

SECURITY THEORY

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CHINESE AND WESTERN THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CHINESE PUBLIC DIPLOMACY. COMMON DIMENSIONS AND DIFFERENCES

Abstract:	<p><i>Public diplomacy has been one of the 21st century challenges in research in international relations, primarily due to its primary purpose: to positively impact public opinion (especially foreign public opinion). Even though the term itself and its strategies appeared for the first time in the American academic and governmental context, it has had different approaches in other parts of the world.</i></p> <p><i>The present introductory study will deal with the standard dimensions and differences of “public diplomacy” from a Chinese and Western perspective. The authors’ primary objective is to contribute to the academic development of research in public diplomacy and offer a valuable resource for scholars and public diplomacy professionals searching for a better understanding of “public diplomacy” from different regional perspectives.</i></p>
Keywords:	China; public diplomacy; power
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Introduction

Although public diplomacy (PD) has been an area of research in international relations for more than twenty years, the methodological instruments of research in the field are still developing and challenging. This article presents a

brief understanding of the similarities and differences of the concept of public diplomacy from a Western-Chinese perspective, understanding public diplomacy as an exercise of power. The authors try to discover the common dimensions and the differences in public diplomacy understanding from a Western and a Chinese perspective. The study is beneficial for both scholars and professionals in public diplomacy, searching for a better understanding of the concept and its strategies beyond the already coined definitions. It is a limited study to the requirements of a journal and presents the overview of further research that the authors intend to develop in the future. Therefore, the article is an introductory analysis that invites PD researchers and professionals to deeper their studies and localizes PD in an area of research: international relations, area studies, public relations, branding, or communication studies, among others. A more comprehensive range of perspectives on understanding the development of the concept and how it is used in different parts of the world would make accurate contributions to the development of new methodological measures of its impact.

Power and public diplomacy from a western and Chinese approach

Firstly, we consider it essential to review the concept of power and identify to what degree public diplomacy is used as a source of power in the Western and Chinese perspectives to engage the foreign public and construct a positive country reputation. Robert A. Dahl sees power as the capacity of a state A to have power over state B to do what A wants and that in other circumstances, B would not have done it¹. Power could be measured, depending on both material (states' GDP, population, geography, territory, and natural resources) and non-material elements (diplomatic skills, legitimacy, government support by the people, reputation of keeping its promise, among others²). From these perspectives, we might understand the material elements of power as hard power and the non-material elements as soft power. Hard power is defined as coercive state power based on military intervention and economic sanctions in accomplishing its main objective to influence others³. In the late 80^s, Joseph Nye introduced the term "soft power".

Soft power is the ability of countries to attract and influence others' behavior, opposing it to the concept of "hard power". The influence of the other actors might be made only by wielding military and economic instruments. He identifies three main pillars of a country's soft power in the Post-Cold War period:

- 1) a country's culture (what are the cultural values that could be exported abroad);
- 2) political values (what persists home and abroad);

¹ Robert A. Dahl, *The Concept of Power*, "Behavior Science", Vol.2, No.3, 1957, pp. 202-203

² Joshua S. Goldstein, Jon C. Pevenhouse, *International Relations, 10th Edition*, 2013-2014 update, Pearson, New Jersey, USA, pp. 45-38

³ Ernest J. Wilson, *Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power*, "Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences", No. 616, 2008, p.114

3) foreign policy (what would legitimate and offer moral authority)¹.

Even if we are tempted to integrate public diplomacy in the general analysis of countries' soft power, historians and international relations scholars would disagree. Nicholas Cull considers that Nye offered the expression mechanism for public diplomacy narratives, but public diplomacy cannot be entirely linked to soft power. Cull gives the example of North Korea to argue this statement – a country that can use public diplomacy, but not soft power- and Ireland – that uses soft power and minimal public diplomacy². In 2009, Nye introduced the term “smart power” (combination of hard and soft power) that would be more suitable for non-Western countries, like Asian, African, or Latin American countries, emphasizing the mutual benefit of cooperation³. We try to analyze in our study public diplomacy as an exercise of smart power, combining soft power dimensions like: culture, political values and foreign policy and the hard power economical dimension (for example, state scholarships offered to foreign scholars, officials or students, among others). Even if the latter's coercion is not immediate, its main objective is to influence the public opinion and contribute to a change of perspectives (for the best hopefully) on the target public opinion.

