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From propaganda to public diplomacy: Assessing China's international practice and its image, 1950–2009

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ABSTRACT

Since World War II, government-sponsored international propaganda and public diplomacy have become more visible and sophisticated in countries around the world. China is no exception. It is not immune to the compulsion and communication imperative to reach and woo the public, both at home and abroad, for its vested interests. From propaganda to public diplomacy, the practices and activities have taken different forms and scopes, mainly including government-owned media outlets aimed at foreign audiences, state-subsidized media organizations as quasi-governmental instruments, overseas advertising and public relations campaigns designed to sway public opinion to win general support for the nation involved or to repair international relations damaged by terrorist attacks and other man-made crises, and recruiting and bribing journalists as clandestine operatives. Whether such practices have been effective in changing hearts and minds among international audiences, however, is open to debate and remains to be further explored. Within the perspective of sociology of knowledge, the main purpose of this study is to look at how China comes to be viewed as an object in international communication research over the past decades that cast the country through the prism of either propaganda or public diplomacy.
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1. Introduction

In 2003, China started touting its "peaceful rise" in the global arena, only to drop the idea quickly a few months later for fear of upsetting the balance of power or the status quo of the United States as the sole superpower. The peaceful rise of China clearly implies the use of soft power, not hard power, in its international trajectory. As *The Economist* ("The Beijing Consensus Is to Keep Quiet," May 6, 2010, online edition) reported during the 2010 Shanghai Expo, "if China's soft power is in the ascendant and America's declining," the reality "hardly shows it." Nevertheless, China has continued to display its prowess in using soft power in public diplomacy to court Americans, as witnessed by China's self-promotional advertisement debuted on January 17, 2011 in New York's Times Square, one day before Chinese President Hu Jintao kicked off his state visit to the United States. Some dismissed Beijing's advertising campaign as sheer propaganda while others sensed its sophistication in public diplomacy. Whether China's external activities are viewed as either propaganda or public diplomacy is, of course, in the eyes of the beholder.

Historically, the practice of propaganda is more than 300 years old. Its altered version—public diplomacy—is relatively new. The modern usage of public diplomacy probably can be traced to the time when nation-states came into contact with

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one another and governments found that they had to engage not only other governments, but also the general public in those countries. The purpose, as Entman (2008, p. 88) put it, is to cultivate "favorability toward the practicing country" among foreign publics. This is especially true in international crises, such as wars and conflicts between nations (Nye, 2008). Both propaganda and public diplomacy certainly could be employed in times of peace to woo governments and their people for specific political orientation. As such, the line between propaganda and public diplomacy is often thin and may be interpreted differently, depending on one's perspective. The rise of China and its use of soft power (Wang, 2008) in international activities offer a good example as to how the shift of concept from propaganda to public diplomacy might affect the way China is viewed as an object of observation in international communication. As Bell (1979) argued, changing conception invokes a conceptual range of possibilities and different modes of thinking and doing things. What China does in the international arena is clearly important in and of itself. Equally important is how its action is perceived conceptually from outside.

Whether China's external practices have been effective in changing hearts and minds among international audiences, however, is open to debate and remains to be further investigated. Following the perspective of sociology of knowledge (Mannheim, 1936; Stark, 1958) as a framework, the purpose of this study is twofold: first, from a historical point of view, to critically examine how propaganda or public diplomacy has been used in international communication to help promote, shape or manufacture consent in the court of public opinion, especially that which involves global audiences; and second, to determine how China comes to be viewed as an object in international communication research and its knowledge production over the past decades that cast the country through the prism of either propaganda or public diplomacy. Specifically, the study seeks to uncover the modes of thinking (Wirth, cited in Mannheim, 1936) that researchers and scholars use to amass, present and disseminate their knowledge about practices of propaganda and public diplomacy by China and their connection to the social conditions in which they take place.

Since World War II, government-sponsored international propaganda has become more visible and sophisticated in countries around the world. From Azerbaijan to Zimbabwe, no government, whether democratic or authoritarian, is immune to the compulsion and communication imperative to reach and entice the public, both at home and abroad, for its vested interests. For a variety of reasons, propaganda has been considered a vital component in any national governments' activities in foreign and international relations. It is part of the structure and processes of international communication across national borders. Over the past six decades, developed and developing countries alike have allocated hundreds of millions of dollars, particular human resources and specific technologies to promote their policies, ways of life, knowledge of national developments, and interpretations of events or realities in order to project their own favorable images or to smear those of other nations.

