Unlike its English translation, in Chinese, *xuan chuan* (propaganda) has a positive connotation associated with such essentially benign activities as the release of news, general shaping of ideology, or even advertisement. *Xuan chuan* has two levels: *nei xuan* (internal propaganda) and *wai xuan* (external propaganda), which means the promotion of the Chinese image abroad. While the state propaganda system is very strong and influential in China, Chinese public diplomacy is relatively weak. One of the reasons for this is the Chinese government’s practice of mixing external and internal propaganda. Moreover, the Chinese understand public diplomacy by emphasizing the importance of *minjian waijiao* (people-to-people diplomacy). In the Chinese glossary, the concept of diplomacy sits alongside another key concept, *wai shi* (foreign affairs). All kinds of official organizations in China have a foreign affairs section. The famous saying of Zhou Enlai, “*wai shi wu xiao shi*” (there is no small issue in foreign affairs), is still the creed for China’s foreign affairs community. Beyond this, China’s public diplomacy practice—like that of France—emphasizes a cultural exchange/cultural diplomacy approach rather than an American-style media diplomacy approach. This is largely because Chinese culture is highly developed while its media is still not globally integrated. Landmarks in recent exchange and cultural diplomacy have included the Chinese-French Cultural Year in 2004, the Chinese-Russian National Year in 2005, and the Chinese-Indian Friend Year in 2006.

The Chinese have become increasingly conscious of public diplomacy. The concept *gongong waijiao* appeared first in the book *Diplomacy Abroad* (edited by Qipeng Zhou, a professor from the Chinese University of Foreign Affairs), which translated the entry for “public diplomacy” from the international public law encyclopedia in 1990 (Zhou and Yang 1990). Next, Professor Yi Lu analyzed the concept in his book *The General Introduction to Diplomacy* but translated the term as “*Gong Zhong Wai Jiao*” (mass/civil diplomacy) (Lu 2004). Chinese scholars remain confused between “public” and “mass/civil” diplomacy because the English word “public” can be translated in Chinese to mean either “non-private” or “nondiscriminatory.” Such translation problems are not uncommon in Chinese academia.

The Chinese practice of public diplomacy predates such scholarship and really took shape in 1983 as part of the “open and reform” period, beginning with the creation of a system of Chinese news spokesmen. The first was Qian Qicheng, who ran the information department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Other governmental organizations followed suit. A State Council Information Office was established in January 1991, pushing the news spokesman system to a new institutional level. Local government was slow to follow suit. The first local news spokesperson system was established only in June 2003 by the government of

Shanghai. To date, thirty-one provinces, seventy-four State Council institutions, and seven Central organs of the CPC have followed Shanghai and launched their own news spokesman systems. Beijing has even added a local system to speak for individual districts. Despite these foundations, the Chinese government paid little serious attention to public diplomacy until after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States. Ironically, given the widespread criticism of U.S. public diplomacy within the United States and elsewhere, the United States was a major model for Chinese public diplomacy. On September 26, 2003, as part of an emerging Chinese public diplomacy, the present author was invited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to give a lecture titled "The Theory and Practice of Public Diplomacy" to begin a public diplomacy series jointly organized by the Department of Policy Planning and the Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

On March 19, 2004, a new Division for Public Diplomacy was established under the Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In announcing the creation of the new unit, Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Shen Guofang defined public diplomacy as "a very important field in diplomatic work." He continued, "The basic goal of public diplomacy is to enhance the exchanges and interaction with the public in order to guide and win the understanding and support of the public for foreign policies" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2004). Foreign Minister Zhaoxing Li added, "We have actively conducted public diplomacy by publicizing China's foreign policies and activities to the Chinese public, thus winning their understanding and support" (Li 2005). Clearly, in their minds "public" meant "Chinese public," and public diplomacy meant what Americans would call "public affairs." This shift in usage is not as strange as it might seem. The Chinese government has long claimed that foreign policy must be an extension of domestic policy and that diplomacy should serve domestic politics.

