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HOW CHINA COMMUNICATES

Public Diplomacy
in a Global Age

Zhao Qizheng



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Preface

In this era of globalization, public diplomacy and governmental diplomacy constitute the sum of a state's diplomacy. The entities participating in public diplomacy express, from a variety of perspectives, the national conditions of their country, explain its policies, and answer such questions that a foreign country may have about it. At the same time, via international contact, they learn the points of view of their foreign counterparts. The purpose of public diplomacy is to improve the attitude of foreign publics toward one's country so as to influence the policies of foreign governments toward one's country. The main players involved in public diplomacy include, at different levels, the government, non-governmental organizations, social organizations, social elites and the general public. The government is the leading party. Non-governmental organizations, social organizations and social elites constitute the backbone forces, and the general public is the foundation.

In its early days, public diplomacy was a government's publicity activities directed toward the public in other countries. Later, richer forms were developed, such as government-sponsored academic exchange programs and activities promoting the learning of the country's language. As foreign travel becomes cheaper, direct interaction between the citizens of different countries has become increasingly frequent. And since economic

globalization and the trend of multi-polarity in international politics are even more relevant to the immediate interests of the public, people today are paying greater attention to international affairs and the diplomatic policies of their respective countries. The new media, represented by the Internet, have expanded opportunities for the public to participate in diplomatic affairs, and their opinions have more influence than ever before. The modern public is not just the passive “audience” of public diplomacy but has become a “main player” who participates positively. The public in one country can communicate directly with the public in another country, and also has the opportunity to communicate with government officials from that country. This has created a new landscape in public diplomacy, a landscape of greater richness and complexity.

The rapid social and economic development in the 30-plus years of reform and opening up has moved China from the wings of the world stage to its center. In comparison with the past, the beneficial or constraining influence of the international situation on China’s development has become increasingly apparent; things in China often attract the attention of the whole world. However, the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics is different from both the path of capitalism in Europe and the United States (US) and the path of socialism of the Soviet Union. The world still needs some time to truly understand China. In addition, the estrangement caused by the residue of Cold War ideology keeps the political powers and the media in the West from observing China in a correct way. As a result, the image of China in world public opinion is seriously inconsistent with the actual situation in China. All these background conditions magnify the urgency and importance of explorations and undertakings in China’s public diplomacy.

China’s public diplomacy consists of the activities of friendly external exchanges that are based on the concept of harmony, an idea of seeking common ground while putting aside differences, and aims to promote mutual understanding between different countries. It is fundamentally different from the public diplomacy practices of some countries that

suppress other countries, peddle their own values and interfere in the internal affairs of other countries.

In 1991 I became vice mayor of Shanghai in charge of work areas like the development of the Pudong District, foreign affairs and foreign trade. In 1998, I assumed the office of minister of the Information Office of the State Council of China, an agency whose responsibility is to explain to the world about China, her culture, national conditions and policies. Now I am director of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, a committee whose main remit is to carry out foreign friendship work. These several jobs all involve public diplomacy. The ideas in "Concepts," the first part of this book, are mostly based on my personal experiences and understandings about the public diplomacy activities of which I was part. "Practices," the second part of the book, contains some real life examples of my public diplomacy activities. I believe the key to public diplomacy is practice. Its principles are easily graspable. For the majority of people in practicing public diplomacy, it might not be necessary to over-emphasize the "academic." That might restrict innovation in practice.

Most activities in public diplomacy are cross-cultural. In this book, I also elaborate on cross-cultural issues that may be encountered in public diplomacy activities.

The idea for this book originally came from Mr. Hu Baijing, an associate professor of the School of Journalism and Communication of Renmin University of China. He organized five of my doctoral students to assemble my speeches, records of my conversations with foreign guests, and media reports and to take extracts from my published works. They classified these texts and organized them into a dozen chapters. These became the original basis of the book. However, the selected materials come from a time span exceeding 10 years and were varied as regards the time context, occasion and audience. Consequently, what appears in this book is the result of my revising these materials. I had a number of face-to-face discussions on the main arguments in my manuscript with Mr. Hu

Baijing, with Ph.D. candidates Zhang Dong, Qiang Ming, Wang Gengxi, Dai Ying and Zhang Qingyuan, and with Liang Tingting, who is now doing her postgraduate program in Nankai University. They also helped me review the manuscript. The cases in “Practices” were carefully selected by the doctoral candidates. Despite the age differences we worked together in friendship and learned much from each other, making the period composing this book a time of great pleasure and enjoyment.

I also want to express my special thanks to Mr. Huang Youyi, vice president of the International Federation of Translators (FIT) and vice president and secretary general of the Translators Association of China (TAC), Ms. Xu Lin, director of the Confucius Institute Headquarters, Mr. Huang Xingyuan, secretary general of the Chinese People’s Institute of Foreign Affairs, Ms. Wu Wei, vice director of the Publication Bureau of the State Council Information Office, Feng Chunhai, a teacher of my university, and Mr. Liu Yongxin. The materials and opinions they have kindly shared with me are all incorporated into the book.

This simple and concise book still took three long years to complete. I really hope its publication may somehow be helpful to the cause of public diplomacy in China. I am very well aware that, as public diplomacy develops and flourishes in China, more and more imperfections might be found in the book. I am ready for remedial suggestions from my readers.



Zhao Qizheng
March 2011

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Part I

Concepts