2. The rise of global media and mediated public diplomacy

In international communication, the practices and activities have taken different forms and scopes, mainly including government-owned media outlets aimed at foreign audiences, state-subsidized media organizations as quasi-governmental instruments, overseas advertising and public relations campaigns designed to sway public opinion to win general support for the nation involved or to repair international relations damaged by terrorist attacks and other man-made crises, and recruiting and bribing journalists as clandestine operatives. In addition to the traditional and more well-established channels like BBC World News and CNN, other similar channels have been emerging at the global level, particularly in the past two decades.

The advent of Al-Jazeera as a formidable voice in the Middle East since the mid-1990s has motivated other countries to establish global 24/7 TV news channels through satellites to present the news from their own national perspectives, such as China's CCTV-9 (2000), Russia Today (2005), France 24 (2006), Iran's Press TV (2007), Japan's NHK World TV (2009), Venezuela's TeleSur (2010), and the CNC World English Channel (2010) of China's Xinhua News Agency. All these channels share one goal in common: to keep pace with the fast changing global media landscape and to report the world from the host country's vantage point. The emergence of these rivals to their American counterparts obviously raises policy trepidation in the United States. In a speech to Radio Free Europe on September 28, 2010 (VOANews, 2010), Walter Isaacson, chairman of the U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors, said "the Voice of America and its sister broadcasters risked being 'out-communicated by our enemies.'" He then went on to list Russia Today, Iran's Press TV, Venezuela's TeleSur and China's 24-hour news channel as "enemies". He later clarified to mean "enemies within Afghanistan—those that advocate terrorism."

The U.S. concerns aside, the increasing emergence of national media centers at the global level constitutes a world irrevocably changed; hence the definitions of the situation are shifted accordingly, requiring new appraisal of the reality (Goffman, 1959; Meyrowitz, 1985). The yearning and sentiment to engage in interpreting global events and reality for the people beyond one's immediate geopolitical sphere are probably best captured by Xinhua president Li Congjun when he said: "CNC will present an international vision with a China perspective. It will broadcast news reports in a timely way and objectively and be a new source of information for global audiences" (English.news.cn, July 1, 2010). The buzzwords are obviously "a China perspective" and "a new source." The mission of CNC, according to Li's remark in 2009, is to break the "monopoly and verbal hegemony of the West" (Yu, 2010, p. A1). In the case of Iran's Press TV, the purpose is "to counter the ubiquitous anti-Iranian propaganda in the Western media" (http://www.mohammadmossadegh.com/news/press-tv/; retrieved July 1, 2010). The objectives of both CNC and Press TV, along with many other global media, underline what Entman (2008, p. 88, emphasis in original) called mediated public diplomacy in which governments pursue "shorter-term and more

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targeted efforts using *mass communication (including the internet) to increase support of a country's specific foreign policies among audiences beyond that country's borders*."

However, the more targeted efforts could be interpreted in different ways. For one thing, the global broadcast competition and challenge to the status quo have been keenly observed, probably reinforcing the vision and mission of the traditional establishment in international broadcasting. As *The Economist* (August 14, 2010, p. 12) argued: "Like other international outfits such as America's Radio Liberty and Germany's Deutsche Welle, [BBC] does not provide propaganda." It went on to say, "They also counter the propaganda from state media machines in places such as Russia and China. Without its own voice, the West's case risks failing by default." The ironic twist is that the West's "own voice" is not propaganda, but those of other nations are, suggesting the line between public diplomacy and propaganda might be functionally determined.

Although the idea of propaganda can be traced to the practice of the Catholic Church in the 17th century to propagate the faith of the congregation, propaganda as a form of mass persuasion with a negative connotation is a modern phenomenon. One of early pioneers in the field of propaganda research defined it in the 1920s as "the control of opinion by significant symbols, or, to speak more concretely and less accurately, by stories, rumors, reports, pictures and other forms of social communication" (Lasswell, 1971, p. 9). He determined the functions of propaganda as "the management of opinions and attitudes *by the direct manipulation* of social suggestion rather than by altering other conditions in the environment or in the organism" (Lasswell, 1971, p. 9, emphasis added). In the 1930s, The Institute for Propaganda Analysis defined propaganda as the "expression of opinion or action by individuals or groups deliberately designed to influence opinions or actions of other individuals or groups with reference to predetermined ends" (Lee & Lee, 1972, p. 15).