In a Chinese approach, the concept of power might be comprehended, primarily, upon the Confucianism term of “Guanxi”. “Guanxi”, a core concept in Chinese society, represents the shared power/influence within a small group or network⁴. From the Western power understanding, expressed previously and the Chinese idea of “Guanxi”, we could understand public diplomacy as an instrument used to develop networks of influence (at different levels: governmental, opinion leaders, press, scholars and students) and further retell real stories to the world about Chinese culture and people to create a broader positive understanding internationally. In the Chinese sense, the concept of soft power has different interpretations among scholars and Chinese leaders. A common opinion among the Chinese scholars regarding soft power: Li Mingjiang and Men Honghua consider that it is still a developing concept in China.

China should focus more on its public diplomacy strategies, through culture promotion abroad, peaceful and harmonious society and the expression of all these strategies more broadly might engage the domestic and foreign public more effectively. In their perspectives, the global problems that the world faces nowadays can no longer be solved through a uniquely Western approach. Still, the

¹ Joseph Nye Jr., *China's Soft Power*, in Helmut K. (ed.), *Bridging the Trust Divide. Cultural Diplomacy and Fostering Understanding between China and the West*, Anheier&Bernard Lorentz Stiftung Mercantor, Berlin, 2012, p.5

² Nicholas J. Cull, *Public Diplomacy: Lessons from the Past*, Figueroa Press, Los Angeles, 2009, p.15

³ Joseph Nye Jr., *Get Smart: Combining Hard and Soft Power*, “Foreign Affairs”, Vol. 88, No. 4, 2009, pp. 160–163

⁴ Yadong Luo, Huang Ying Stephanie, Lu Wang, *Guanxi and Organizational Performance: A Meta-Analysis*, “Management and Organization Review”, No.1, 2012, pp.130-172

Chinese concepts of a harmonious society and a harmonious world of peace might contribute to new world solutions to new-world problems. Men Honghua argues that Chinese soft power should be analyzed simultaneously with Chinese values and practice to comprehend the term and the Chinese soft power strategies and actions¹ more extensively. Honghua identifies, like Joseph Nye, but more extensively, six pillars of the Chinese soft power: culture, norms, the international image of the country abroad, international institutions, and a development model². The additional dimensions that Honghua introduces in the Chinese soft power understanding are being pointed out from the “Guanxi” network system. Firstly, China should find alliances and develop reliable partnerships within international institutions. Secondly, it offers expertise as a successful developing model.

On the contrary, Zhang Shuyang believes that Joseph Nye’s “soft power” theory has a certain misunderstanding of the “Chinese model” (China’s political system and social system). She pointed out that Nye’s soft power theory highlighted the “Western-centric” ideology, and Western “universal values” always existed in his “soft power” theory, such as Western-style democracy and freedom. Under the influence of “universal values” thinking, China’s political and social system is regarded by Nye as significant trouble to the development of China’s “soft power”. However, she believes that the “Chinese model” is proposed to summarize the specific experience of China’s revolution, construction and reform. China has achieved great development results by relying on this development path and it is a model for many developing countries. So, it is still of high reference value for other underdeveloped countries and regions to realize the prosperity and strength of countries and nations³.

