

China's Public Diplomacy: Between Successfulness and Critics

Enny Fathurachmi

*Lecturer at the Department of International Relations
University of Mulawarman*

ABSTRAK

Sorotan masyarakat internasional terhadap ketertutupan Cina melahirkan upaya untuk memperbaiki citra Cina lebih baik. Upaya kuat yang dilakukan Cina lewat diplomasi publik cukup diapresiasi dunia internasional dengan semakin banyaknya kerjasama yang dilakukan dengan Cina. Pilihan diplomasi publik menjadi kunci sukses citra positif Cina berkaitan dengan pertumbuhan ekonominya. Meskipun diplomasi publik yang dilakukan Cina lebih didominasi oleh tokoh-tokoh tertentu. Tulisan ini menggunakan pendekatan konsep diplomasi publik “ala Barat” dengan implementasi pemaknaan “ala Cina”. Namun demikian hasil diplomasi publik menunjukkan bahwa ada pergeseran image lebih positif khususnya dalam bidang ekonomi dari dunia internasional dengan indikator intensnya kerjasama yang dilakukan ke beberapa negara dan integrasi ekonomi dengan organisasi regional di kawasan lain. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa diplomasi publik tidak hanya menjadi hak prerogratif negara-negara yang mengusung demokrasi saja.

Key words: *Diplomasi publik, Cina, pertumbuhan ekonomi, positif image*

Introduction

The attempts of the China government to increase its economic development impacted to its image as a new economic power particularly in Asia. All the time, this achievement was held by Japan which influenced Asia with its technology and investment. The Chinese government has been very active approaching several countries to create economic cooperation. It appears as if it is replacing Japanese position. For many years, China was known as closed country in a so-called as “bamboo curtain”. Nowadays, the country has been really enthusiastic to change its image as openness country. The hard work of China's government to keep close diplomatic relations to many

countries resulted in the achievement that China was host a prestigious event like the Beijing Olympic.

Moreover, China's government has been using public diplomacy as a tool to increase its image. There are various strategies dealing with economic, environmental, education and cultural exchange issues. On the other hand, the important question is to analyze public diplomacy terminology which has been understood differently by China from the public diplomacy terminology from west. Here China understood public diplomacy generally as "the general understanding of public diplomacy coincides with the state-centered approach, but this does not mean that diplomacy by non-state actors is not part of the picture. In current writing, scholars often differentiate explicitly in terminology between public diplomacy (*gonggong waijiao*)-foreign audiences targeted by diplomatic actions of a government- and people to people diplomacy (*minjian waijiao*) - interaction between people and civil societies of various countries (Hooghe: 2007).

However, China' public diplomacy has been dominated by the state which control the information it gives to public. The personal role of leaders such as Den Xiaoping, Qian Qisen, Jiang Zemin, and Hun Jintao is a key of successfully public diplomacy. On the other hand, some scholars see that China's image has not improved much. This is related to democratization and human rights issues. In addition, the domination of government's role to do diplomacy means that the other actors such as NGOs or Civil Society have a lesser role in public diplomacy.

This essay examines the question whether public diplomacy a prerogative of democratic states. I have put the China as a case study to explain China's public diplomacy, and meanwhile at the same time I sharpen by comparing it to America's public diplomacy. My consideration to put America as comparison to China is due to the fact that it, as democratic system, is still a reference for some countries.

My argumentation is that public diplomacy is not only a prerogative of democratic states because every state has the same rights to enhance its image with any kinds of strategy or instrument such as soft power. Moreover, I will explore the Chinese public diplomacy and its relations with different parts of the world.

This essay discusses on four parts whereby the first part will be exploring public diplomacy theoretically. The second part will be exploring Chinese public diplomacy as a system and the instrument that it uses. The third part is comparing American's public diplomacy with China's public diplomacy. This

part will also exploring China's relations with different parts of the world. The last part is conclusion.

Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy is part of diplomacy. It is one of soft power instrument in diplomatic practice. There are various definitions on public diplomacy which focus on different aspect. There have been attempts to define public diplomacy on uniformity. According to Paul Sharp in Jan Melissen chapter, *The New Public Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practice*, he describes public diplomacy as the process by which direct relations with people in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented.

