



PALGRAVE MACMILLAN SERIES IN  
GLOBAL PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

# Public Diplomacy and the Politics of Uncertainty

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Palgrave Macmillan Series in Global Public  
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# From External Propaganda to Mediated Public Diplomacy: The Construction of the Chinese Dream in President Xi Jinping's New Year Speeches

*Yan Wu, Richard Thomas, and Yakun Yu*

## INTRODUCTION

With its increased economic, political and military strength, China has been perceived as an exemplary model of progress by many developing countries. Yet its foreign policy is seen as a threat to US interests, Asian-Pacific security and human rights worldwide. The ‘threat’ discourse emerged in the US in parallel with China’s economic growth in the early 1990s. Since then, the ‘threat’ discourse has evolved as it now centres on politics and ideology, economy and trade and strategic military goals (Yang & Liu, 2012). China’s substantial and strategic investment in developing countries and the ‘One Belt One Road’ (OBOR) initiative are also

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© The Author(s) 2021  
P. Surowiec and I. Manor (eds.), *Public Diplomacy and the Politics  
of Uncertainty*, Palgrave Macmillan Series in Global Public Diplomacy,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-54552-9\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-54552-9_2)

threatening as they signal a transition from US global dominance to a hetero-polar world order.

China has been practising a new form of public diplomacy in the past two decades in order to dispel the notion of a 'threat'. Before the 'Chinese Dream' was introduced as a public diplomacy narrative in 2012, concepts such as the 'peaceful rise', 'peaceful development', 'peaceful coexistence' and 'harmonious world' were all used to counter the threat of rhetoric. President Hu Jintao's suggestions of 'peaceful development' and 'building a harmonious world' framed China as a responsible rising power. At a 2005 summit marking the 60th anniversary of the UN, Hu reiterated that China would hold 'the banner of peace, development and cooperation', and 'unswervingly follow the road of peaceful development' (Hu, 2005).

According to Ji and Zhou (2010), Hu's harmonious world proposal was a Chinese attempt to solve global conflicts by promoting world peace, while implementing China's domestic policies in the realm of foreign affairs, policies that focused on national unity in a time of rapid economic growth. However, when power was transferred to the current President, Xi Jinping, Chinese foreign policy altered substantially. Xi has stressed China's standing as a global power while calling for a 'new type of great-power relationship' with the US which would jointly promote global peace and development (Calmes & Myers, 2013).

The reception of the Great Power narrative has been mixed. On the one hand, Xi's narrative was widely supported in sub-Saharan Africa, Russia and the Philippines. On the other hand, the narrative was rejected by the Trump administration and US public opinion (Pew Research Centre, 2017). China's peaceful intentions have also been described as a 'wishful illusion' due to the country's technological industrialization, economic development model and undemocratic political system (Yue, 2008, p. 443). Despite China's peaceful rhetoric, the intensified tension in its economic and political relationship with a developed world dominated by the US means that a resurgent China challenges the current global order, possibly resulting in uncertainty, instability and even conflict (Buzan, 2010; Callahan, 2005; Yue, 2008). Indeed, the idea of China's 'threat' has pervaded policy formulation in the US (Broomfield, 2003) and has triggered anxiety about China's global ambitions and concerns of future war between the two superpowers (Allison, 2017; Okuda, 2016).

Against this backdrop, it is important to understand China's foreign policy intentions and how they are communicated to audiences within



China and beyond. This chapter aims to theorise the articulation of the Chinese Dream as a public diplomacy narrative. To do so, it analyses President Xi Jinping's New Year speeches in the years 2014–2019 while demonstrating how this narrative counters the China 'threat' discourse. The Chinese Dream, or *Zhong Guo Meng* (org. 中国梦), was officially introduced by Xi on 29th November 2012, during a speech heralding a new era of China's 'rejuvenation' (Xi, 2014, p. 38). Ever since, the Chinese Dream has played a pivotal role in the development of China's foreign policy agenda and has informed its strategic diplomatic goals. The successful application of the Chinese Dream depends on the cultural congruency established by the myth of the American Dream in the West, as well as a range of convergent media strategies used to promote positive messages about China. This chapter therefore examines whether China's new narrative may decrease global tensions and instability.

## FROM EXTERNAL PROPAGANDA TO PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN CHINA

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Communist Party of China (CPC) adopted a Soviet-style propaganda model. State communications took the form of propaganda and were delivered as a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist critique of the dictatorship of proletariat (Houn, 1961; Liu, 1971), aiming 'to transmit social and political values in the hope of affecting people's thinking, emotions, and thereby behaviour' (Kenez, 1985, p. 4). Isolated from Western democracies, state communication aimed at non-Chinese publics was categorised as 'external propaganda' (*duiwai xuanchuan*). China focused its communications on the "socialist bloc" of Central and Eastern Europe and developing nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and sought support in its fight against 'American imperialism' (Wang, 2008). In China itself, English, Russian, Japanese and French language magazines were published mainly for foreign diplomats in Beijing or for a select number of communism sympathisers.

Since the reforms in the late 1970s, the Communist Party's control over media production has relaxed as China's media and creative industries have been subject to marketization, differentiation and de-ideologization (Lieberthal, 2004; Lynch, 1999; Yang & Calhoun, 2007; Zhao, 1998). Similarly, state-controlled central broadcasters have enjoyed greater autonomy in terms of content and management. This reduced

state control over the media, along with the end of the Cold War has influenced the practice of China's external propaganda in the early 1990s.