Historically, there has never been any shortage of state-sponsored propaganda that employs both official and private channels in ways that form a concerted effort at the international level (for a useful review, see Jowett & O'Donnell, 1992; see also Beeley, 1971; Jackall, 1995; Parry-Giles, 1994). According to *The Economist* (August 14, 2010, p. 47, emphasis added), before the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the cold war "was the *state-backed broadcasters' heyday*, with big budgets for propaganda wars about the virtues and vices of capitalism and communism." In more recent times, newspapers and broadcast media have reported numerous cases in which journalists and other media practitioners are entangled in governmental activities that blur the line between propaganda and legitimate journalistic practices. For example, in bilateral relations, the role of Chinese journalists is "to promote them" (*The Economist*, June 2, 2012, p. 35). The opposite of promoting bilateral relations could be propaganda that undermines them.

3. Manipulating news media through PR campaigns and lobbying

In the private sphere, the news media take on the status of an ad hoc player in foreign affairs and international relations, too. Because of the rise of public relations and media consultancy as legitimate practices, governments have found it productive to hire foreign lobby groups and practitioners to manipulate news coverage related to their national interests (Manheim & Albritton, 1984). Although limited, there is empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of PR and lobbying efforts to shape client nations' relations with the host country, hence projecting and propagating a more desirable image. In the United States, for example, Albritton and Manheim (1985) reported that, after hiring American PR consultants, the images of Argentina, Indonesia, Korea, the Philippines, and Turkey in the *New York Times* became more positive, being portrayed as more cooperative. "Although such image improvements are unlikely to translate immediately into political advantage or policy gain within the U.S. arena," they argued that "over time, the creation and manipulation of informational settings can exert a positive influence on public opinion and political outcomes" (Albritton & Manheim, 1985, p. 58).

Consistent with public relations campaigns, and with more calculated intent, is the blatant manipulation of news media by governments in international propaganda. When North Korea's leader, Kim Jong Il, anointed his son, Kim Jong Un, as the heir apparent in early October 2010, more than 70 foreign journalists "were suddenly given visas to attend a series of events" and "rare access to an austere city" that allowed the outside world to closely observe life in the world's most secluded society (*The Economist*, October 16, 2010, p. 27). Although *The Economist* (October 16, 2010, p. 27) reported that the North Korean "leadership's attempts to convince them that theirs is a 'people's paradise' are likely to fall on many deaf ears," these foreign journalists nevertheless were obliged to bring texts, pictures and videos of military parades, enthusiastic performers and cheering audiences to the rest of the world. Knowing they are manipulated in some way by national governments does no necessarily preclude foreign journalists from reporting what they are allowed to see.

4. "Still shooting in the dark": effects of international propaganda

Since the early 1900s, while hundreds of thousands of articles and book reviews have been written worldwide on the topic of propaganda, there has been little systematic and cumulative investigation of its effects in terms of the influences on individual cognitions, attitudes or behaviors, let alone on much larger units at the societal or national level. In the existing literature so far, the most comprehensive and large-scale research on the effects of propaganda has remained to be the experiments of four propaganda films on the factual knowledge, opinions, attitudes and motivation of American soldiers during World War II. More than 4000 soldiers were exposed to four films—*Prelude to War*, *The Nazis Strike*, *Divide and Conquer* and *The Battle of Britain*—as part of the *Why We Fight* series of propaganda films produced by the U.S. military. A general conclusion from the experiments is that the films had significant effects on factual knowledge and some impacts on opinions,

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but showed no influences on both attitudes and motivations (for a succinct review of the experiments, see Lowery & DeFleur, 1995).

As rigorous and impressive as they might be, these experiments were conducted more than 60 years ago in times of international war and uncertainty. Since the end of World War II, the world has gone through great economic depressions, several regional wars (notably in the Korean peninsula, Indo-China and the Middle East), the Cold War, and the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and the breakup of Soviet Union. Throughout the process, the global media landscape has evolved from film to radio, television, cable, satellite, and the Internet in a rapid succession that renders international communication instant and incessant for those who have access to new forms of communication and various types of information. With the advent of fast changing communication capacities and media channels, propaganda no longer follows the familiar mass propaganda and persuasion model established during the peak of two world wars and its acceptance or resistance takes on new meaning thereafter. It is difficult to imagine that what might be true under the perspective of powerful media could still be valid when the larger media environment has changed beyond recognition and the audiences themselves have become active in content production and dissemination.

Whereas studies of media effects have been voluminous since the 1950s, those that specifically look at propaganda have focused more on describing historical practices and contemporary efforts. By its nature, propaganda is persuasive or manipulative. While there is belief that "obtaining a 'reinforcement effect' is far more feasible than obtaining a 'conversion effect' for international, as for all, persuasive communication" (Lerner, 1971, p. 45), research that seeks to determine effects of media content related to any aspect of propaganda activities has been rather limited. The paucity of research in this area has long been recognized by Martin in the early 1970s. As he saw it (1971, p. 61, emphasis added), "although a great deal of research has been done on the effects of communication and a fair amount of theory has been developed, *the propagandist is still shooting in the dark*." Part of the reasons is that there has been more descriptive discussion than empirical investigation. Nevertheless, a few empirical studies do help shed light on how propaganda might influence individual beliefs and knowledge about historical events.

