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Public Diplomacy and its Chinese conception

Subject: What can Public Diplomacy achieve? What are the limits of Public Diplomacy? Discuss with reference to a country of your choice.

In a realist approach of International Relations, States, for their survival, seek for the best foreign policy in order to improve their power upon the other nations. To achieve this goal, some states eventually use a special strategy, called Public Diplomacy (PD), based on “image cultivation across national borders”¹. China, with its rising economy and its growing domestic and international interests, need to secure a legitimated authority throughout the international community and has then to care about its image².

The objective of this essay is to understand to what extent a state, and especially the Chinese one, can extend its influence throughout the world, thanks to the use of PD. In fact, with the development of mass parties, the increasing role of civil society in politics, the rise of globalization and the information revolution, States have been using new ways of promoting self-interests. Foreign policy has been democratized.³ In that context, Nye coined the notion of Soft Power, which refers to “a nation winning influence abroad by persuasion and appeal rather than by threats or military force”⁴. The main function of PD is the promotion of Soft Power⁵. Its impact on the international politics deserves deeper analysis and will be the main purpose of this essay.

¹ **Melissen Jan**, *Wielding Soft Power : The new Public Diplomacy*. The Hague: The Netherland Institute of International Relations. Clingendael Diplomacy Paper N° 2. May 2005. p.2.

² **Kurlantzick, Joshua**. *Charm Offensive: how China's soft power is transforming the world*, Oxford University Press, New Dehli, 2007, p.15.

³ **Batora, Jozef**. *Public Diplomacy in Small and Medium-Sized States: Norway and Canada*. Netherlands Institute of International Relations “Clingendael”, March 2005. p. 1

⁴ **Pan Esther**, *China's Soft Power Initiative*. Council on Foreign Relations. 05/18/2006. <http://www.cfr.org/publication/10715>. p.1.

⁵ **Batora Jozef**, *ibid*, p.1

In this dissertation, after having briefly defined and explained the notion of PD and its Chinese understanding, the attention will be focus on, first of all, what results can be reached thanks to the use of PD, exemplifying these assertions through the People's Republic achievements. Secondly, we will examine what can restrain the scope of PD, in particular for China. Finally, we will conclude this essay expressing the danger the use of the Chinese PD represents for the world.

The concept of PD and its emulation in China

- What is Public Diplomacy?

For Amr⁶, nowadays, “the use of PD is crucial for a successful foreign policy”. The term PD, coined by the American diplomat Edmund Gullion in 1965, can be defined as “the means to promote the national interest and the national security through understanding, informing and influencing broader publics in foreign countries”⁷. In other words, Governments intend “to shape public opinion in other countries”⁸, in order to sketch a favorable political environment abroad for their national interests.

The idea is that, through a bottom-up political mechanism, the civil society has the capacity to put pressure on the government's policy making and then will indirectly influence our own national security and prosperity⁹. However, a winning PD strategy must be founded on a two-way communication, a “genuine dialogue”¹⁰. In other words, to successfully change and inform foreign public points of view, publics must

⁶ Amr Hady. *The need to communicate: how to improve U.S Public Diplomacy with the Islamic World*. Analysis Paper #6, January 2004, p. VI.

⁷ Amr Hady, *ibid*, p. IV.

⁸ Edelstein, David M. Krebs, Ronald R. *Washington's troubling obsession with PD*. *Survival*, volume 47, Issue 1 2005. p.89.

⁹ Amr Hady, *ibid*, p.1.

¹⁰ Amr Hady, *ibid*, p.1.

believe their will is taken into consideration by our government. According to Aoyama¹¹, the effect of PD can be measured thanks to world opinion surveys and economic performance.

PD comprehends two kinds of actions: firstly, “information furnishing activities”, including distribution of information abroad and international broadcasting. It could be consider as propagandistic activities. Secondly, it involves activities of “international education and cultural exchanges”¹². For these actions, PD targets the general public in foreign societies and more specific non-officials groups, organizations and individuals.

- The Chinese PD conception.

During the Cold War, the marginalized Chinese communist regime usually communicated with the external world in a propagandistic way. Its international image was based on what could be perceived of its domestic politics, through the broadcasting of the Chinese leaders’ statements by the media, like China Radio International.¹³

During the reform period, and more particularly since the 1990s, China increased its PD budget. Strategically, Chinese leaders emphasized its “peaceful development”¹⁴, focusing on its respect of the states sovereignty and its contribution to maintain

¹¹ **Aoyama**, Rumi. *China’s Public Diplomacy*. Waseda University, 2007, p.2.