Meanwhile, Deng Xiaoping, the late CPC leader, adopted a more pragmatic development strategy for China—*tao guang yang hui*—which involved adopting a generally lower profile in global affairs (D'Hooghe, 2005). External propaganda largely adopted a defensive stance involving rebutting unfavourable reports about China, publicising the Chinese government's statements to the outside world and improving the global awareness of China's economic development (CPC Central External Propaganda Research Office, 1998). The commercial use of the internet in the mid-1990s created new dynamics and tensions between the state, media and both domestic and international publics. These dynamics were intensified by China's more open approach to marketization, globalization and China's membership of the WTO and other organizations for economic cooperation. All of these challenged China's traditional understanding of propaganda and resulted in China's need to modernize its external propaganda and to interact with a global public (Bi, 2001; Harwit & Clark, 2001; Mengin, 2004; Zhao, 2004; Zhao & Schiller, 2001).

The methods of ideological control in contemporary China combine an old Soviet-styled propaganda approach with some modern public diplomacy strategies, as the Party 'embraced modern communication technologies, theories, and methodologies' from the West (Brady, 2008, p. 2). Old methods include both direct censorships conducted by government bodies such as the Central Propaganda Department (*Zhong Xuan Bu*) and self-censorship practiced voluntarily by media organisations to avoid political risks. New methods, learnt mainly from the US, tend to use the market to set social norms and to justify control:

China's propaganda system has deliberately absorbed the methodology of political public relations, mass communications, political communications and other modern methods of mass persuasion commonly utilized in Western democratic societies, adapting them to Chinese conditions and needs. (Brady, 2008, p. 3)

Under such circumstances, 'external propaganda' has changed from exporting political values and principles to a general shaping of ideology, news and even advertisements that target foreign nations (Wang, 2008, p. 273). Marketing strategies such as branding now constitute a major

part of China's internal and external political communication, while the promotion of strategic political policies often involves a collaboration among government bodies, convergent media (consisting of both state-controlled and commercial media, across both traditional and digital platforms), and the commercial and cultural industries.

The CPC proactively adopted marketing strategies to maintain its “outward symbols and the all-important name brand” and “the content and meaning of the Party's activities changed significantly” (Brady, 2008, p. 3). Consequently, propaganda or ‘thought work’ have reached overseas publics more softly as external propaganda has evolved into ‘sleeker’ public diplomacy.

In addition to reactive measures prohibiting foreign influence, the CPC Central Propaganda Department engages in public diplomacy at home and overseas. That is, the state tasks the creative industries with producing content that the Party believes should be transmitted to and inculcated in various parts of the population (Shambaugh, 2007). In 2007, President Hu Jintao closely linked China's cultural industries with its public diplomacy apparatus. The cultural industries, he argued, should give the public correct guidance, foster healthy social trends and create a thriving cultural market all of which would enhance China's international competitiveness (Xinhua, 2007).

Although the perception is that Chinese media serve both the Party and the market (Zhao, 1998), the Party does not compromise when there is conflict between its interests and the market. In fact, the market dynamic is one of reward-and-punishment as the Party still seeks to exert influence. Researchers have demonstrated that the government has used its licensing authority, or power over markets, to enforce its political will (Brady, 2008; Esarey, 2005).

Although the concept *gonggong waijiao* as a literary translation of ‘public diplomacy’ first entered China's academic lexicon in 1990 (Wang, 2008), China's public diplomacy practice could be traced back to 1983 as part of the reform and ‘opening up’ policies. The spokesperson system was introduced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that year, and other governmental organisations followed suit. In 2004, President Hu Jintao announced China's midterm diplomatic strategy as maintaining ‘the important development period’ of strategic opportunities and the striving for a ‘peaceful and stable international environment’ (Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN Office at Geneva and other International Organizations in Switzerland, 2004).

Also in 1983, the Division of Public Diplomacy (the Office of Public Diplomacy nowadays) was established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There are some notable events demonstrating China's rising international profile and its exercising of public diplomacy. For example, the first Confucius Institute opened in Seoul, South Korea in 2004; the foreign aid budget exceeded \$1 billion in 2006; China successfully hosted the 2008 Summer Olympics; China's participation in UN peacekeeping overseas intensified; Shanghai hosted the World Expo in 2010; there were Belt and Road forums in 2019 and a successful bid for the Winter Olympics in 2022. As Wang (2008, p. 263) suggests, public diplomacy in China is designed to fulfil two roles—"as a function of wise strategic thinking and defensive reasons, and as an urgent task to facilitate China's rise to 'soft power'".

China faces immense challenges in its public diplomacy practice. Its one-party authoritarian polity and human rights records are the main contributors to China's prestige deficit (D'Hooghe, 2005; Kurlantzick, 2007; Nye, 2012). Despite the fact that China has invested heavily in overseas broadcasting, including English-language 24-hour news channels, the lack of media credibility and influence problematises the persuasion of foreign publics. In addition, Wang (2008, p. 265) suggests that China faces 'a hegemony of discourse' controlled by Western concepts and an ideology dominated by English-language media. Meanwhile, Chinese diplomats 'know little of international marketing', while "Chinese public diplomacy carries the burden of a huge language and cultural gap in communicating with the world" (Wang, 2008, p. 266).