For example, in an exploratory experimental study of Radio Moscow's North American broadcasts, Smith (1970–71) found that the Soviet propaganda did result in opinion change among the listeners. Suggesting that it was both a psychological and a sociological phenomenon, Smith argued that the entire U.S. social system "must be considered for a full understanding of the impact of Radio Moscow's broadcasts" (p. 550). As he put it, Radio Moscow seemed "to have had an effect, not because of any particular skill in communication, but because conditions" in the U.S. society had led the audience "to hold unrealistic negative images which, upon actual exposure, were clearly refuted for many of the listeners" (p. 550).

Similarly, in two experiments, Yelland and Stone (1996, p. 559, emphasis added) found that "college students' belief in the Holocaust was diminished by reading a denial pamphlet. It was particularly disconcerting to find that *the denial propaganda decreased students' belief in the Holocaust* even during the time when the Holocaust film Schindler's List was a common topic of conversation." They also reported that although "the level of a student's knowledge about the World War II period was found to influence belief in the Holocaust, greater knowledge did not increase resistance to the propaganda" (p. 559). In other words, propaganda content that contradicts what is commonly known might have an adverse effect on those who are exposed to it by weakening their beliefs. If the pattern holds up in the general population, such propaganda effect has serious theoretical and practical implications for international communication. Theoretically, the reasons people are susceptible to propaganda need to be further explored. Practically, if propaganda indeed changes people's beliefs, then ways have to be found to combat such messages by inoculating people against propagandistic campaigns.

Other than experiments with limited explanatory power, there appears to be little study in a real-world setting that seeks to investigate the influences of propaganda in a cross-national context (for domestic effects, see for example Ursprung, 1994). In this regard, the study of PR efforts in the United States on behalf of foreign countries appears to be instructive. Manheim and Albritton (1984, p. 656) found that "external actors not only try systematically to influence the media–public–policy agenda system, but that they succeed" in changing the media portrayal of those countries. They believed "such manipulation of projected images of reality has the potential to influence public opinion and the policy process" (p. 656).

In the context of continuing concerns and scholarly interests over the pervasiveness of propaganda or public diplomacy at the international level, one way to assess their use is probably to scrutinize how countries are looked at as an object of research in international propaganda, especially in ways that conceptually locate the countries in the larger framework. As members of an occupational group with epistemological interests in the outside world, researchers and scholars are generally considered elites in any country. They tend to be the targets of public diplomacy and their actions, whether real or symbolic, might have implications for mass opinion (Entman, 2008). How researchers and scholars come to view national practices in the international arena therefore deserve closer scrutiny. Unlike the concept *public diplomacy*, the concept *propaganda* in modern usage usually carries a negative connotation, implying governmental activities to indoctrinate foreign audiences. Although indirect, examination of the linkage between the labels of either propaganda or public diplomacy and the countries involved should to some extent reveal the frames attached to their cross-national practices and how they might be perceived under investigation.

5. Methods

As a concept and a practice, international communication covers a wide territory, ranging from governmental activities to media campaigns and journalistic reporting to individual efforts between countries. It is therefore difficult, if not

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impossible, to survey all the studies in various fields of inquiries that might deal with propaganda or public diplomacy as a locus of research. This is especially true, given that scholarly journals have proliferated ever since globalization and digital technologies have altered the geopolitical landscape within and between countries around the world. New theories, new topics, new data and new ways of doing research have led to the plethora of media studies in a single nation or cross-national setting. Because of online databases, these studies are available to researchers from anywhere as long as local access to the Internet is feasible. JSTOR is such a database and, by its own account, "one of the world's most trusted sources for academic content." A non-profit organization, JSTOR "offers high-quality, interdisciplinary content to support scholarship and teaching. It includes over one thousand leading academic journals across the humanities, social sciences, and sciences, as well as select monographs and other materials valuable for academic work" (http://about.jstor.org/content-collections; retrieved October 20, 2010).

For the purpose of this study and to gauge how China has become a research object in international communication, JSTOR was used as the source of data. Another database, SSCI, was also considered. However, a search using identical keywords of SSCI database did not return useful data that could be effectively compared to the JSTOR. Also, SSCI database does not go as far back as the JSTOR database. As of October 7, 2010, JSTOR includes 2832 journals in 53 disciplines, varying from African American Studies to Zoology. The entries cover article, review, editorial and pamphlet and go as far back as the journals have been published. An update in 2014 indicates that JSTOR has digitized more than 50 million pages and continue to digitize approximately three million pages annually. Its content "comes from a broad range of disciplines, predominantly in the humanities, social sciences, and field sciences" (http://about.jstor.org/10things; retrieved January 16, 2014).