This mixture of public affairs and public diplomacy has its roots in the Chinese political system. There is no single organ of public diplomacy and no equivalent to America's under secretary for public diplomacy and public affairs. This work is shared between the International Communication Bureau of the Department of Publicity (Propaganda) of the CPC Central Committee, the International Communication Office of the NPC (National People's Congress) and the CPPCC (Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference), the Bureau of External Cultural Relations of the Ministry of Culture, and the news department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, among others.

Traditional Chinese diplomacy emphasizes high politics and neglects grassroots politics. Countries are understood through the prism of China's own domestic experience. Chinese officials and citizens alike, for example, assume that if Sino-U.S. relations go well at the highest level, then all Americans will be sympathetic to China. They are puzzled when the White House sends goodwill gestures to China while the U.S. Congress expresses hostility.

Before the open and reform period of the early 1980s, China was isolated from the mainstream of international society and its international image reflected almost entirely a perception of its domestic politics. Thereafter, domestic politics

remained a highly significant and still perhaps dominant factor. The chief differences between the West and China fell into the domestic sphere, focusing on the single-party political system, human rights, and freedom of the press. Other major differences are the national unification issue and disagreements over the status of Taiwan and Tibet. In the past, China was passive and reluctant to express itself in international society. That time has now passed.

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The Chinese have many misconceptions about their international image. The typical (and often overlapping) errors are as follows:

1. China assumes that national strength is an index of international image: that if the nation is strong enough and big enough, then others will respect it. This flies in the face of the paradox that Switzerland and the Nordic countries are small and militarily weak, but their images are excellent, while the dominant power, the United States, is viewed negatively in many countries of the world. Chinese leaders encourage the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation but pay much more attention to their gross domestic product (GDP) than the reach of their soft power because they understand China's development as flowing from economic growth, driven by exports and foreign direct investment (FDI). This mind-set has tended to make Chinese diplomacy too pragmatically oriented. China has neglected to cultivate real affinities with foreign publics and has thereby invited the so-called China threat theory.
2. China has paid attention to its international position while neglecting its international image. Under the ancient imperial tributary system, emperors and their courts sought to maintain the prestige of the Chinese nation. Today reputation is neglected.
3. China has focused on expanding its economy internationally while neglecting culture, or—when culture has been considered—the Chinese government has just focused on expanding the traditional culture and ignored the cultivation of civil society abroad through cultural exchange.
4. The Chinese are too humble to promote China in international society.
5. The Chinese assume that China should be respected by the world for its long history and splendid civilization but forget that historical significance does not automatically convert into contemporary influence.

These misconceptions are as common among leaders as the general public. They are matched by several paradoxes in the West's view of China, which may be framed in the following generalizations:

1. Westerners seem to like Chinese history and culture but dislike contemporary China since today's China is viewed as too political and less cultural in their minds.
2. Westerners seem to like the Chinese people but dislike the Chinese government and the Communist Party.
3. Westerners seem to like the concept of "China" but dislike the concept of the "People's Republic of China," which they associate with communism.
4. Westerners appear to like to travel to and invest in China but seem unwilling to live in China; in other words, they seem to enjoy the benefits of the rise of China but are unwilling to suffer from the costs of the rise of China, such as the resulting pollution.

Even if some misperceptions about China could be eliminated, Chinese culture poses a considerable obstacle to effective Chinese public diplomacy. The problem lies in the tradition of the rule of virtue. Chinese people prefer self-examination and look for self-transformation in attempts to convince or convert others. In terms of fundamental worldview, the Western approach sees individual people as the units through which the world is understood and tends to think in absolutes, that is, good versus evil. The self is identified with God; the other is the heathen and an irreconcilable enemy. In contrast, Chinese thought supposes many kinds of other and suggests methods to reconcile that other into a harmonious existence. Here, the other can become the self. Hence, "Western philosophy assumes the principle of Objectivity but Chinese philosophy assumes the principle of Subjectivity/Other" (Zhao 2005). In other words, Western political discourse asks first, "Who are you?" It is concerned with the problem of identity, with distinguishing and making friends and enemies, exploring "us" and "others." It is a worldview based on splitting. In contrast, Chinese political thinking first asks, "Who are we?" creating the concept of "the whole world as one family," and emphasizing the creation of harmony. As a result, the Western concern is to regulate and facilitate struggle while the Chinese concern is to make a harmonious coexistence possible (Zhao 2005).