¹² **Aoyama**, Rumi. *ibid*, p.8.

¹³ **Wang**, Yiwei, *Public Diplomacy and the Rise of Chinese Soft Power*, The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Sage, 2008, p.259.

¹⁴ **Kurlantzick**, Joshua. *China’s Charm: Implications of Chinese Soft Power*, Carnegie Policy Brief, No. 47, June 2006. p.3.

pacifically the international order. In the words of Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, the rise of China “will not come at the cost of any other country, will not stand in the way of any other country, nor pose a threat to any other country”.¹⁵ Unsurprisingly, the idea of Chinese noninterference policy coincides with a period of unpopular interventionism from the United States.

The new liberal policy of Beijing and its willingness to invest abroad also revolutionized its image. Chinese leaders portray China as a potential ideal for the developing world, keeping a centralized authority on the state expansion while increasing wealth. In countries like Indonesia, that hold partially responsible the economic globalization for the suffering engender by the financial crisis, “the success of China’s developmental model holds significant appeal”.¹⁶ However, as we will observe, developing countries and developed countries differ in their perception of the Chinese attractiveness.

- The means of PD and the Chinese adaptation.

For the American Department of State, the leading tools of PD are “publications, motion pictures, cultural exchanges, radio, and television”¹⁷. It means that Public Diplomacy, promoting the country’s soft power, does not rely solely on state structures. PD involves a large set of people and interests that go further the actual government’s policy. The state administration must then “harness the potential of the

¹⁵ **Kurlantzick**, Joshua. *Charm Offensive: how China’s soft power is transforming the world*, Oxford University Press, New Dehli, 2007. p.38.

¹⁶ **Kurlantzick**, Joshua. *China’s Charm: Implications of Chinese Soft Power*, Carnegie Policy Brief, No. 47, June 2006. p.3

¹⁷ **Amr Hady**. *Ibid*, p.1.

positive images and values associated with domestic non-state actors”¹⁸, providing resources to them, in order to create cooperation and a mutual obligation. The success of PD depends on the synergy between government’s policy and societal actors for broadcasting shared values and an attractive image of the state¹⁹. It also means that PD is asymmetrical, relating officials persuading non-state actors abroad, but also non-state actors cooperating with the government influencing foreign non state actors.

To reach a broader public, China’s government helped improving and expanding its media network. For example, according to Kurlantzick²⁰, CCTV (the Chinese state television) has been professionalized and is now internationally broadcast. For Wang Y.²¹, all Chinese media, like Xinhua News Agency, China Radio International or People Daily’s and China Daily’s newspapers, are instruments “to introduce Chinese development and policies to the world and help foreign audiences understand China”.

The Chinese administration promotes also Chinese culture, for example in overseas primary schools, inciting government to develop Chinese teaching classes. Foreign students are now very welcome in China for scholarships and university courses.²² A network of institutes, named Confucius, depending directly on the Chinese government²³, has also been set up to spread Chinese culture and language all over the world.

¹⁸ **Batora**, Jozef. *Public Diplomacy in Small and Medium-Sized States: Norway and Canada*. Netherlands Institute of International Relations “Clingendael”, March 2005. p.5.

¹⁹ **Batora**, Jozef, *ibid*.

²⁰ Kurlantzick, Joshua, *ibid*, 2007, p.68.

²¹ **Wang**, Yiwei, *ibid*, p. 265.

²² **Kurlantzick**, Joshua, *ibid*, 2007, p.69.

²³ **Hanban Website**, <http://english.hanban.org/gywm.php> (22/11/09).

It is difficult to present Chinese PD approach without mentioning Chinese aid activities and its advertisement²⁴. These activities grew from \$1.5 billion in 2003 to \$27.5 billion in 2006, most of them in Africa, especially in countries with oil extraction. 53% of these activities were in the form of state-sponsored investments, concessional loans constituted 42%, grant and debt cancellations accounted 5%²⁵.

To summarize, PD intends to influence positively the perception of foreign civil societies of a country. China has perceived the benefits that this technique can provide and began developing its own conception of it, focusing on its peaceful development and keeping a large centralization of its action. We will now examine the benefits of this strategy.

The potential achievements of Public Diplomacy.

- What can be achieved with Public Diplomacy?