Nonetheless, China has unprecedented opportunities to develop a robust public diplomacy strategy. Its culture, cinema, literacies, acupuncture, traditional medicine, cuisine, martial arts, painting and calligraphy are all popular overseas and help create positive cultural associations with the 'China' brand (D'Hooghe, 2005). At the same time, the world is moving away from the unipolar system dominated by the US. Indeed, the rise of populism in North America and Europe and the rise of BRIC nations have also created favourable conditions for China. The practice of public diplomacy, according to Yang Jiemian, Deputy Head of China National Association for International Studies, is a continuation and development of the traditional diplomacy:

Public diplomacy is usually led by the national government, built upon a wide range of communication channels and tools, aiming to gain understanding, recognition and support from foreign publics by introducing national conditions, policies, and ethos overseas. The objectives of public diplomacy are to win the hearts and mind of the people afar, project a desirable national image, create a favourable international opinion environment, and sustain and enhance the national interest. The foundational work of public diplomacy starts with information concerning diplomatic policies, strategies and measures to people at home and encourage them to participate in the practice of public diplomacy. (Yang, 2013, p. 40)

This definition captures the recent development of China's theoretical conceptualization and practice of public diplomacy. Contrary to the belief that Chinese leaders focus on formal intergovernmental contexts (D'Hooghe, 2005), this definition demonstrates that the focal objectives of China's public diplomacy have shifted from foreign governments to foreign publics. Secondly, the CPC expects every Chinese citizen to participate in practising public diplomacy thus creating favourable international environments for China's sustained growth. Finally, the CPC has creatively enabled a comprehensive range of communication tools and media resources in facilitating the practice of public diplomacy.

Zhang (2006) conceptualizes public diplomacy as an interactive process in which nation states participate in a continuous course of meaning-making and negotiation with others. In today's media-saturated environment, symbolic meaning-making not only depends on the availability of cultural artefacts, but also media resources, channels, platforms and technologies. Where the internet has created sophisticated communication networks, more actors now practise public diplomacy. Consequently, foreign policy is not only conducted officially, but also through 'the narratives that evolve in a globally accessible media system' (Riley, 2014, p. 231). The digitalization of public diplomacy also starts blurring the boundaries between diplomacy, public diplomacy and media diplomacy as international leaders accept that 'interactions with foreign publics and the projection of its reputation have become an indispensable part of a nation's ability to achieve its foreign policy objectives' (ibid., p. 232).

The next section aims to examine the Chinese Dream narrative. The chapter will examine its metanarrative and deal with the complex and multifaceted issues surrounding public diplomacy, as well as providing a case study which demonstrates how the Chinese Dream shapes Chinese public diplomacy.

## THE META-NARRATIVE OF THE CHINESE DREAM AS PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

In his speech introducing the Chinese Dream in November 2012, President Xi Jinping reviewed China's modern history from the mid-nineteenth Century and its colonisation by European powers to the present day. He emphasised that the Chinese Dream has been a unifying theme for its people to achieve the nation's 'rejuvenation' (Xi, 2014). A series of political campaigns and documents have been further launched to promote the Chinese Dream as a public diplomacy narrative (Table 2.1).

The Chinese Dream, as Xi put it, 'is the inner meaning of upholding and developing *socialism with Chinese characteristics*' (CPC Central Committee's Party Literature Research Office 2013, p. 5) and its essence is 'revitalising the nation and enhancing the well-being of the people' (ibid., p. 27). This definition offers a strong endorsement of Deng Xiaoping's core political idea and highlights that Xi's new CPC leadership would lead the country's continuing development. At the same time, the strategic use of the Chinese Dream expands the original conceptualization of socialism by assembling a range of political, economic and cultural ideas that explore its domestic and external applications. The essence of the Chinese Dream could be summarised as follows:

**Economy:** Sustaining economic development and building prosperity (Kuhn, 2014) as the country curbs the challenges associated with urbanization, welfare reform, and environmental degradation. This is laid out in two steps: building a 'moderately well-off Chinese society' by 2021 and transforming China into a modernised and fully developed nation by 2049.

**Politics:** Achieving the nation's rejuvenation involves building a modern socialist country that is politically democratic (with an anti-corruption focus), culturally advanced, and militarily strong (The State Council Information Office of the PRC, 2015).

**International relations:** China should take its 'rightful place' by removing any remnants of past humiliations brought about by colonial powers and wars, and cementing China's territorial integrity and sovereignty (Kallio, 2015). Furthermore, China should challenge the West's global domination in place since the Industrial Revolution (Kuhn, 2014).

**Individuals:** The Chinese government aims to improve citizen wellbeing and personal career development (Kuhn, 2014). More specifically, as Xi emphasizes, Chinese people are entitled to 'enjoy better education, more stable employment, higher incomes, a greater degree of social security,

**Table 2.1** Official documents on the Chinese Dream 2013–2019

Books by the CPC Central Committee's Party Research Office (in Chinese)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excerpt from Xi's speech about the Chinese Dream and national rejuvenation (2013)</li> <li>• The Chinese Dream and the Chinese path (2013)</li> <li>• Socialist path of culture development with Chinese characteristics (2013)</li> <li>• Socialist path of national defence and the development of the armed forces with Chinese characteristics (2013)</li> <li>• Excerpt from Xi's speech about building China into a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way (2016)</li> <li>• Excerpt from Xi's speech about developing a Socialist Culture in China (2017)</li> </ul>
Books and speeches by Xi Jinping (in Chinese)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The governance of China Volume 1 (Book, 2014, Foreign Languages Press)</li> <li>• Speech at the Congress to celebrate the 95th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (Book/speech, 2016, People's Publishing House)</li> <li>• The governance of China Volume 2 (Book, 2017, Foreign Languages Press)</li> <li>• Speech at the Congress to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the founding of the People's Liberation Army (Book/speech, 2017, People's Publishing House)</li> <li>• Speech at the Congress to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement (Book/speech, 2019, People's Publishing House)</li> </ul>