The Chinese approach to image proceeds from the inner world rather than the realm of external expression. China's inner/feeling culture differs from the Western-style external/exploring culture. The Chinese draw a distinction between the internal *neixin* (heart) and external *Mianzi* (face). More than this, the approach to public diplomacy is further confused by the understanding of "power" in Chinese culture. By extension, it becomes even more difficult to work with a concept like soft power. In Western politics, the term *power* refers to the ability of one actor or organization to influence the attitude and behavior of another actor or organization. Such a definition is strongly related to the logic of Darwin, focusing on those with power as the subject and those without power as the object. Actually, the definition of power should not only take into account the ability of the power subject, but also the extent of acceptance in the power object. This is the important difference between the ancient Eastern tribute system and the modern Western international system.

In China, power is usually translated into Chinese as *Quanli* (权力). Actually, in traditional Chinese, *Quanli* has two basic meanings: "steel yard" (n.) or "against scripture while for principle" (v.). In practice, *Quanli* is always connected

with *Quanshu* (tactics or strategy). So, historically, although there was balance of power in the period of the Warring States (475–221 BC), it was not a system but a strategy (*Junshi Shu*). In philosophy, Chinese understanding of power is always related to morality. Various schools of Chinese traditional philosophy explained the connection differently. Xunzi or Hsun Tzu (313–238 BC) argued that power is contrary to morality (君子以德，小人以力；力者，德之役也), while Confucius (551–478 BC) claimed to “become a sage from inside and an emperor from outside” (“ruling others and cultivating himself,” 内圣外王). In other words, morality inside brings power outside. Confucius said, “Do not impose upon others what you do not desire yourself” (己所不欲，勿施于人, 《颜渊》); Lao Tzu (854–770 BC) taught to “govern by doing nothing that is against nature” (无为而治); and hence, in other words, power comes from nature.

To summarize, traditional Chinese thinking about power is that power comes from morality and morality comes from nature. The traditional Chinese tributary system integrated power and morality. In Chinese traditional thinking, there is no concept of nation, nation-state, sovereignty, or international system but the idea of “All under Heaven” (*Tianxia*). There was no Chinese Machiavelli to disconnect power and morality, so it is not difficult to understand why it can be argued that “there is no Chinese international relations theory” (Wang 2005).

2. Chinese Public Diplomacy Practice

As China’s rise has required the country to think in terms of its soft power, the Chinese government has paid more and more attention to public diplomacy. With the academic Seminar on China’s Public Diplomacy, inaugurated on March 19, 2004, a new Chinese public diplomacy strategy started being shaped. China’s public diplomacy aims to fulfill two roles—as a function of wise strategic thinking and defensive reasons, and as an urgent task to facilitate China’s rise to soft power. China is seeking the road for peaceful development. It needs to change the international view of China, redress the so-called China threat, and make the world accept the rise of Chinese power. Chinese diplomacy has to go beyond the traditional model of diplomacy, which focuses on government-to-government engagement. The Chinese government also needs to initiate public diplomacy to engage foreign civil society.