Generally, the utilization of PD enables, first of all, to reduce misunderstandings between nations. Secondly, it provides feedback to understand the result and the impact of a policy making. Finally, it facilitates the promotion of personal, professional and institutional bind between civilians and organizations, in foreign countries²⁶. Batora differentiates the PD of major powers and that of medium sized power comparing their mission: for the former ones, the objectives are a “re-

²⁴ Kurlantzick Joshua, *ibid*, 2006, p.3.

²⁵ Lum Thomas, Fischer Hannah, Gomez-Granger Julissa, Leland Anne, China's foreign aid in Africa, Latin America, and South East Asia, CRS report for Congress, 02/25/2009, p.9.

²⁶ Wang, Yiwei, *Public Diplomacy and the Rise of Chinese Soft Power*, The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Sage, 2008. p.260

branding”, explaining and advocacy of foreign policy, for the latter ones, the main goal is capturing attention²⁷.

As it has been very explicitly formulated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China in 2004, “the basic goal of PD 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”²⁸. China is then trying to promote an effective dialogue, a mutual understanding, to build a durable self-sustaining trust in its foreign policy.

More specifically, for Hu Youqing, a deputy to the National People’s Congress, promoting the use of the Chinese language will contribute to spreading Chinese culture and increasing China’s global influence²⁹. There is then a direct link between the promotion of the Chinese culture and its wish of expanding its worldwide power.

Wang Y.³⁰ corroborates this hypothesis, interpreting the “peaceful rise” strategy as the Chinese desire to make the outside world accept its rising power. To enforce this peaceful development, China has to depict itself as a helpful, affable and responsible country.

At the contrary, Kurlantzick³¹ believes that this “peaceful rise” PD strategy is really based on the Chinese will to maintain peace, at least on its periphery. In fact, “peace

²⁷ **Batora**, Jozef. *Public Diplomacy in Small and Medium-Sized States: Norway and Canada*. Netherlands Institute of International Relations “Clingendael”, March 2005, p.7.

²⁸ **Wang**, Yiwei, *ibid.* p.260.

²⁹ **Zhigang**, Xing. “NPC Deputy calls for Promoting Chinese”, China Daily, 10 Mar. 2006.

³⁰ **Wang** Yiwei, *ibid.* p.260.

³¹ **Kurlantick**, Joshua, *ibid.*, 2006, p.4.

allows China's economy to grow and provides opportunities for Chinese companies looking for outlets".³²

For Aoyama³³, the five main objectives of Chinese PD are: "Publicizing China's assertions to the outside world; forming a desirable image of the state; issuing rebuttal to distorted overseas reports about China; improving the international environment surrounding China; exerting influence on the policy decisions of foreign countries".

According to many scholars, the main goals of Chinese PD are "to convince the world of its peaceful intentions, secure the resources it needs to continue its soaring economic growth, and isolate Taiwan"³⁴.

- What China has already achieved?

For Wang, the world is receptive to Chinese PD. According to a BBC poll from 2005 carried out in twenty-two nations, "forty eight percent of people thought China's role in the world was mainly positive"³⁵. It means that, thanks to the use of PD, Beijing succeed in modifying its international image, shifting from the status of threat to one of constructive power for the world.

The Beijing Olympic Games of August 2008 were an opportunity to improve PD. It was an occasion to instruct foreign civil societies about the modern China and display

³² Ibid.

³³ Aoyama, Rumi. *ibid*, 2004, p.10.

³⁴ Pan Esther, *ibid*, p2

³⁵ Kurlantzick Joshua, *ibid*, 2007, p.112.

a positive image of the country and its culture, using lots of forms of informal dialogue³⁶.

The Confucius institute reports that an increasing number of foreigners are learning Chinese. In fact, whereas the first Confucius center for the Chinese teaching opened in 2004, in December 2007, two hundred and ten institutes in sixty four countries had already been set up³⁷. “The image of Confucius and the ideals of his philosophy are now linked to the image that China wants to project to the rest of the world: harmony with other countries, virtuous government, mutual respect, loyalty, humanity and restraint”³⁸.

In Asia, China has acquired a quite important regional influence. Kurlantzick³⁹ asserts that “seventy percent of Thais now considered China Thailand’s most important external influence”. The same country also declared that every public school in the country should teach Mandarin.⁴⁰ For that author, during the last ten years, perceptions of China in Southeast Asia have drastically changed, as civil societies now consider China as “potentially the preeminent regional power”⁴¹.