Going forward from the Western-Chinese comparative understanding of power to the coined definitions of public diplomacy in the Western world, the most popular ones are Joseph S. Nye⁴ and Nicholas J. Cull⁵’s perspectives. They define public diplomacy as one of the key soft power instruments to help enforce culture and the country’s international image abroad. Public diplomacy is an effective tool

¹ Apud Li Mingjiang, Bonnie S. Glaser, Melissa E. Murphy, *Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics. The Ongoing Debate*, in *Chinese Soft Power and Its Implications for the United States*, Centre of Strategic and International Studies, Washington, 2009, pp.14-20, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/090310_chinesesoftpower__chap2.pdf, (23.11.2020)

² Men Honghua, *Report on China’s Soft Power*, “International Review”, Vol.2, 2007, pp.19-20

³ Zhang Shuyang, *The Realistic Framework of Joseph Nye’s “Soft Power” Theory*, in “Contemporary Economics”, No.11, 2019, pp.11-14

⁴ Joseph Nye S., *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power*, in “The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science”, Vol. 616, No. 1, 2008, pp. 94–109

⁵ Nicholas J. Cull, *Public Diplomacy before Gullion. The Evolution of a Phrase*, in Nancy Snow, Nicholas J. Cull, (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, 2nd Edition, 2020, , p.19

used by a country to promote national policies and goals, communicate national ideals, beliefs and values, and build shared understanding and relationships across borders. Scholars should be cautious when assuming definitions, determine the fields of analysis, and distinguish between public diplomacy and public affairs, public relations, publicity, marketing, nation-branding, and propaganda. The common characteristic of all these concepts is to pursue public influence, but the main differences lay in communicating their narratives. Public diplomacy encompasses the governmental efforts to positively influence the public or the elite opinion of another state regarding its policies, values and ideas¹. Public diplomacy is different from public affairs because the latter covers both public information and its policies². It is different from publicity, as the publicity's strategy is the demand for a specific product type. It is different from propaganda because its strategy is to generate reactions beyond rationality. It is different from public relations, as its strategy focuses on the message of trust³. Public diplomacy is also different from nation branding. Branding is more about promoting and public diplomacy about creating a country's reputation⁴.

Most experts and research studies in public diplomacy are mainly in and coming from the USA. Very few studies are coming from European, Latin American, Asian, or African countries, agreeing in this aspect with Claudia Auer and Alice Srugies. They conducted research on Public Diplomacy in Germany in 2013 and shared the same findings⁵. One of our research's objectives is to fulfill this gap in the field. Further on, comparatively Chinese and Western scholars' opinions and perspectives on public diplomacy will be presented as part of the authors' literature review in the field.

Even though "public diplomacy" is relatively new, similar actions to engage the foreign public were seen in Europe and Asia, from the Roman Empire to the British Council and Confucius Institutes. Public diplomacy has been developing in its importance since the increased public role in state affairs⁶. From a historical viewpoint, most experts agree on the historical academic appearance of the term itself in the USA, in 1965 when Edmund Guillion defined public diplomacy as an instrument of foreign policy used to influence the foreign public. It facilitates

¹ E.H. Potter, *Canada and the New Public Diplomacy*, in "Discussion Papers in Diplomacy", No. 81, The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations "Clingendael" 2002, p. 3

² Doug Newsom, Judy Turk VanSlyke, Dean Kruckeberg, *Everything about Public Relations (Romanian Translation)*, Polirom, Iași, 2003, pp.22-23

³ *Ibidem*, p.24

⁴ Jan Melissen, *The New Public Diplomacy. Soft Power in International Relations*, Palgrave, Netherlands, 2007, p.19

⁵ Claudia Auer, Alice Srugies, *Public Diplomacy in Germany*, USC publications, LA, in Michael Burter, *Diplomacy without a State: External Delegations of the European Commission*, "Journal of European Public Policy", 2013, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp.183-205

⁶ Nicholas Cull, *Lessons from the Past, in Engagement. Public Diplomacy in a Globalized World*, CW Print Group, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London, 2008, p.18

interactions between people-to-people and intercultural communication and helps with communication between diplomats and their foreign correspondents¹. Among the most noticeable western scholars on Chinese public diplomacy we encounter, Falk Hartig and Ingrid d’Hooghe. Hartig mentions that countries use public diplomacy to promote universal values through public diplomacy and to engage the foreign public to counterbalance the “negative external perceptions or to build a line of defense against foreign criticism”². Moreover, Ingrid d’Hooghe analyzed the factors that undermined or contributed to the country’s public diplomacy success. She considers that in a peaceful rise in China, the Chinese government used public diplomacy tools to positively position its image abroad. China promoted its image abroad as a peace-loving nation, open to cooperation, a trustworthy partner, and a developing country that would put its citizens in the first place. Using these narratives, China tried projecting the same care internationally for a “harmonious society” as a responsible international affairs player³.