(continued)

better medical and health care, improved housing conditions and a better environment'. (*China Daily*, 2014)

The official Chinese Dream discourse contains elements from the old practice of external propaganda, as well as the CPC's newly adopted

**Table 2.1** (continued)

Books by The People's Publishing House writing group (in Chinese)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remain true to our original aspiration and adhere to the spiritual home of the Chinese Communists (2016, People's Publishing House)</li> <li>• The ideological and practical guideline of anti-corruption (2018, People's Publishing House)</li> </ul>
Books by the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee (in Chinese)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Xi Jinping thoughts on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era (2018, Xuexi Publishing House)</li> <li>• The learning guideline of Xi Jinping thoughts on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era (2019, Xuexi Publishing House)</li> </ul>
Government white paper by the State Council Information Office (in English)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• China's Military Strategy (2015)</li> </ul>

strategy of public diplomacy. It reflects the new initiatives from the CPC to rebrand itself, and its creative promotion of all-round development strategies in the name of the Chinese Dream at home and overseas. The Chinese Dream is used firstly as a defensive strategy to counter the China 'threat' discourse and is secondly used proactively to rebrand China's global superpower status.

The Chinese Dream concept has considerable synergy with the American Dream, used by politicians including Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Henry Kissinger, and most recently, Barack Obama to project their political agendas and to rally public support. Despite the paradoxes associated with the concept due to the increasing inequality of wealth and opportunity between social classes and ethnic groups (Calthorpe, 1993; Hochschild, 1995; Johnson, 2006), the word 'dream' suggests freedom, infinite possibilities and unlimited success, and appeals to general humanities as well as triggering strong emotional responses. The early use of the Chinese Dream in commercial publications (Mars & Hornsby, 2008; Wang, 2010) was used to describe individual prosperity, market pragmatism, modernization, urbanization, and the evolution of the Chinese middle class. The aspiration of middle-class prosperity, self-improvement and upward mobility via endeavour and entrepreneurship (Kumar, 2005; McCall, 2013) was indeed drawn from the American Dream (Li, 2015; Li & Shaw, 2014).



The direct imitation of the ‘dream’ culture as a governing idea from President Xi is designed to inspire by adopting modernism-oriented Western values to rally both domestic support and international alliances. The democratic ethos of this concept is designed to motivate a growing urban middle class that is often exposed to Western culture and influence (*The Economist*, 2013). However, as Xi emphasizes in various speeches and numerous official documents, although the projection of the Chinese Dream demonstrates the CPC’s efforts to rebrand China’s politics with Western modernity-oriented values, the essence of the Chinese Dream is ultimately about a congruent relationship between the state and its citizens. Indeed, the American Dream celebrates individual freedom, self-reliance and social mobility, while the Chinese Dream focuses on the individual’s dependence on the State (Kai, 2014). As the state-media argues, ‘only when the country is doing well, can the nation and people do well’ (*China Daily*, 2014).

As defined within official documentation, the Chinese Dream centres around ‘national rejuvenation’. Culturally, ‘rejuvenation’ connotes longevity, rebirth and leaving the past behind. In many ways, by choosing this metaphor, current Chinese leaders echo but also revise the legacy of ‘wounded nationalism’ (Chang, 2001). China was invaded and colonised by technologically advanced Western powers and Japan for more than a hundred years, and this colonisation left behind collective insecurity, ‘wounded pride and resentment’ (Chang, 2001, p. 26). This defeatism renders China vulnerable to reactive nationalism, viewing Western powers as both hostile and unreliable (Chang, 2001; Huang & Lee, 2003). As a grassroots expression, nationalism has filled the ideological void in post-1989 political communication and has become the dominant propaganda discourse to unify the nation, legitimate CPC governance and mobilize young people (Chang, 2001; Wu, 2007).

Various grassroots expressions of nationalism have now been incorporated into official discourse and developed into a form of pride and confidence in China. Hence, the message of ‘national rejuvenation’ resonates with nationalism, but also suggests that China has moved on from a humiliating history of falling victim to colonialism and has risen to a position of new global recognition and power (Brown & Bērziņa-Čerenkova, 2018). National rejuvenation, as a new expression of top-down nationalism, differs from other grassroots nationalistic sentiment, and finds its roots in Chinese culture and history as legitimate

source motivators for Chinese young people as they aim to bring their country back to the world stage.

In summary, the Chinese Dream as public diplomacy narrative is the embodiment of both hard and soft power in strategizing China's future development. The hard development strategy lies in China's sustained political, economic and military growth. The soft power strategy is the Chinese leadership's use of rhetorical tools to shape a sense of belonging and the promotion of traditional Chinese values to overseas publics. The foundation of the Chinese Dream is the combination of Party ideology and revival nationalism.