Public diplomacy is defined by Tuch as an attempts to affect the attitudes and opinion of foreign publics, involves the entire communication spectrum, modern communication technology as well as such other methods of intercultural communication as cultural and educational exchange, libraries, publication, and people (among them professionally qualified foreign service officers) (Signitzer and Wamser:2006). And it includes our own learning experience because we must understand the hopes and fears of other peoples if we are going to be successful in persuading them to understand us.

Furthermore, the new public diplomacy places more emphasis on dialogue with foreign publics that requires learning to engage and even accommodate alternative views, contrary opinions and evidence, rather than attempting contemptuously to speak over them, as in megaphone diplomacy (Fitzpatrick:2007 quoting Shaun Riorda:2003 quoting Steven Livingston).

China's Public Diplomacy

In China the public diplomacy activities are reserved for the Office of Foreign Propaganda of the Chinese Communist party (CCP) and the state council information office (SCIO) (Hooghe:2007). The office of foreign propaganda is a highly secret organization, supervised by the foreign propaganda small leading group which consists of senior communist party leaders: the SCIO is the more public or government pendant, established in 1991 (Brady: 2006 quote by Hooghe: 2007).

Looking back at the development of China's public diplomacy institutions since the country was established, three phases can be found each with their district characteristics (Zhexin: 2009)

- First, the phase which extended from 1949 to late 1980s, marked by a strong orientation towards foreign propaganda.
- Second, the phase that roughly started from the end of the Cold War (after the Tiananmen Incident) and lasted until the beginning of the 21st century when China's public diplomacy institution began shifting from one-way foreign propaganda to two-way international communications.
- Third, the phase that started from around 2003 when public diplomacy suddenly became a hot topic both for China's political leadership and for the academia. This phase can be called an overall developing period of China Public policy as much progress has been achieved in theory development on institution building as well as in practice.

China's public diplomacy institutions have developed from one way oriented foreign propaganda to two-way, multi-dimensional overall communication. The current objective is to meet the international standards in as short time as possible. Furthermore, the role of key actors is importance. President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao play major roles in China's charm offensive abroad (Hooghe, 2007). They travel extensively to take time to address foreign audiences and include contacts with ordinary people during their visits. The Chinese public diplomacy offensive is firstly directed toward developing countries of Africa, Latin America, Southeast and Central Asia. That is to say particularly to those whose relations with the United States have been faltering and neo-liberal model of development failed such as Venezuela, African countries, neighboring former socialist or communist countries of former Soviet Union and Southeast Asia (Lawniczak, 2007).

China's instruments for public diplomacy, such as the media, publications, internet, and development aid, commercial deals, and cultural and other events, do not differ from other countries. Moreover, China also uses Confucius Institutes. The spread of Chinese culture through the establishment of Confucius institutes around the world is another manifestation of Chinese efforts to demonstrate cultural sophistication and give reassurance that China's drive to gain major-power status is based not simply on military and economic might, but also on the sound foundations of China's soft power (Huafei:2007). Public diplomacy is of course one important way to showcase these foundations.

Comparison between China's public diplomacy and America's public diplomacy

The United States is a reference for several countries dealing with democratic system. The country has been very active to promote democracy to whole the

world. The U.S uses many strategy to influence others countries to accept its concept in democracy. It has come with aids, economic cooperation, natural disaster diplomacy, or military forces. On the other hand, China is still maintaining its political system with communism. Therefore, it could have interesting to compare between America's public diplomacy with China's public diplomacy.

Public diplomacy is the promotion of America's interests, culture and policies by informing and influencing foreign populations. The department of states proclaims that the goals of U.S. public diplomacy strategy include promoting democracy and good governance and marginalizing extremist leaders and organizations. The U.S. government first officially acknowledged its use of public diplomacy activities in the early years of the 20th century when President Woodrow Wilson created the Committee on Public Information to disseminate information overseas during World War I. According to a Pew survey, in 2000, more than 50% and as high as 83% of foreign populations around the world held favorable views of the United States (The Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2003 in Lum et.al: 2008). A number of decisions early on by Bush Administration including refusing to sign onto the Kyoto Treaty, the International Criminal Court, The Chemical Weapons Ban, and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, lessened foreign opinion of the United States. After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, people around the world expressed shock and support for the U.S. government. Since then, however, negative attitudes about America have increased.