In acknowledgement of this, when addressing the 10th Conference of Chinese Diplomatic Envoys Stationed Abroad, which convened in Beijing on August 30, 2004, to design the nation’s midterm diplomatic strategy, President Hu Jintao stressed that

the fundamental task and basic goal of China’s diplomatic work at present and a certain period in the years to come is to maintain the important development period featured by strategic opportunities and strive for a peaceful and stable international environment, a good-neighborly and friendly surrounding environment, an environment for equal and mutually beneficial cooperation, and an objective and friendly publicity environment so as to build a fairly well-off society in an all-round way. (*People’s Daily* 2004)

This was the first time that a Chinese leader stated that “an objective and friendly publicity environment” was a fundamental goal for Chinese diplomacy. This commitment provided a foundation for Chinese diplomats to understand public diplomacy at the level of strategy. The desire to shape a favorable external environment has since become one of the main tasks for Chinese diplomacy.

China is not without certain advantages in its public diplomacy. First, China’s rapid economic and political development invites the interest and attention of the world. More and more countries now encourage and welcome China to be a responsible stakeholder in the international system; more and more people visit or live in China, including foreign media professionals. The Confucius Institute reports that an increasing number of foreigners are learning Chinese. At the same time, China has more resources to invest in public diplomacy; for instance, China’s foreign aid budget in 2006 increased by 14 percent to \$1.1 billion.

Second, China has the advantage of a massive population. China can send out thousands of Chinese language teachers to teach at hundreds of Confucius Institutes around the world. China has also sent out thousands of police on United Nations peacekeeping missions. Of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, China has contributed the largest number of troops to UN peacekeeping. In Liberia alone there are six hundred Chinese police serving UN peacekeeping troops. Besides the UN peacekeeping mission, Chinese police have volunteered to help the local people, winning the hearts and minds of Liberians (*The Economist* 2006).

Third, China has a strong government and abundant political, economic, and cultural resources. Since the government thinks highly of public diplomacy, one can be confident that China will organize effective public diplomacy sooner or later. In particular, China enjoys friendship with developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The success of the China-African Summit of November 2006, which was attended by heads of government or their representatives from forty-eight of the fifty-three African countries, suggests that when China modifies its diplomacy from an export/FDI-orientated approach to an import/soft power-focused approach the world is receptive.

China plans to use both the Olympic Games in 2008 and the Shanghai World Expo in 2010 as opportunities to carry out public diplomacy and promote the China Brand. As Expo ambassador Zhou Hanmin declared in an interview, “What is public diplomacy? It is quite simple. There are two objectives in attracting other countries to attend the exhibition. One is to let more people know us. The other is to let people like us” (Hang 2002).

Besides its opportunities and advantages, however, Chinese public diplomacy must also overcome significant challenges and disadvantages.

First, while the Chinese political system operates under the principle of democratic centralism, Chinese diplomatic power is not so centralized. The Chinese diplomatic system is complicated by many departments and groups. It is difficult to make long-term strategic arrangements to practice public diplomacy. The Zhongyang Waibai (Central Foreign Affairs Office) merely coordinates the decision making of diplomacy, while the Central External Propaganda Group of Central Committee of the CPC is not a regular institute. So while multiple agencies

embrace the importance of public diplomacy, each does so in its own way. For instance, the Ministry of Culture focuses on cultural diplomacy; the Information Office, under the State Council and Foreign Affairs Department, is in charge of media diplomacy; the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (IDCPC) is in charge of party-to-party diplomacy and public diplomacy toward socialist countries; the Office of Chinese Language Council International (in Chinese, *Hanban*), which united twelve ministry organs, is in charge of building Confucius Institutes around the world. With a traditionally strong government but a weak society, China is not good at using the resources of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and transnational companies to carry out an integrated public diplomacy.