### CASE STUDY OF PRESIDENT XI JINPING'S NEW YEAR SPEECHES

We analysed six New Year Speeches delivered by President Xi Jinping between 2014 and 2019. He is the first Chinese national leader to deliver televised and streamed speeches on New Year's Eve from his Zhongnanhai office, the central headquarters for the CPC and the State Council of China. The speeches were delivered in Chinese with English subtitles via a range of media platforms aiming for audiences inside and outside China. The subtitled speeches were carried by the state-endorsed central media's English language service including *China Radio International*, *China Central Television English*, *China Network Television*, *People.com.cn*, *Xinhua Net* and *China Daily*. In addition, the 2014 speech was carried by Facebook and the state media's YouTube channels. From 2015 onwards, the dissemination of the New Year speeches was synchronised on state-endorsed broadcasting, digital platforms and their YouTube, Facebook and Twitter accounts.

The six speeches were viewed on YouTube via the official account of *Chinese Global Television Network* (CGTN). As an arm of China's public diplomacy, CGTN is a convergent media group affiliated with the state-controlled China Media Group, looking to provide alternative news coverage from China which negates international media coverage. CGTN's YouTube account started on 24th January 2013 and by December 2019, its programmes have garnered more than 800 million views. We have monitored and collected the President Xi's new year speeches from January 2014 (Table 2.2).

Our key method was multimodal analysis, which involves analysing both speech and the semiotic interpretation of visual compositions. Based

**Table 2.2** President Xi’s New Year speeches on the CGTV YouTube channel (captured at 3 March 2019)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Viewed</i>	<i>Liked</i>	<i>Disliked</i>	<i>Commented</i>
2014	4’7”	786	13	1	0
2015	9’18”	47,487	324	29	176
2016	7’37”	81,770	591	80	219
2017	9’35”	92,315	757	92	373
2018	10’52”	265,337	4500	512	1423
2019	11’11”	135,560	2500	305	1172

on the toolkits of “grammar of visual design” provided by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 2), we argue that media texts rarely communicate in a single mode. Instead, meaning is constructed via multiple modes simultaneously combining visuals, sound, language and so on. The multimodal approach considers how signs are used in combination (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) and studies how visual elements such as images work to create meaning, in each case describing the choices made by the producer of the text (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 9).

More specifically, we analysed the linguistic techniques (such as metaphor, lexical choices and so on) used by President Xi, the specific terminology he employed and how he delivered the messages to influence his audience. For example, his clothing, the location, the artefacts in his office and set design all carry rich semiotic meaning as the metaphorical associations in language, gestures, setting and colours connote particular ideas (Machin, 2007, p. 11). The analysis reveals the embedded ideas about China’s culture, history and development as they relate to the Chinese Dream.

## MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENT XI’S NEW YEAR SPEECHES 2014–2019

President Xi’s New Year speeches resemble the familiar format of President Roosevelt’s “fireside” radio chats, the traditional Christmas message from the British monarch and the televised New Year greetings from US presidents and other national leaders. Such televised speeches have, over time, been perfected by Western leaders (Čech, 2014; Van Noije & Hijmans, 2005). The adoption of such a familiar format shows that the

CPC is not only familiar with Western political communication strategies, but is also prepared to adopt Western public diplomacy strategies to increase China's cultural and political significance.

Visually, the speech allows publics to see inside the President's office in Zhongnanhai which has been strategically orchestrated to be the symbolic representation of Chinese national identity. Semiotic insights into its visual components reveal that China's public diplomacy aims to gain global recognition and popularity for its presidential administration. Due to its single-party undemocratic political system, the election of Chinese presidents has been shrouded with secrecy and has attracted criticism. As the first Chinese President to deliver a New Year speech to global audiences, Xi and his administration employed a clear strategy to engage and persuade home and foreign publics—the strategy of mimicry.

In his 2015 speech, for example, Xi is centrally positioned behind his desk. Three telephones indicate his authority and prominence. Two folders, a calendar of the past year and a penholder suggest that the President has worked diligently and reviewed the previous year's developments. Xi looks into the camera, making direct eye contact with publics. His dark slim-cut suit and mulberry tie mixes Western and Chinese styling and differs from his predecessors who often wore the Chinese tunic suit (known as 'Mao suit') for such formal occasions. The national flag and painting of the Great Wall of China symbolise national identity, state authority, ancient civilisation and historical pride. Their cultural associations with Chinese national identity are set to elicit an emotional response. The nationalist rhetoric in Presidential speeches could provide domestic publics with the 'sense of belonging', 'paternal protection' and provide foreign publics with the sense that great cultural values bond people together as 'spiritual kin' (Van Noije & Hijmans, 2005). There are photographs on two wall-high bookshelves. The black and white photograph of the President in a military uniform indicates his past military service, and photographs of him with his relatives emphasise family values. Overall, such visual cues transmit notions of service, diligence, intellect and family, further humanizing the President and developing the idea that he is authoritative and trustworthy.

Xi's globally televised or streamed New Year speeches signal a significant change in China's public diplomacy in becoming more proactive and human-oriented. Speaking to the world from his Zhongnanhai Office, Xi provides global audiences with an insight into his ordinary (albeit

constructed) office life, which is also a technique used by various American Presidents (Adatto, 2008). The ‘documented’ life narratives connote loyalty, stoicism, personal success, national service, family values and professional dedication, all of which chime with the themes promoted within the Chinese Dream.