Thanks to the PD, China also convinces foreign nations to invest in the country. According to Kurlantzick⁴², Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines invested approximately \$90 billion in China, “with most of the capital

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Wang Yiwei, *ibid*, p.265.

³⁸ Huafei, Qiu. *Public Diplomacy: China’s Grand Foreign Strategy*, PublicDiplomacymagazine.org, 1:2009, p.73.

³⁹ Kurlantzick Joshua, *ibid*, 2006, p.1.

⁴⁰ Kurlantzick Joshua, *ibid*, 2007, p.116.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Kurlantzick, Joshua, *ibid*, 2007, p.76.

coming from Diaspora Chinese firms”. In comparison, Latin America invested \$20 billion in China. China’s trade with Latin America grew ten-fold between 2000 and 2007 and reached \$142 billion in 2008⁴³.

In South America, civil societies now consider that Chinese influence is more benefiting to the people than the American one: “By comparison to the bad spell that Latin America has had with United States, China’s kind of a breath of fresh air”⁴⁴. It seems that China’s core goals in the region are, namely securing its resources needs and convincing American countries to switch their loyalty from Taiwan to the People’s Republic.

Another important goal of Chinese PD strategy is the building of political alliances that share the same conception of international relations and perceive the state interventionism of western countries as a threat. Iran, Burma or Zimbabwe seem receptive to Chinese diplomacy⁴⁵.

To sum up, PD facilitates inter-national relations. Following the differentiation of Batora, the Chinese PD strategy is one of a major power. It seems that the Chinese PD strategy is succeeding to reach its goals, especially in the developing countries. But as we will now analyze, this strategy is not without pitfalls.

⁴³ **Lum** Thomas, **Fischer** Hannah, **Gomez-Granger** Julissa, **Leland** Anne, China’s foreign aid in Africa, Latin America, and South East Asia, CRS report for Congress, 02/25/2009, p. 18

⁴⁴ **Pan** Esther, *ibid*, p.2.

⁴⁵ **Kurlantzick** Joshua, *ibid*, 2007, p.223.

What are the limits of Public Diplomacy?

- The gap between facts and Public Diplomacy activities.

The most important limit for PD is to not correspond to the foreign policy of the country. In fact, as underlines it Amr⁴⁶, policies remain the essential determinant of countries awareness. If PD does not correspond to the reality of facts, it can be assimilated as a pure act of propaganda.

In that perspective, the main obstacle that can limit Chinese PD success in developed countries can come from its violation of human rights and its ideology⁴⁷. In fact, China must compete with a world news system dominated by occidental countries and marked with Western concepts and ideology⁴⁸. For developed countries, even with a PD based on peaceful development, China remains subjugated by an authoritarian suspicious regime.

According to Aoyama⁴⁹, Government research indicates that ninety percent of the news on China reported by the US media is negative”. In a period of economical slump or stagnation, individuals feel threaten by an economic giant without the same ideology.

In developing countries, like in Zimbabwe and Sudan, Chinese support for despotic leaders, like in Zimbabwe and Sudan, “angers civil society leaders and opposition

⁴⁶ Amr Hady, *ibid*, p.8

⁴⁷ Kurlantzick Joshua, *ibid*, 2006.

⁴⁸ Wang Yiwei, *ibid*.

⁴⁹ Aoyama Rumi, *ibid*, 2007, p.6.

politicians”⁵⁰. Then, it is difficult to regain the confidence of civilians, even with a good PD strategy.

- The relation between a state administration and its Public Diplomacy tools.

The impact of PD communication operations can be limited if the reliability or independence of its means is doubtful. For example, even if the Xinhua press agency is cited by some scholars as a real news source, “it remains at the heart of the censorship and disinformation system established by the Chinese Communist Party⁵¹. That is why, the Xinhua Agency, as all the Chinese mass media, maintains a modest authority abroad⁵². For Amr⁵³, “an effective PD should also be flexible and innovative”. Moreover, with a traditionally strong government but a weak civil society, China is not good at using the resources of non-governmental organizations and transnational companies to carry out an integrated PD.

Furthermore, the Chinese diplomatic system is complicated by many departments and groups. 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 Office of Chinese Language Council international is in charge of building Confucius Institutes around the world⁵⁴. To be effective and avoid contradictions or problems of coordination, the management of PD operations must be simple in order to enable the possibility of long term strategies.