China, moreover, needs to take advantage of its own media to carry out media diplomacy. In China, the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, the Information Office of the State Council, the Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Xinhua News Agency, China Radio International (CRI), Chinese Central TV English channel (CCTV-9), and *China Daily*, as well as other agencies, use all kinds of ways to introduce Chinese development and policies to the world and help foreign audiences understand China. However, "it will be some time before the Chinese mass media, with its lack of competitiveness caused by strict government restrictions on the media, can start winning large audiences abroad" (Rumi 2004). On the other hand, China also needs to take full advantage of foreign media to carry out media diplomacy. Only since 2007, in preparation for the Olympic Games, has China allowed the foreign media to interview individuals and organizations without the permission of Chinese authorities.³

Second, China faces a hegemony of discourse, since most of the world's news is expressed within the framework of Western concepts and ideology and dominated by the English-language media. China enjoys economic and cultural power, but it cannot control how it is portrayed in the Western media. For example, China's engagement with the regime of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe has been widely criticized in the Western media (Pan 2006). China's friendly relationship with the government of Sudan (despite the crisis in Darfur) has prompted some groups to call for a boycott of the Beijing Olympics.⁴ As Rawnsley (2007) pointed out, "Cultural and economic diplomacy do not easily or necessarily translate into the realization of foreign policy objectives." The Chinese are eager for quick success and instant benefit and fixate on the idea of winning by a fluke, a single lucky roll of the dice. Such shortsighted behaviors are related to China's pragmatism during the open and reform period, which established economic interests as the main goal of foreign policy. They are also embodied in the Chinese practice of public diplomacy. Following the examples of Goethe Institute and Alliance Francaise, *Hanban* initially aimed to set up 100 hundred Confucius Institutes around the world. It swiftly passed this target. The first Confucius Institute was established in Seoul in November 2004; through December 11, 2007, it had set up 210 institutes in 64 countries and regions. It announced plans to quadruple the number of foreigners studying Chinese to 100 million by 2010,⁵ not keeping in mind that China's supply cannot meet the demand of the world. Critics warned against overreaching; they worried about

issues of quality and the collateral effect of such plans and appealed for more attainable goals (Wang 2007).

Third, the quality and ideas of China's diplomats need to be improved; Chinese bureaucratic systems need to be reformed. China's bad domestic habits are exported when China practices public diplomacy. Being educated under the slogan that "there is no small issue in foreign affairs," Chinese diplomats tend to be overcautious. They lack creativity. They know little of international marketing but are full of out-of-date ideas about external propaganda. One foreign observer noted, "The recent SARS and Avian Flu epidemics reveal that public diplomacy is essentially reactive rather than pro-active; defensive; secretive; potentially dishonest; and, for purely political expediency, too cautious and slow in responding to crises that have increasingly already been reported in the foreign media" (Rawnsley 2007). Chinese diplomats and leaders—because of the influence of Confucian culture—are usually slow of speech but quick in action. They urgently need to improve their skills and make full use of the modern media and technology to practice public diplomacy.

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Fourth, Chinese public diplomacy carries the burden of a huge language and cultural gap in communicating with the world. It is very difficult to translate Chinese political discourse into other languages. For instance the Chinese *taoguang yanghui* (low-profile) strategy and *kexue fazhan guan* (scientific outlook on development) both need to be understood in a Chinese way. The straightforward translation is highly ambiguous and leaves too much to the imagination. The Chinese terms *peaceful rise*, *harmonious world*, and *strategic opportunities* all lack exact English translations to express their true meaning. The former assistant foreign minister Shen Guofang tells a funny story to highlight the potential for confusion: an American botanist applied to visit China to study the Dazhai Flower, unaware that the Dazhi Flower was actually the Chinese government-promoted agricultural model to enable the Dazhai area to "flower," spreading benefits to all of China (Shen 2007). Even more important is the model of thought behind the language. China needs to explain to the world exactly what it plans to do after "rising," and especially how it will deal with U.S. hegemony. This cannot be expressed in the one Chinese phrase *heping*

jueqi (peaceful rise). The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation may be encouraging to Chinese people, but it makes China's neighbors worry about the revival of the tributary system.

3. Soft Power and China's Peaceful Rise

To understand Chinese public diplomacy, one has to go beyond the diplomatic level and consider Chinese grand strategy. The remainder of my argument will concern China's soft power and soft rise.