### THE PUBLICS: INCLUSIVENESS AND EXCLUSIVITY

Xi’s 2018 New Year speeches start with the greeting to ‘comrades, friends, ladies and gentlemen’. While ‘comrades’ is a popular greeting among CPC members, ‘friends’ indicates a feeling of respect and affection while ‘ladies and gentlemen’ is conventionally used when addressing business elites or non-Chinese guests. These warm modes of audience address were quickly explained by the President:

I would like to extend my New Year wishes to my countrymen and women from all ethnic groups, in Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions and in Taiwan, as well as overseas Chinese. I also wish good luck to friends from all countries and regions across the world.

The wide publics specification embraces the inclusion of people of all ethnicities, political regions and nation states. What bonds this diverse audience together is the use of in-group pronouns of ‘we’ (132 times), ‘our’ (89 times) and ‘us’ (6 times) in the six New Year speeches, building the connection between speaker and audience. The in-group pronouns of unity convey an intention to create commonality, cohesion and solidarity.

Nevertheless, the use of first-person pronouns is simultaneously inclusive and exclusive (Pennycook, 1994). The use of ‘we’, ‘us’, ‘our’ in President Xi’s speech such as: ‘*We* Chinese people seek to realise the Chinese dream, a great realization of the Chinese nation’ (2014) first defines the Chinese Dream as a *collective* dream of *all* Chinese people. The authority and legitimacy of the speaker himself obliges his audience to follow him in fulfilling the dream. Meanwhile, the use of ‘we’ defines a ‘we/the other’ dichotomy. ‘The others’ therefore are those who have not subscribed to the Chinese Dream but need to be convinced, persuaded, mobilized and engaged.

Meanwhile within the unifying collective nouns of ‘we’, patriotism is emphasized as the key factor in developing the expected sense of shared identity and aims to enhance bonding among Chinese people. In his 2015

speech reviewing activities in the past year, President Xi refers to a series of high-profile activities held across the country to commemorate the end of the World War II in China and highlights patriotism as the core spirit of the Chinese nation:

For those who have offered their precious lives for the country, the Chinese nationality and peace, we will forever remember their sacrifice and contribution, no matter how times change.

Xi's 2014 speech includes an emphasis on family, which could evoke a strong emotional response, furthering the intended connection among the nation state, family and individuals:

Some of Chinese citizens are far away from the motherland, and their close relatives and some cannot have a reunion with family members. On behalf of the motherland and people, I'd like to offer my sincere greetings to them and wish them a peaceful and smooth New Year.

The stock political language to define national identity in official documents is missing from the New Year speeches. They are purposively imbued with inspiring and prudent language taken from ancient texts or idioms, drawing upon cultural elements to shape the perception of the collective cultural identity. In emphasizing his determination regarding the deepening political and economic reforms in China, Xi's 2015 New Year speech uses the metaphor of a flying arrow:

We will continue to deepen reform in an all-round way. An arrow that has been released makes no turning back.

In expressing his sympathy towards the economically disadvantaged, Xi's 2018 speech quotes ancient Chinese poet Du Fu before stating his policy on affordable housing:

If only I could get tens of thousands of mansions! I would house all the poor people who would then beam with smiles. (ancient Chinese poet Du Fu)

References to ancient Chinese texts and idioms are strategically used to demonstrate the President's familiarity with traditional culture, and represent a legitimate source to unify people from diverse social groups. In

order to engage young people for example, President Xi asserts in his 2018 speech:

Of course, those achievements [in anti-corruption and economic reform] would not have been possible without the support of the people. I would like to give a ‘thumbs up’ to all our great people.

‘Thumbs up’ (*dian zan*) is a Chinese equivalent to the ‘like’ function on Western social media platforms and is a popular expression among young netizens. By using such online language, the President aims to connect with young people, bringing the CPC’s legitimacy to a generation who might otherwise be attracted by Western values.

### THE CHINESE DREAM STARTS AT HOME

The 2019 New Year speech by President Xi mainly covers China’s achievements over the past year and the challenges ahead. It focuses on domestic issues including economic development, environment protection, national security and elements of human security including alleviating poverty, improving healthcare and innovations within science, technology and education. Such issues are often supported by evidence or statistics, as the President states:

Another 125 poor counties and 10 million poverty-stricken rural residents were lifted out of poverty. *We reduced* the price of 17 cancer-fighting drugs and included them on our medical insurance list.

In addressing these achievements, President Xi is careful to attribute them to ordinary Chinese people. The repetition of ‘we’ builds solidarity between the speaker and listener and is used to praise the audience’s collective work and apparently positive outcomes. By mentioning specific towns, counties and cities outside of Beijing, Xi further builds associations with those outside the state capital, and reinforces a down-to-earth approach in his 2019 speech:

I was pleased to see the lush green banks of the Yangtze River, the ocean of rice sprouting at the Jiansanjiang agricultural base, the lively Shenzhen Qianhai Harbour, the bustling Shanghai Zhangjiang High-tech Park, and the bridge that brings together Hong Kong, Zhuhai, and Macao. These

achievements are all thanks to the hard work of people from all of China's ethnic groups, who are the trail-blazers of the new era.