With its scope and historical depth, JSTOR provides a comprehensive index of scholarly research. The search results list the title of the article, the full name of the author(s), the title of the journal, volume and issue numbers, year of publication and page numbers. Its search mechanism locates key words in five categories: item title, full text, author, abstract, and caption. The search can be narrowed by item type (articles, books, pamphlets, reviews, and miscellaneous), date range and language (English, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, and Spanish). Although the search would not return any item that uses derivative words related to propaganda, such as propagandist, propagandism and propagandistic policy, their number is relatively small. Using "propaganda" and its derivative words as key words in the full text, a search of articles published in all eight languages returned a total of 100,613 listings, the majority (95.4% or 95,999 items) of which contained the word propaganda. The remaining items (4.6%) were generated by "propagandist" (4305), "propagandism" (308) and "propagandistic policy" (1), respectively. In other words, the sheer number clearly suggests that the phenomenon and the main concept of propaganda have captured a broad intellectual attention.

The same applies to the key word China and the key word Chinese or Chinese propaganda policy. Only when both words appear in the same article would the key word China retrieve an item that contains Chinese propaganda policy. Similarly, when "public diplomacy" is used as the key words in the full text search, articles that contain only words like "public diplomatic policy" would not be retrieved because the latter is different from the exact phrase. Inclusion of the word propaganda in the full text does not automatically indicate its centrality in the work because it could be mentioned in passing or used in connection to other key notions. In both cases, however, no item was returned using either "Chinese propaganda policy" or "public diplomatic policy," separately. A more precise search method is therefore needed to identify the focus of research.

Using more than one word to search, the key words can be entered with or without quotation marks. With quotation marks, the results include items that use the exact phrase; otherwise, items that include any of the key words would be listed. Take international propaganda as the key words. When the phrase was used without quotation marks in the full text search, nearly 50,000 articles (49,080) were identified. A perusal of random articles showed that many items that mentioned "international" and "propaganda" anywhere in the full text, but not necessarily "international propaganda" per se, were listed. In other words, the search did not zero in on international propaganda as a concept. With quotation marks, only 262 items were included in the search results. This study quoted the key words to search for articles that addressed either international propaganda or public diplomacy over the past decades. Since the study focused on how China's international propaganda or public diplomacy practices might be perceived by scholars and researchers in the English academic communities, articles published by Chinese authors, where clear identities (e.g., surnames) could be ascertained, were excluded from the analysis, regardless of whether they were located in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan or diaspora Chinese communities. Excluded also were links to external content.

6. Results

Limiting to English language publications only, Table 1 reports the search results of specific keywords. When the word propaganda was searched in the item title, the number of articles stands at 952 entries. While not directly comparable to the nearly 100,000 listings available in the first search, the small number undoubtedly represents a more focused attention on propaganda as a research topic. A random check of these articles shows that the key word search indeed is both reliable and valid to locate relevant articles for analysis. The bi-modal pattern shows the early interest in the propaganda research in the 1930s and 1940s, followed by a decrease during the heyday of the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s. An unambiguous division of the world's countries into the U.S. camp and the Soviet bloc clearly reduced the need for international propaganda. Since the 1970s when the U.S. was deeply dragged into the Vietnam War and many developing and underdeveloped countries were caught in the ideological and developmental struggles between the two superpowers, academic attention to

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Table 1
Research on propaganda, 1929–2009.[a]

Year	Propaganda in item title[b]	"International propaganda"[c] in full text	China[d] in full text
<1929	6.5%	6.1%	2.5%
1930–1939	14.5	5.3	3.7
1940–1949	12.4	6.9	8.6
1950–1959	9.1	13.0	16.0
1960–1969	8.3	11.5	13.6
1970–1979	9.3	16.0	22.2
1980–1989	14.7	13.4	16.0
1990–1999	11.9	14.9	17.3
2000–2009	13.1	13.0	8.6
Total	952	262	81

[a] Based on JSTOR search results, entries represent the number of articles published in English language publications only. When the database was accessed on October 7, 2010, there were a total of 2832 journals in 53 disciplines. It should be noted that although JSTOR has been comprehensive, most communication-related journals are not included in the database.
[b] "Propaganda" was used as the keyword in the *item title* in the JSTOR search (923). When "propagandist" was used as another keyword in the item title, 29 articles were added.
[c] "International propaganda" was used as the exact phrase in the *full text* in the JSTOR search. When the exact phrase was used in the item title, the number of articles was 21. No additional item was returned when "international propagandist" was used as a separate key phrase.
[d] "International propaganda" was used as the exact phrase in the *full text* and "China" in the *full text* in the JSTOR search. No item was returned when using "Chinese propaganda policy" in the full text search. Excluded were four articles published by Chinese authors.

propaganda research began to rise. The 1980s and 1990s saw a significant increase in the number of articles on propaganda thanks to the demise of communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and the subsequent transition of many communist states to democracies. The data unequivocally point to a persistent scholarly interest in addressing issues related to propaganda.