The rise of Chinese soft power invites world concern. Many scholars anticipate competition between China and the United States over their competing soft power. Joseph Nye Jr. (2005) anxiously pointed to the decline of American soft power and the rise of Chinese soft power. Some scholars even warn that a Beijing Consensus is replacing the Washington Consensus. The so-called China Model was a hot topic during the China-African Summit in 2006.

The Chinese government has its own way of conceptualizing these issues, embodied in talk of a Chinese peaceful rise or peaceful development strategy. The peaceful rise strategy means China is trying to get the outside world to accept its rising power. As it observes the main platforms for U.S. hegemony, China has deduced a simple model from the U.S. experience: "make contributions to your own country," "make contributions to regional peace," and create "legislation for the world." The pursuit of rational interests, the pursuit of a satisfactory international order, and the pursuit of legitimate hegemonic power have become the main theme of America's "governance of the world."⁶ China has also learned from history that if one achieves rationality, legitimacy, and the matching objectives of a hegemonic cause, one can achieve hegemony. Divergence or contradiction among the three will bring destruction and self-defeat. China's quest for a peaceful rise is seeking the rational, legislative power to match the objective of peace. In fact, when one considers the regional environment prior to China's growth, the approach during its rise, and the impact after its rise, the ascent of China is not only reasonable but also legitimate and peaceful. This has indeed been the rise of peace, by peace, for peace (Wang 2004).

But the task of enhancing China's soft power falls to public diplomacy. When the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, China's public diplomacy focused only on external propaganda in socialist bloc and developing nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. China sought friends for its fight against "American imperialism." Branches of the Xinhua News Agency sprang up around the world. At home, China issued some magazines in English, Russian, Japanese, and French: first was *People's China* in 1950, then *China Construction* in 1951, and *Beijing Review* in 1958. Until today, *Beijing Review* has been the representative weekly used to introduce Chinese governmental positions and release Chinese political, economic and cultural news.

Chinese external propaganda matured after the open and reform period. As Zhong and Wang (2006) summarized,

In the past, the Chinese government didn't use the term of public diplomacy officially, but practiced it. The progress of Chinese public diplomacy practice can be divided into three stages, its goals and tasks were different at each stage. First, it publicized the new China, and supported world revolution. Second, it enhanced reform and the process of opening to the outside world, safeguarded world peace. Third, it refuted the idea that China was a threat and advocated peaceful development. To summarize, the idea of publicity was gradually abandoned, and modern public diplomacy accepted into the practice of China's public diplomacy. China should take measures to build an international image of cooperative, friendly and responsible country, in order to enhance peaceful development. (p. 69)

In recent years, the perception of the "China threat" has been the main obstacle for improving China's international image. Actually, there is a paradoxical relationship between the foreign perception of a China threat and the Chinese perception of China's opportunity/rise. The vice president of the Henry Luce Foundation, Terrill E. Lautz, expressed this well, noting, "When China is weak and split, American's China image usually is quite positive; when China gets strong and begins to have the potential to develop externally, American's China image tends to be negative" (Lu 2003). Hence, China should change others' perception of the logic that the strong are necessarily threatening, helping international society to learn to trust China. This will require China to take on all the responsibilities of a great power and participate actively in international affairs.

4. The Practice and Strategy of Chinese Public Diplomacy

Since the end of the cold war, Chinese public diplomacy has pursued five main objectives: (1) more strongly publicizing the Chinese government's statements and assertions to the outside world, (2) forming a desirable image of the state, (3) issuing rebuttals to distorted overseas reports about China, (4) improving the international environment surrounding China, and (5) exerting influence on the policy decisions of foreign countries (Zhan 1998).

Misperceptions about China have formed through an interactive process. Both China and international society bring misunderstandings to the table. International society does not understand China's national conditions, ideological estrangements, or distrust; China does not pay enough attention to the outside response and is not good at promoting itself. Realizing the limited understanding of international society, the Chinese government has actively released White Papers to explain China's policy positions. According to a paper on China's Progress in Human Rights in 2004,

Since 1980, China has joined 21 international conventions on human rights, including the "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights" and has adopted a series of measures to perform its duties specified in the conventions, and submits on time its reports on implementing the conventions for consideration of the United Nations treaty bodies. With a sincere and responsible attitude, the Chinese government is actively considering approving the "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" (Permanent Mission 2004).