Media coverage of negative news such as disasters, poverty, or corruptions is often restricted in China (De Burgh, 2003). Direct interference from government officials in media reporting is common in the name of curtailing any possible negative economic impact (Luther & Zhou, 2005). However, Xi's New Year speeches in 2016, 2017 and 2019 take a new approach to address existing problems associated with China's development:

Many of our compatriots lost their lives in tragic incidents like the "Eastern Star" cruise shipwreck, the serious fire and blast in the port of Tianjin, and in the landslide in Shenzhen. Some of our compatriots were also brutally murdered by terrorists. Our hearts were broken by those tragedies. May the deceased rest in peace and the living remain safe and sound!

In Lianzhang Village in Qingyuan in Guangdong Province, I discussed with a villager named Lu Yihe how we could help to relieve his household's poverty. I can vividly recall their down-to-earth sincerity. I would like to wish all of them and their fellow villagers a prosperous and thriving New Year.

We vigorously pushed forward the exercise of our Party's strict governance in every respect, unswervingly cracked down on both 'tigers' (major corruption) and 'flies' (minor corruption), in a bid to purify our political ecosystem, and continue to improve our Party and our government's working style, as well as our social conduct.

These examples show how Xi proactively addresses the poverty, bureaucracy, corruption, security, and natural and man-made disasters challenging China's sustained development. By using first person pronouns, he not only aligns his own position with that of the people, but he also positions himself on behalf of the CPC as responsible for implementing the changes. The epistemological and metaphysical implications of the utterance of 'I' firstly provide the speaker's particular point of view and secondly indicate the intentional action from the speaker. By doing so, Xi establishes himself as a pragmatic leader capable of assertively handling development challenges.

Eliminating development challenges such as corruption and inequality constitute more domestic aspects of the Chinese Dream, and implicitly and explicitly contribute to CPC legitimacy. In his analysis of CPC



governance, Zeng (2015) attributes the Party's ruling capacity not only to the regime's external stability but to the internal cohesion reflected in the unity of the ruling elites. Due to the influence of Confucianism, Chinese political culture generally features a low public participation and a high trust in government, making ruling elites more instrumental. In this sense, party cohesion is a prerequisite for the CPC to maintain legitimacy and includes dealing with the negative consequences of combining authoritarian rule with the market economy such as corruption and inequality (Zeng, 2015). In prioritizing anti-corruption within the Chinese Dream, Xi plays a crucial role in legitimizing the CPC ruling capacity and maintaining party cohesion. This internal party cohesion is exhibited in the way Xi speaks on behalf of CPC members. As Xi claims in his 2016 speech, Party members and officials are presented as a collective who are working to ensure that people's lives and property are safely protected, and that "their rights to improved livelihood and physical health are guaranteed".

## PROJECTING THE CHINESE DREAM OVERSEAS

The analysis of speeches given by French Presidents reveals the regularity of the notion of the 'significant other'—other states seen as threats or competitors (Van Noije & Hijmans, 2005). Similarly, the revival of nationalistic discourse embodied in the Chinese Dream uses the construction of a national identity versus other nations. In Xi's speeches, other nations are represented by an explicit majority of 'friends' and an implicit minority of 'foes'.

Xi is the first Chinese leader to revise Deng Xiaoping's foreign policy. The external use of the Chinese Dream maps out his ambition to change China from a low-profile, developing state into an assertive, modernised global player ready to lead (Sørensen, 2015). Xi's narrative on China's diplomatic achievement begins with a review of China's commitment to realising its dream through peaceful development in unison with friends old and new, as evidenced in the 2019 speech:

We put China's proposals on the table and made our voice heard at these and other diplomatic events. I and my colleagues visited five continents and attended many important diplomatic events. We spoke with state leaders about wide-ranging issues, we strengthened our friendships, we enhanced mutual trust, and we enlarged our circle of friends.

The promotion of the Chinese Dream overseas continues a strategy of peaceful development that counters the China ‘threat’ discourse (Sørensen, 2015). However, in contrast to Deng Xiaoping’s low-profile international relations policy (D’Hooghe, 2005), Xi and the current Chinese leaders use the New Year speeches to demonstrate China’s leadership in guiding regional or even global economic development. For example, the OBOR initiative from 2015 aims to enlist other states into a China-centred development strategy to achieve a ‘sustainable’ and ‘peaceful’ blueprint at global level by projecting economic collaboration with states along the ancient silk and maritime road. Up to April 2019, China has signed collaborative agreements with 125 countries and 29 international organizations. According to China’s national news agency Xinhua (2019), OBOR delivers benefits to developing nations and offers a new solution to ‘imbalanced global development’. OBOR as an extension of the Chinese Dream was a focal point in the New Year Speeches in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

China will resolutely uphold the authority and status of the United Nations, conscientiously perform its due international obligations and responsibilities, keep its promises on global climate change, actively push forward the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, and always contribute to the building of world peace and global development, and the safeguarding of international order.

As evidenced in this 2018 speech, despite its rising status in leading world economic development, China has put its Belt and Road Initiative firmly in the framework of the UN’s mission of maintaining world peace and promoting global development. Consequently, China’s ambition of taking the lead in global issues was morally justified. Xi’s New Year Speeches thus reassure global audiences that China is not part of the great power politics threatening the moral authority of the UN. On the other hand, China becoming a world power has unavoidably set it against the US in a series of territorial, trade, and other disputes. In particular, China’s claim over the disputed waters in the South China Sea positioned it in direct conflict with the US as the latter stepped up its military activity and naval presence in the region. Xi’s 2017 New Year speeches stress China’s sovereignty claims in the moral framework of safeguarding world peace and common development:

We have adhered to the peaceful development while resolutely safeguarding the territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests of China.