Propaganda can be internal or external, depending on the goals it hopes to achieve. By its nature, propaganda directed at external audiences is international in that one country attempts to influence people in other countries primarily through the uses of means of mass communication. When "international propaganda" was used as the exact phrase in the full text search, the number of articles was relatively small (262 items), suggesting a broader scholarly attention and hence a smaller body of research across national borders. A search of articles with "international propaganda" in the item title found only 12 listings, with the year of publication ranging from 1940 to 1971. It is evident that scholars and researchers stopped using "international propaganda" specifically in the title. Nevertheless, if the keyword search in the full text is used as an indication of general interest, the pattern increased significantly from the 1950s onward and showed no sign of abating through the 2000s, demonstrating a chronic concern over international propaganda in the community of scholars.

Because of the small number of articles with "international propaganda" in the item title and the latest year of publication in 1971, using the keyword in the item title search obviously would miss many works on international propaganda that did not use the specific phrase in the title. It is also difficult to imagine that no work on international propaganda has ever been published since 1971. To determine how China might be involved in some way in international propaganda research, a broader search scope was therefore used. As reported in Table 1, when China was added as another search keyword in the full text, the number of articles became even smaller. Still, nearly one third of the articles (30.9%) of the total 262 items included China in the full text, suggesting its relevance in international propaganda research. As part of the whole, the pattern of scholarly attention to China naturally followed that of the general search using "international propaganda" as keywords. The common configuration indicates that China has been a recurring focus of research on international propaganda. Three phases in China's history particularly appear to attract academic interest in international propaganda: the 1950s when the Chinese Communists took control of the country, the 1960s–1970s when the Cultural Revolution emerged (1966) and ended (1976) and China embarked on economic reform and openness to the outside world (1978), and the 1990s when the Chinese government continued to pursue marketization both at home and abroad, following the 1989 Tiananmen Square democratic movement.

As noted earlier, in international communication, the distinction between propaganda and public diplomacy is very thin. Transnational mass media, including international broadcasting radio and TV, may become, both willingly and unwillingly, a means of public diplomacy or a tool of propaganda through which governments seek to reach foreign publics with particular purposes. Because of the fuzzy demarcation that separates the two concepts and practices, a nation's public diplomacy could be another country's propaganda, and vice versa. To some extent, international propaganda and public diplomacy may be considered as two sides of the same coin. However, a search of articles using both "international propaganda" and "public diplomacy" at the same time in the full text found only 12 items, the majority of which (10) appeared after 1971. The 12 items accounted for a very small fraction (1.4%) of the 855 articles that could be identified by either "international propaganda" (262) or "public diplomacy" (593) combined since 1900s. The result strongly indicates that in most articles, the two concepts were mutually exclusive in academic exploration and discourse. It is therefore instructive to further explore how public diplomacy might be emphasized as the central focus of research in international communication.

As shown in Table 2, when public diplomacy was used as the keyword search in the full text, a very different pattern emerges from the data, compared to that of international propaganda research. Before 1980, very few articles used the

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Table 2
Research on public diplomacy, 1929–2009.[a]

Year	"Public Diplomacy"[b] in full text	"Public Diplomacy"[c] in item title	China[d] in full text
<1929	0.7%	–	–
1930–1939	–	–	–
1940–1949	0.3	–	0.8
1950–1959	0.8	–	1.9
1960–1969	2.0	2.8%	1.9
1970–1979	5.4	–	5.7
1980–1989	18.7	25.0	16.5
1990–1999	14.2	5.6	18.0
2000–2009	57.8	66.7	55.2
Total	593	36	261

[a] Based on JSTOR search results, entries represent the number of articles published in English language publications only. When the database was accessed on October 7, 2010, there were a total of 2832 journals in 53 disciplines. It should be noted that although JSTOR has been comprehensive, most communication-related journals are not included in the database.
[b] "Public diplomacy" was used as the exact phrase in the *full text* in the JSTOR search. When "public diplomatic policy" was used, no item was returned.
[c] "Public diplomacy" was used as the exact phrase in the *item title* in the JSTOR search.
[d] "Public diplomacy" was used as the exact phrase in the *full text* and "China" in the *full text* in the JSTOR search. Excluded were eight articles published by Chinese authors.