The United States government also sponsors a broad array of cultural and education exchange programs for the purpose of increasing mutual understanding. The state department's Bureau of Education and Cultural Exchange administers a number of programs, including the Fulbright Program, English language programs an American speakers program, citizen exchange programs, and student leader programs. The country also focuses on Public diplomacy which is consists primarily of three categories of activities; international information programs, educational and cultural exchange programs, and international nonmilitary broadcasting.

The China government has established an office for promoting Chinese language and culture as part of a global public diplomacy effort. China's National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, or *Hanban*, reportedly has established 210 Confucius Institutes worldwide in 64 countries and regions since 2004 to teach Chinese language and culture. Some observers assert that these centers will help China to cultivate friendships and promote an understanding of china throughout the world. More than 200 educational institutes in 61 countries and regions reportedly have applied to

open up Confucius Institutes while China has trained more than 300 teacher and spent \$26 million on textbook and audio equipment for this purpose (Xinhua News Agency in Thomas Lum et.al, 2008). Other China's efforts include hosting overseas scholars in programs similar to U.S. government-sponsored scholarly exchange and attracting and expanding facilities for foreign students.

Furthermore, China's assistance often garners appreciation among foreign leaders and citizens disproportionate to its costs that China offers assistance without the conditions that Western donors frequently place on aid likes democratic reform, market opening, and environmental protection. In addition, Chinese aid does not require a lengthy process involving setting up and meeting social and environmental safeguards. China has taken some tentative steps toward making its foreign aid process more open, coordinating its projects with other ODA providers and offering more development-oriented assistance, while continuing to eschew the label of major ODA donor (Thomas Lum, 2008).

China relations to others part of the world

This sub-part would be explore the China' public diplomacy at some regions. China has good relations with Southeast Asia. The country sets several cooperation as well as engaging in Free trade Area. Overseas Chinese communities have long played important parts in the economies, societies, and cultures of Southeast Asian States although their relations with China the home of their ancestors in many instances have been ambivalent. China bilateral relations in Southeast Asia leads to a regional division between mainland Southeast Asia states particularly Burma, Cambodia, and Laos where China is more influential and maritime Southeast Asia states such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore where Beijing wields less power. Thailand a major non NATO ally of the United States appears to be more comfortable in its relations with China than other regional states. China has also been an increasingly active player in multilateral organization that include Southeast Asian states such as ASEAN plus three (ASEAN, China, Japan, and South Korea) (Thomas Lum, 2008). China's foreign aid to this region includes non-development aid and low-interest loans as well as trade and investment agreements.

Cross-border migration between China and Central Asia has facilitated stronger economies ties but also has contributed to more complicated diplomatic relations. There reportedly are over one million ethnic Kazakhs in China, with most residing in the Xinjiang Uighur autonomous region. Several tens of thousands have moved to Kazakhstan in recent years. China has

pursued both bilateral ties with each Central Asia state as well as multilateral ties through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization whose members include China, Russia, and all the Central Asian countries except Turkmenistan which claims to be nonaligned. China's growing bilateral and multilateral ties with central Asia are the major impetus to political and economic integration in the region, according to some observers. China cooperates in Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation program (CARES which the members are China, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Mongolia, and all the Central Asian states except Turkmenistan). This cooperation have initiated by the Asian Development Bank in 1997 to improve living standards and reduce poverty in its member states through regional economic collaboration.

China's political-economic goals and relations in Africa are defined in a formal document released in early 2006, entitled China's Africa Policy. It lays out a China goal of creating a new type of strategic partnership with African consisting of multifaceted cooperation grounded in long-standing guiding Chinese foreign policy principles. It explicitly conditions official relations with African governments on their adherence to China's "one-China principle" *vis a vis* Taiwan, but makes no other political demands. It seeks to increase reciprocal official leadership visits and diverse lower level cooperative exchanges and pledges China-African cooperation in international forums. China is pursuing its policy goals in Africa both bilaterally and through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Its cooperation is a comprehensive effort initiated by China to build mutually beneficial economic development, trade, and political relations with Africa rooted in principles of "South-South Cooperation."