Comparing the Chinese public diplomacy with the western approach of the concept, Wang Yiwei considers that Chinese public diplomacy is more similar to the French cultural diplomacy than the American concept of public diplomacy, as it focuses more on cultural diplomacy and exchanges. Still, he recognizes the under development international broadcasting⁴.

A historical review on Chinese public diplomacy

Reflecting on the historical evolution of Chinese public diplomacy, we try to identify the common dimensions and the differences from the western understanding. Firstly, it is considered that China’s public diplomacy began, symbolically, on July 16th, 1936. That was the moment when Mao Zedong invited the American journalist Edgar Snow to Shaanxi and told him stories of how the Chinese Communist Party fought against Japanese aggression and national salvation. Snow’s talks with Mao and his visit to the CCP’s revolution base were recorded and published in North America and Europe as a book named “Red Stars over China”. The conversation between Mao and Snow was seen as the first activity of the CCP’s early “public diplomacy”. July 16th is celebrated as China’s Public Diplomacy Day⁵. In the early 1970s, China planned a famous public diplomacy event known as “Ping-Pong Diplomacy”.

¹ Murrow Center, <https://sites.tufts.edu/murrowcenter/> (05.10.2020)

² Falk Hartig, *Chinese Public Diplomacy. The Rise of Confucius Institute*, Routledge, New York, 2016, p.35

³ Ingrid D’Hooghe, *The Rise of China’s Public Diplomacy*, Institute for International Relations “Clingendael”, Netherlands, 2007, p.3

⁴ Yiwei Wang, *Public Diplomacy and the Rise of Chinese Soft Power*, “The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science”, Vol. 616, 2008, pp. 257–273, p. 259, www.jstor.org/stable/25098003 (15.10.2020)

⁵ Youma Zhou, *Mao Zedong, Snow, and Public Diplomacy*, “Public Diplomacy Quarterly”, No.1, 2010, pp.103-111

During that period, to facilitate the official dialogue between the Chinese and American governments, China invited the American table tennis team to play in China, which ultimately promoted the establishment of diplomatic-tie between China and the United States and opened a new era in China's diplomacy history¹. After successfully hosted the 2008 Beijing Olympics in China, the government paid more attention to "public diplomacy". In July 2009, President Hu Jintao proposed for the first time that China should launch public diplomacy activities in his speech at a meeting with Chinese diplomats, which marked that public diplomacy was officially put on the government's agenda. During the 2010 National "Two Legislative Sessions", foreign minister Yang Jiechi spoke publicly about public diplomacy. He mentioned that "one of the important contents of public diplomacy is introducing China's domestic and foreign policies to the public at home and abroad through communication and exchanges, to increase understanding and reduce misunderstandings"². From Yang Jiechi's public speech, we identify an essential difference from the western perspective: focus on the domestic public. The Chinese public diplomacy public focus is not only the foreign one, not even the principal one but the domestic public and then the foreign public. This perspective might change the public diplomacy narratives completely or be presented differently from a trained and foreign public perspective.

In the last ten years, the Chinese government's emphasis on public diplomacy promoted the academic development of public diplomacy. In 2011, two books on China's public diplomacy were published. One is "Public Diplomacy and Communication between Cultures" by Zhao Qizheng. He suggested a definition of the Chinese Public Diplomacy, placing public diplomacy and government diplomacy into the country's overall diplomacy. He highlights those negotiations and communications between governments (such as ambassadors or cultural envoys representing the Ministry of Culture) are government diplomacy. The diplomatic behavior or a government's representative to the public of another country is public diplomacy. The diplomacy of the public of one country to the public of another country is called "civil diplomacy", also known as "people-to-people diplomacy" or "non-governmental diplomacy", which belongs to the category of public diplomacy (see the diagram below)³.