Table 3
Comparison of international propaganda and public diplomacy, 1929–2009.[a]

Year	International propaganda/China[b]	Public diplomacy/China[c]
<1929	2.5%	–
1930–1939	3.7	–
1940–1949	8.6	0.8%
1950–1959	16.0	1.9
1960–1969	13.6	1.9
1970–1979	22.2	5.7
1980–1989	16.0	16.5
1990–1999	17.3	18.0
2000–2009	8.6	55.2
Total	81	261

[a] Based on JSTOR search results, entries represent the number of articles published in English language publications only. When the database was accessed on October 7, 2010, there were a total of 2832 journals in 53 disciplines. It should be noted that although JSTOR has been comprehensive, most communication-related journals are not included in the database.
[b] "International propaganda" was used as the exact phrase in the *full text* and "China" in the *full text* in the JSTOR search. Excluded were four articles published by Chinese authors.
[c] "Public diplomacy" was used as the exact phrase in the *full text* and "China" in the *full text* in the JSTOR search. Excluded were eight articles published by Chinese authors.

phrase public diplomacy in the text, suggesting a lack of conception of governmental activities as legitimate diplomatic practices to reach and woo foreign publics. Since the 1980s, however, the choice of public diplomacy as the main notion to describe governmental efforts in scholarly research increased noticeably. Given the absence of co-appearance in the articles, the pattern represents a conceptual and epistemological shift from the idea of international propaganda to public diplomacy. Although international propaganda as a concept has remained relatively stable over time in academic research, public diplomacy has gained more currency. This is particularly true in the early 2000s, with more than half of the articles appearing in this decade. The juxtaposition of the two trends from the 1930s is striking.

Similar to that of international propaganda, the number of articles using "public diplomacy" in the item title is also relatively small (36). It would again exclude most articles from the pool of research if the keyword search is applied to the item title only. The same strategy was hence used to search the full text to identify articles related to China. While the number of articles is smaller than that of general research, it accounted for four out of 10 (44.0%) such works in the database. The data show a significant and dramatic rise in the use of public diplomacy in research involving China since the 1980s, echoing the overall growth over the past three decades. Conceptually speaking, in contrast to international propaganda research (see Table 3), China apparently fares better in academic attention as it has been associated more frequently with public diplomacy research since it started the path of openness to the outside world and economic modernization in the early 1980s. Whether that translates into a better national image for China in the community of scholars, however, cannot be directly assessed because the content of those articles in the JSTOR database requires further investigation. Epistemologically, the transformation of China from an object of international propaganda research to that of public diplomacy research speaks volumes as to how the country might become known and knowable in intellectual inquiries. As elites, researchers and scholars apparently have conceptually shifted their view of China from propaganda to public diplomacy, a gradual conversion that stamps a favorable image on China. This was particularly noteworthy that over the past several decades only four articles

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about international propaganda and eight articles about public diplomacy were published by Chinese authors when the two key phrases and China were used in the full text search.

7. Conclusions and discussion

International propaganda has long been a governmental activity since World War I. From authoritarian to democratic countries, governments of all shapes and sizes have more or less engaged in propagandistic practices to sway public opinion, both at home and abroad, either in support of their policies, ideas or national interests or to smear other nations in times of war, international crises and conflicts. Depending on one's perspective, such governmental efforts and campaigns might be deemed as a form of public diplomacy in both official circles and scholarly communities. Since the early 2000, China, Russia, France, Iran, Japan, and Venezuela have launched their own 24/7 international broadcasting channels to challenge the dominations of U.S. and British media at the global level and to interpret the realities around the world from their own perspectives. Whether the research focus is on international propaganda or public diplomacy, scholarly interests in governmental activities across national boarders have remained steady over the past several decades, as testified by the voluminous publications included in the JSTOR database.

As comprehensive as the database might be, however, there have been limited empirical studies in the literature that specifically look at the effectiveness of either international propaganda or public diplomacy on individuals or societies at large. The received knowledge or background belief in this area of research appears to be that international propaganda is likely to change how people perceive other countries, but not necessarily their attitudes or behaviors toward the countries involved. Even on the cognitive dimension, the evidence is sketchy and by no means can be generalized from country to country. Part of the reason is that the few existing studies of the impacts of messages, whether on large or small scales, were based on experimental designs that had little external validity. Also, the findings from U.S. experiments on the effects of propaganda films are dated and have little relevance to today's fast shifting media landscape that sees countries vying against one another to reach the global audience through their own national communication systems.