China will remain resolute and confident in its defence of its national sovereignty and security. And China's sincerity and goodwill to safeguard world peace and promote common development will remain unchanged.

To soften this assertiveness, President Xi proactively emphasizes China's role in coordinated international activities and its contribution to the world in his 2019 speech:

The Chinese people care greatly about the country's future and the future of the world. When Ebola emerged in Africa, we offered our help. When a water shortage occurred in the capital of the Maldives, we provided assistance. There are numerous examples like these which demonstrate the spirit of common destiny of the Chinese people and all humanity.

An emphasis on 'the common destiny of the Chinese people and all humanity' is used to defuse external fears about China's resurgence. Discursive statements such as 'self-reliance and hard work' were emphasized in the 2017 and 2019 speeches, with 'determined perseverance' featuring in the 2016 speech. Such rhetoric strongly resembles the essence of the American Dream, further shortening the cognitive distance between China and other nations. However, the Chinese Dream is presented by Xi as different from the American Dream as it is mutually beneficial to other countries, as evidenced in his 2014 speech:

More than 7 billion people inhabit the planet Earth. We in the same boat should keep watch and help each other to achieve common development. We Chinese people seek to realize the Chinese dream, a great revitalization of the Chinese nation, and also wish that the dreams of people of all countries will come true.

In this context, the Chinese Dream discourse is strong and effective. It combines hard and soft power, positions China at the centre of a strategic map of global development, creates alliances with other countries, and sends assertive messages to possible foes while aiming to win over competitive countries.

## CONCLUSION

As it increases its global power, China's public diplomacy strategies take much from the US, while maintaining CPC ideology. Although the US is presented as adopting an opposite value system to China, the rhetorical power of the American Dream has been used to legitimate the universality and authenticity of the Chinese Dream. In analysing the metanarrative of the Chinese Dream and the multimodal construction of the Chinese Dream from six New Year speeches, we synthesise four key points.

First, although the objectives of Chinese public diplomacy have shifted from foreign governments to foreign publics, public diplomacy is still regarded as the continuation of formal diplomacy and is orchestrated and led by the CPC. Our research reveals the new public diplomacy practice of personalised speeches by President Xi in reassuring global audiences by portraying China through the notions of 'world peace' and 'common development'. Rather than Communist ideology, nationalism is emphasized to unify the diverse audience groups within the country and to legitimate CPC governance. 'Revival nationalism' as we argue, incorporates various grassroots nationalistic expressions, and is at the core of understanding the Chinese Dream as public diplomacy.

Second, the goal of China's public diplomacy is to diffuse potential tensions and conflicts at home. President Xi's speeches target domestic audiences from all ethnic groups, covering the mainland, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and Chinese citizens residing overseas. Hence 'Chineseness' implies both political and cultural identity, and every Chinese person is enlisted in public diplomacy. The inclusiveness of domestic publics from a wide range of political regions and ethnic backgrounds is controversial; nonetheless, the goal of such inclusiveness is to 'strengthen internal cohesion and enhance external acceptance' (van Ham, 2002, p. 259) by employing strategic images and languages. By ascribing 'Chineseness', President Xi aims to strengthen the cohesion in the state-public relationship by supporting the ongoing domestic anti-corruption campaign, and promoting the sustained development of the economy, education, science, technology, and environmental protection at home.

Third, in order to reach out to foreign publics, the New Year speeches use branding techniques and marketing communication tactics to promote the Chinese Dream. The CPC adopts these new communication strategies in addition to old-fashioned propaganda. Externally, the Chinese Dream implies a shift from external propaganda based on an upfront ideology to using the power of images, emotions, values and

influences. Similar to other nation branding campaigns such as ‘Cool Britannia’, the Chinese Dream involves a range of creative sectors and cultural artefacts. In the President’s annual speeches, a combination of family-oriented emotions, cultural traditions, political prominence and indicators of a modern lifestyle enable target audiences to respond to such values. These are all messages that may resonate with foreign populations. Meanwhile, since media and communication resources are in the control of the Party State, the CPC has creatively enabled a comprehensive range of public diplomacy tools and media resources. In addition to state-controlled convergent media, social media platforms were employed to reach foreign populations thus fostering favourable opinion about China’s continuing prosperity.

Finally, in assuming its rising global status, President Xi uses a distinct ‘friends vs. foes’ dichotomy. The Chinese Dream was used rhetorically as a symbol for shared values and common beliefs to attract foreign nations and promote China-centred geo-economics. Those nations potentially contesting China’s development blueprint are framed as threatening and competitors. Nevertheless, the Chinese Dream as a public diplomacy narrative is used to reach foreign public, build empathy and shorten the psychological distance.

Although projecting the Chinese Dream exhibits the CPC’s efforts in modernising China’s politics with Western values, the essence of the Chinese Dream is the combination of political ideology legitimated in the context of traditional cultural values and revival nationalism. Until 2015, research shows that the Chinese Dream had been mainly perceived negatively in the West and associates China with the notion of a threat (Sørensen, 2015). However, the CPC’s recent public diplomacy efforts in promoting the Chinese Dream via the personalized New Year speeches seem to be attracting foreign publics. An appropriate focus for future research would be to assess whether personalization of politics in the age of convergent media would further change the dynamics and effects of Chinese public diplomacy.

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