¹ *Ibidem*, p.109

² China News, *Public diplomacy is an important direction for China's diplomacy*, <https://www.chinanews.com/gn/news/2010/03-07/2155626.shtml>, (07.03.2010)

³ Qizheng Zhao, *Public Diplomacy and Communication between Cultures*, China Renmin University Press, Beijing, 2011, pp. 4-5

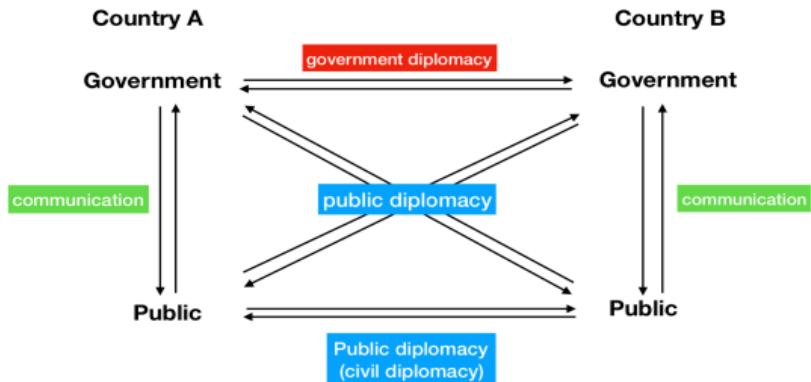


Figure 1: Public Diplomacy and its Relationship with Government Diplomacy¹

Zhao also defined public diplomacy actors: the government, the social elites, and the general public. The government is dominant, the social elite is the backbone and the public is the foundation. In Zhao's opinion, the essential task of China's public diplomacy is to explain China to the world and help the foreign public understand the real China. And further on, to enhance the country's cultural attractiveness and political influence more effectively, it improves the international public opinion environment, safeguards the country's interests and positively spreads its national image in the world².

Another essential book in public diplomacy in the Chinese academic field is "Introduction to Public Diplomacy" written by Han Fangming. Han believes that public diplomacy is led by the government, facing the foreign public, using communication and conversation as the primary means to enhance the country's image and maintain diplomacy in which national interests are the fundamental purpose³. Han also defined the audience of public diplomacy at the three levels:

- 1) the core audience is foreign parliaments and parliamentarians, political parties, international organizations, and their members;
- 2) the primary audience is large-scale transnational companies, media groups, think tanks, and other non-governmental organizations who are influential in the policy-making process of foreign governments;

¹ Qizheng Zhao, *China steps on the world stage of public diplomacy*, "Public Diplomacy Quarterly", Vol. 1, 2010, pp.1-5

² *Ibidem*, p.1

³ Fangming Han, *Introduction to Public Diplomacy*, Peking University Press, Beijing, 2011, pp.7-10

3) the general audience is the foreign public¹. From Han Fangming's perspective, we could also observe the public focus on the officials' discourse: "domestic and foreign public" direction, and Chinese scholars. Perspective – that is more similar to the Western dimension of public diplomacy target public: foreign public.

In Zhao and Han's definition of China's public diplomacy, they both mentioned the leading and guiding role played by the government and agreed that safeguarding national interests and enhancing the national image among the international society are the core tasks of China's public diplomacy. Their considerations highlight perhaps the essential differences from the Western understanding of public diplomacy and identify the particularities of the Chinese approach.

During the latest years, under the current leadership, the government emphasizes the diversity of public diplomacy subjects and activities and attaches great importance to construct international communication capabilities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has issued a series of policies to develop Chinese public diplomacy, such as media diplomacy, education diplomacy, think tank diplomacy, religious diplomacy, big-corporate diplomacy, etc. Also, the first lady diplomacy, a western tradition, appeared for the first time in China's public diplomacy. President Xi Jinping highlighted in the report of the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of China that it is necessary to "strengthen cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, build the capabilities for international communication, tell the Chinese stories well, present a true, (...) comprehensive China and improve the country's cultural soft power"².