Such papers have successfully reduced foreign public criticism of the Chinese government and promoted China's international image.

Of course, China still faces many challenges in improving its image. China's neighbors, India, Korea, and Vietnam, are still heavily influenced by memories of wars and the tributary system. Overseas, Chinese help to promote as well as hurt China's image. The main obstruction comes from ideology. Joshua Kurlantzick, the author of *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World*, wrote in a related article, "Despite the soft influence of China on other countries, it will remain an authoritarian country" (Kurlantzick 2007). Another Chinese public diplomacy watcher, Ingrid d'Hooghe, also perceives limits of Chinese public diplomacy: "No public diplomacy will be able to change China's image as a country where human rights [are] violated" (2005). Similarly, *Financial Times* columnist Guy de Jonquières (2007) commented,

The importance of Chinese "soft power" is overrated. Most of Beijing's diplomatic overtures around the world are driven first and foremost by economic need, above all its quest for secure supplies of energy and raw materials. That it has stolen a march on the US is due more to Washington's neglect than to Beijing's undoubted political marketing skills. Truly effective soft power is based on the projection of intrinsically appealing national ideals, principles and values. However wantonly the Bush administration has squandered those assets, I suspect most Asians, given the choice, would still opt for the—tarnished—American dream over the harsh constraints, relentless materialism and spiritual poverty of contemporary China.

The Western scholars' comments were also echoed by Chinese scholars. For instance, Xuetong Yan (2007) pointed out recently that "the core of soft power is not cultural power but political power, i.e., the government's mobilization capability including the internal and external political mobilization capabilities which depend on the credit of the government."

To properly carry out Chinese public diplomacy, China needs to learn from Chinese history, inquiring into ideas, environment, resources, and challenges for public diplomacy and put forward a systematic Chinese public diplomacy strategy with Chinese characteristics. The outline could be as follows:

1. *The target*: A self-confident, trustworthy, cooperative, peace-loving China is the basic goal for Chinese public diplomacy. This, in the long run, serves China's national development goal to be "a prosperous and strong, democratic and civilized responsible country" (Wen 2007). China's public diplomacy should actively cooperate with Chinese national development strategy and gradually change China's image in the international society from negative to neutral to positive.
2. *The means*: The key to Chinese public diplomacy is to shape an affinitive and democratic government. Chinese government organs overseas first should protect the legal rights of every Chinese citizen; second, they should initiate image-promotion activities through cultural exchange and broadcasting, making use of the local media to broadcast Chinese news and other programs with the help of local overseas Chinese, students studying abroad, and transnational companies with investments in China. For instance, "creative China" activities and culture-selling activities all help to shape a vibrant, democratic, open, and humanistic image of China and to build the China Brand.
3. *Focal points*: Considering Liu Kang's observation that "today China's international image is basically demonized by the American media" (*Global Times* 1999), Chinese public

diplomacy should focus on the media in the United States and Europe, who mainly shape the public opinion of the world, to erase the bad effect of “hate media.” China should make full use of the multilateral stage, particularly the United Nations, to present its voice; learn to be good at communication with the nongovernmental organizations and the world civil society; and break the traditional paradox of public diplomacy and turn the passive entanglement of domestic issues into the active engagement with international issues, thereby shaping China’s new image as a responsible great power.

4. *Organization:* China needs to integrate its diplomatic resources, putting the vice minister of foreign affairs in charge of public diplomacy and public affairs as early as possible, to unify and coordinate the public diplomacy work within the Chinese diplomatic system. China should establish a State Department Information Bureau to take the responsibility for international communication. At the same time, China should continue to make full use of nonstate actors such as Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC).