China's diplomatic engagement with the Middle East region has grown through successive gesture, initiative, and commitments. China's rhetoric support for nationalist causes in various regions was an established feature of its Cold War era diplomacy. During the 1990s, Chinese leaders began making stronger and clearer policy statements on controversial Middle East policy questions such as Israeli-Arab peace negotiation. China's special envoys have worked to create a balance in which "generally speaking, the Arab countries show support to China on the Taiwan issue, the Tibet issue and the issue of human rights" and, "China also support the Arab countries' sovereignty, territorial integrity and legitimate national rights (Thomas Lum, 2008)." China has also set The China-Arab cooperation Forum which was established in January 2004. The Forum brings together officials from China and the member states of the Arab League, who meet to discuss opportunities for cooperation in cultural, economic, and political fields.

China's relations with Latin American and Caribbean countries have an effort to compete with Taiwan where it is needed for Taiwan's recognition. For a number of years, China with some success has been trying to woo countries away for recognizing Taiwan. From 33 of the independent countries in Latin American and Caribbean, China has official diplomatic relations with 21 while 12 nations currently maintain relations with Taiwan (Thomas Lum, 2008). On the other hand, China has signed a variety of bilateral partnership agreements with several countries in the region in order to strengthen relations. One of the cooperation is FOCALAE (East Asia-Latin American Cooperation Forum which was established in 2001 that brings together ministers and officials from 33 countries from the two regions for strengthening cooperation in such area such as education, science, technology, and culture.

Public Opinion to China

Generally, the image of China in whole regions above has positive particularly in economic issues. Southeast Asia is very welcome to China to create some cooperation. Some countries on the region see that China's influencing is beneficial for the region. Even the others see that China existence in the region potentially as new dominance economy.

Although the region likes Africa still believe and give positive response to the United States but it also views positively to China's involvement. For Africa, China is beneficial. The Chinese portray in Middle East sees that China enjoys a relative advantage in its public image and likely to be able to improve its image.

Conclusion

China's public diplomacy efforts to several part of the world are similar to what the United States has been doing. China focuses on economic, educative, and cultural cooperation. Moreover, the China's image is generally positive seen from several regional perspective its image is even better than that of the United States.

Looking at the terminology of public diplomacy, some scholars tend to argue that public diplomacy's aim is to increase a country image and gain interest. I would like to stress that public diplomacy is not only a prerogative of democratic states because non-democratic states like China also uses the same instruments although with different strategies and priorities. I do realize however, that China is still challenged with the issues dealing with democracy, human rights and the role of civil society. In addition, China also targets short-term economic priorities. Potentially, this is critical to China's public diplomacy.

References

- Fitzpatrick, Kathy R. 2007. "Advancing the New Public Diplomacy: A Public Relations Perspective". *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, Vol 2. No 3.
- Hooghe, I.D'.2007, "The Rise of China's Public Diplomacy". *Clingendael Diplomacy Papers* No. 12.
- Huafei, Qiu. 2007. *Public Diplomacy: China's Grand Foreign Strategy* PD case study: Beijing Olympics.
- Lawniczak, Ryszard. 2007. "Public Relations Role in a Global Competition "to sell" Alternative Political and Socio-Economic Models of Market Economy". *Public Relations Review* 33.
- Lum, Thomas et.al, 2008, 'Comparing Global Influence: China's and U.S. Diplomacy, Foreign Aid, Trade, and Investment in the Developing World' *CSR Report for Congress*.
- Lum, Thomas et.al. 2008. "China's Soft Power in Southeast Asia", *CSR Report for Congress*.
- Mellisen, Jan. 2005. "The New Public Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practise", in Jan Mellisen (ed), *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, Houndmills, Palgrave.
- Signitzer, Benno and Carola Wamser. 2006. "A Specific Governmental Public Relations Function", in Carl H.Baton and Vincent Hazleton (ed), *Public Relation Theory II*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associated, Inc.Publishers.
- Zhemix, Zhang. 2009. "China's Public Diplomacy Institution: Its development, Challenges and Prospects of Its Practise". *Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS)*.