According to Xie's research, since 2013, China's public diplomacy research papers on the national image, international image and soft power are decreasing, while research on international communication is increasing. Taking the construction of the China Global Television Network (CGTN, China hopes to eliminate the "demonization" of Western media's reports on China, break through the inherent media frame, and use its own media channels to tell Chinese stories. Therefore, building an international broadcasting system will be a vital aspect of developing Chinese public diplomacy³.

Cross-cultural communication under the "Belt and Road" initiative is also an essential topic of China's public diplomacy. Li Dan pointed out some negative interpretations of the "Belt and Road" initiative regarding politics, economy, security, culture, etc. As an effective carrier of people-to-people cultural exchanges, she proposed that Confucius Institutes encourage people in neighboring

¹ Fangming Han, *Effectively Transform Our Country's Potential Advantages of Public Diplomacy into Practical Results*, "Public Diplomacy Quarterly", No. 01, 2011, pp.6-10

² CPC NEWS, *China Enters a New Stage of Public Diplomacy*", <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0411/c40531-29918421.html>, (11.04. 2018)

³ Tao Xie, *The Status Quo and Challenges of my country's Soft Power and Public Diplomacy Research*, "International Communications", No. 06, 2016, pp.43-45

countries to learn and understand the Chinese language and culture. Like this, they can have a more direct understanding of China and the “Belt and Road” initiative, thereby enhancing the line of defense against foreign criticism¹.

In 2020, in the context of the Covid-19 global pandemic, Chinese scholars also proposed “anti-pandemic diplomacy” to carry out public diplomacy activities, which refers to actively sharing “anti-pandemic” experiences with others countries providing medical supplies and technical supports. It is pointed out that in the post-pandemic era, the main task of China’s public diplomacy is to promote the concept of “a Community of Shared Future for Mankind” to be affirmed under the universally recognized discourse represented by cosmopolitanism². During President Xi Jinping’s mandate, China’s public diplomacy has carried out a series of innovations. It pays more attention to cultural exchanges and enriches the subjects and forms of public diplomacy. By enhancing international communication capabilities, China hopes to tell the Chinese story well so that the core values of building “a Community of Shared Future for Mankind” could be recognized by the international community.

Conclusion

As a general conclusion, we consider that public diplomacy’s meaning and usage both in Western and Chinese approaches have national and regional approaches but keep the same objective of answering the need to have a positive country image abroad. The research in the field is developing, making pertinent contributions to a better understanding of the term from a Western and Chinese perspective. An “everlasting new public diplomacy” is rooted in the past but constantly adapted to new challenges. In a globalized world, credibility, trust, and reputation are part of public diplomacy's positive image to engage with the foreign public.

From the Chinese perspective, we can conclude that symbolically, China’s public diplomacy can originate in the early stage of the Chinese Communist Party’s revolution but is undefined as a term. It was felt as a need to open to the world and tell the Chinese stories abroad, using one of the instruments of public diplomacy—journalism, not an official diplomatic communication. The acceleration period of the theoretical and practical development of China’s public diplomacy was after 2010, when the government attached more importance to public diplomacy and promoted growth in the academic field. The definition of public diplomacy in Chinese academia emphasizes the guiding role of the government and the legitimacy conferred by the government, and its main task - to safeguard national interests and build a good international image. Even though the main

¹ Dan Li, *The Negative Public Opinion towards the Belt and Road Initiative and Neighborhood Public Diplomacy - From the Perspective of Confucius Institutes*, “Journal of Guizhou Provincial Party School”, No. 06, 2019, pp.46-52

² Xinli Zhao, Siyu Xie, *A Review of the Research on China’s Public Diplomacy Study in 2020*, “Public Diplomacy Quarterly”, No. 04, 2020, pp.44-52

objectives and understandings of public diplomacy are the same, there are still differences in the Chinese public diplomacy dimension, both in Western and Chinese perspectives.

Developing new, updated methodological instruments from different regional perspectives might broaden the understanding of public diplomacy dimensions and contribute to the literature gap in the field.

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