In international communication, China is certainly no exception. Over the past 40 years, the country has remained on track to become a powerful actor in the world geopolitical stage. It has not only invested significantly in digital information and communication technologies to be a competitive global media player itself, but also become a regular target of academic interest in either international propaganda or public diplomacy research. As extensive as it might be, the JSTOR database does not necessarily represent the whole array of research on China in various disciplines, nor does it cover the countless journals in countries around the world. Although not a problem in the present study, another drawback of the database is that derivative words have to be entered separately to search for any additional items unless they are accompanied by the key word itself. Given such limitation, if the analysis of only English journals is any indication of the general research pattern, a few conclusions can be drawn from the data.

First, the two concepts—international propaganda and public diplomacy—do not appear to be interchangeable in academic research even though their definition and practices are arguably similar. For one thing, the two concepts are rarely used in the same article, suggesting mutual exclusiveness. Whereas international propaganda as a key concept has been used fairly constant in scholarly investigation over time, the concept of public diplomacy has acquired a more frequent and prominent usage since the early 1980s, outnumbering the former in terms of the total number of articles in the JSTOR database. The pattern demonstrates a conceptual turn in the way scholars and researchers approach international communication as a component of governmental activities in cross-national settings. An increase in a more neutral or non-pejorative notion to describe what the governments do across national borders implies a recognition of a changing reality—a leveled playing field in international communication as witnessed by the proliferation of nation-based global TV channels—and shifting practices from the intention to manipulate foreign audiences to the necessity to inform foreign publics.

Second, as an object of observation and research, China has benefited conceptually from the shift of international propaganda to public diplomacy in academic inquiries, particularly during the last three decades. There is evidence that China has been transformed from a country associated with international propagandistic activities to one that is engaged in public diplomacy to promote its own images, ideas or national interests. This transformation is obviously consistent with the soft power approach China has taken in the last two decades to charm both its friends and foes alike in the global arena, as opposed to its exports of blatant propaganda before 1980 when the country itself was enmeshed in more ideological and militant campaigns within its own territories. Whether it is a reflection of a changing China out there, altering conceptual perspectives of China in the community of scholars or an interplay between the two processes is open to debate because different concepts both enable and constrain description and interpretation of the same reality. However, even a gradual change in conception works in China's favor as it loses its ideological baggage that had dominated the country's international image in the 1950s and 1960s.

Third, given that international propaganda as a label has been persistently affiliated with China since the Chinese Communist Party came to power in 1950, there appears to be lingering doubt, albeit in a diminishing manner, as to what the country is up to whenever its activities are extended beyond its own national boundaries. It seems it would be difficult for China to shed its image of an international propagandist inherited from the years past. As *The Economist* argued in an unrelated story (October 23, 2010, p. 3P): "It can take decades to change the image of a country." The 2010 Shanghai Expo offers a revealing example. While China has enjoyed heavy doses of global exposure in the news media around the world, its purpose to host the World Expo has been questioned and linked to the practices of propaganda that could be traced to

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the Expo's 19th-century origin and the early fairs. In an article published in *The New York Times* (September 17, 2010, p. A12A, emphasis added), Scott James raised an intriguing question: "In Shanghai today the pavilions are mostly devoted to promoting nations' tourism and business—propaganda that could be more widely disseminated online. So do we really need world expos anymore?" Obviously, an organized attempt in public diplomacy by the Chinese government turned out to be propaganda to an observer, suggesting a challenging task in managing international image.

In the age of globalization and the Internet, international propaganda or public diplomacy can indeed be easily waged online and unhindered by geographical barriers. Its massive scale, however, also makes it difficult to gauge its real-world impacts on the recipients. When U.S. President Eisenhower "demanded that the USIA develop global propaganda campaigns," he insisted the activities to be "directed toward those *persons capable of effecting change*" (Parry-Giles, 1994, p. 269, emphasis added). In other words, for international propaganda to be effective, its target audience should be selective and the objective should be social change. If the existing studies and knowledge offer any practical guide, the best international propagandists can hope for is to shape public perceptions toward themselves or their antagonists. As Varis (1980, p. 444) long noted, however, "a mere quantitative increase in the flow of words and images across national borders may replace ignorance with prejudice and distortion rather than with understanding." It is the qualitative change in ways of looking at nations that hold the keys to better understanding of international relations. From international propaganda to public diplomacy, the use of concepts in research about national behaviors or practices, especially by outsiders, represents an intellectual break from a long-held tradition, the implications of which have yet to be fully addressed.

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