⁵⁰ **Kurlantzick** Joshua, *ibid*, 2007, p.230.

⁵¹ **Kurlantzick** Joshua, *ibid*, 2007, p.64.

⁵² **Aoyama** Rumi, *ibid*, 2004.

⁵³ **Amr** Hady. *The need to communicate: how to improve U.S Public Diplomacy with the Islamic World*. Analysis Paper #6, January 2004, p.41.

⁵⁴ **Wang** Yiwei, *ibid*, p.265.

- The management of Public Diplomacy instruments

According to Wang, Chinese PD is also handicapped by a huge language and cultural gap in communicating with the world. It is hard to translate with exactitude Chinese political statements. Even the Chinese terms *peaceful rise* (*heping jueqi*), does not have an accurate translation in English language. It will be then difficult for the Chinese mass media to facilitate the formation of a public opinion that can be shared with other countries and explain properly its foreign policy⁵⁵.

While Wang considers PD as an International Public Relations strategy, for him the practice of mixing external and internal propaganda in China is a break for the development of a domestic consensus to defined itself and establish a positive image of China abroad. In fact, the same mass media organization, controlled by the government, is in charge of all non official public relations.⁵⁶ These restrictions on communication capacities reduce the possibilities to developing a competitive Chinese mass media network abroad and then to extend China's external publicity activities. The partial incorporation of its media in the world forces the country to elect a cultural diplomacy approach rather than an American-style media diplomacy approach. That is why Wang Y. judges Chinese PD relatively weak.

To summarize, the limits of PD can come from a large range of parameters. In that essay, it has been underlined the communication difficulties, from the coherence and uniformity of the message to the reliability of the PD means, with the cultural gap and the translation problems.

⁵⁵ Aoyama Rumi, *ibid*, 2004, p.30.

⁵⁶ Aoyama Rumi, *ibid*, 2004.

Conclusions.

PD can be a powerful instrument to support and promotes a governmental policy. It is an essential tool to draw a desirable image of a state, but also contributing to the economic development of a state, issuing rebuttals to distorted overseas reports, helping the building of political alliances, improving a negative international environment and export a culture. Nevertheless, it is not easy to exceed moral and ideological divergences, the language barrier, but also reality of facts and collective memory.

At first sight, it seems that the Chinese PD strategy has been successful in Asia, Latin America and partially in Africa. As noted Steven Kull, the manager of the BBC poll, it is incredible that, despite its growing economic power, “China is viewed as so benign, especially by its Asian neighbours that it could threaten or seek to dominate”⁵⁷. However, the censorship that the Chinese mass media must face reduces its information dissemination capability and its competitiveness in front of Western media capacities.

In developed countries, China is still considered like a threat for the international order⁵⁸. A more recent Globescan international poll shows that “forty percent of interviewees rating China negatively compared with thirty nine percent who view it positively”⁵⁹. Compare to the former Poll, China’s appeal is decreasing. However, besides the negative image spread by Western media, China succeeds to export its

⁵⁷ **Kurlantzick**, Joshua. *Ibid.* 2007. p.112.

⁵⁸ **Ikenberry** John, *The Rise of China and the Future of the West*, Foreign Affairs Vol. 87, Issue 1 jan/feb. 2008

⁵⁹ **BBC**, *Russia and China 'approval down'*, 06/02/2009 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7873050.stm> (26/11/09).

culture, as demonstrate it the success of Confucius centers. Its good economic outcomes in Western countries are also a proof of its success⁶⁰.

Yet, in Kurlantzick's opinion, the image transmitted by China to the rest of the world can be quite dangerous: for weak civil societies and for dictatorial leaders, the People's Republic example demonstrates that success is possible without releasing many political rights and maintaining a strong centralization of power⁶¹. "China has already begun to export its own poor labor, political, and environmental policies"⁶². Shaping the international political order, Chinese PD can then represent a threat for the spread of humanitarian values. However, in my opinion, the first reason for Chinese success in gaining so much appeal in developing countries could be the failure of Western countries in the promotion of their paradigm and ideology, or even their own foreign policy. This could be a good topic for another essay.

⁶⁰ **National Statistic Bureau of China** *China statistical yearbook*, New York; London : Praeger, 2008, p.730

⁶¹ **Kurlantzick**, Joshua. *Ibid.* 2007. p.144.

⁶² **Kurlantzick**, Joshua, *Ibid*, 2006, p.5.

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