Conclusion: From Soft Power to Soft Rise

The problems and challenges facing China in bolstering its international image require that the Chinese government take positive and effective public diplomacy steps and place the practice of public diplomacy at the heart of the national strategy. The long-term challenge for successful Chinese public diplomacy is to keep a balance between Chinese and Americanized/Westernized trends. That is, China should express itself in its own way but at the same time in the way that the world can understand and likes to hear. Compared to the United States, China needs an enduring and effective public diplomacy strategy and needs to improve its skills to make full use of the modern media and means to carry out its public diplomacy.

The rise of China has reached the stage of a transition from a simple “Made in China” brand to a dynamic “Create/Initiate in China” concept. Chinese development increasingly highlights the importance of Chinese standards, Chinese brands, and Chinese financial power, all of which places an increased burden on Chinese public diplomacy. The needs of business also suggest the huge potential of developing new research on and new practices for Chinese public diplomacy.

In all, public diplomacy plays three kinds of roles in China’s rise: (1) By shifting from “external propaganda” to public diplomacy, it can shape a sympathetic and harmonious international environment and be a catalyst for the process of China’s rise. (2) By creating a Chinese international image in the twenty-first century, public diplomacy can be the mirror of China’s rise, reflecting Chinese charm and kindness. (3) By building Chinese soft power and changing China’s rise from a hard rise to a soft rise (rising in norms, not just markets; rising in values, not just goods), public diplomacy can be the lubricant for China’s rise.

Chinese peaceful development includes missions for both rejuvenation and modernization. Public diplomacy is the way to promote national image and soft power. China’s target is not to recover prestige under the tributary system but to bring its philosophy and thought into the nation’s development target. Ancient Chinese thinkers advocated the “rule of virtue” as the key political value. China hence will have more confidence to carry out successful public diplomacy to shape

its own soft power system and thereby enrich the understanding of its national power and accomplish the historic transition from soft power to a soft rise.

The rise of China has reached the stage of a transition from a simple “Made in China” brand to a dynamic “Create/Initiate in China” concept.

Just as China’s rise is basically benefiting from globalization, the rise of Chinese soft power is also benefiting from the diversification of the world driven by the co-rising of BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China). The world is in a transition period. In this process, the United States may be blamed for buck-passing as the sole superpower, and China may be viewed as the object of hope because of its rapid rise. China’s image has been improved by hosting six rounds of six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue while America’s image has been greatly damaged by its invasion of Iraq and its failure to create stability there. It is, however, naive to say that the rise of China’s soft power is at the expense of the decline of American soft power. Actually, both the United States and China are blamed by critics of globalization as the main driving forces behind, and the chief beneficiaries of, globalization (Dombey and Pignal 2007). There is certainly healthy competition between them, but at the same time, China and the United States can cooperate to build up a harmonious world to enjoy the benefits of the ultimate “win-win” situation. China should learn to be a responsible stakeholder in the international system and achieve its sustainable soft rise in such a way as to satisfy or at least gain the acceptance of the international community.

Notes

1. Alex Berkofsky of the *Asia Times* has noted, “However, Chinese soft power has very little to do with the original soft power concept Dr. Joseph Nye introduced in 1990.” See Alex Berkofsky, “China: The Hard Facts on Soft Power,” *Asia Times*, May 25, 2007; see also Alex Berkofsky, “The Hard Facts on ‘Soft Power,’” *PacNet*, no. 26, May 31, 2007.
2. See <http://book.qq.com/a/20061205/000034.htm> (according to the survey, 90 percent of Chinese people were against giving up the dragon as a Chinese symbol).
3. See http://www.olympic.cn/news/olympic_comm/2007-11-07/1300603.html. Also see <http://en.beijing2008.cn/media/>.
4. See <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/4/boycott-the-2008-beijing-olympics>.
5. See http://www.hanban.edu.cn/en_hanban/kzxy.php.
6. See Yiwei Wang (2006, chap. 16).

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