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David Scott
Published online: 15 Jun 2015.

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DAVID SCOTT

During Hu Jintao's period of leadership, careful public diplomacy language was deployed by the People's Republic of China from 2000–2012 to describe the international system and China's role within it. The terms looked at in this analysis are those introduced in the 2000s to recalibrate the 'multi-polarity' [shijie duojihua] emphasis of the 1990s. These terms have been deployed within a general 'reassurance diplomacy' that emphasised concepts like 'responsible Great Power' [fuzeren da guo], 'multi-lateralism' [duobian zhuyi], 'good neighbourhood policy' [mulin zhengce], 'democratisation of international relations' [guoji guanxi mingzhuhua], 'peaceful rise' [heping jueqi], 'peaceful development' [heping fazhan] and 'harmonious world' [hexie shijie]. Ambiguities, implications, impact, and tensions surrounding these terms are considered, and China's deliberate adjustments pinpointed. China's soft power intentions emerge from its instrumentalist use of diplomatic rhetoric, though a credibility gap also emerged between actions and words by 2012.

This analysis considers the diplomacy and statecraft involved in how the People's Republic of China crafted its external message from 1990 to 2012 through its 'public diplomacy' [*gonggong waijiao*].[1] This public diplomacy strategy included the construction and deployment of an array of specific English language reassurance terms directed by China to the international community; in other words, 'public diplomacy through communication.'[2] China's rhetoric represented a further example of a 'strategic discursive public diplomacy' seen in other situations.[3] It is no coincidence that China's push for soft power advancement through its public diplomacy involved 'the power of discourse' [*huayu quan*] in the language deployed by the Chinese government to show a suitable image of China to the world.[4]

In terms of communication, the Chinese actively deployed a range of public diplomacy terms to reassure their international audience. These particularly image-related terms are trackable in both speeches by Chinese

officials and joint declarations drawn-up with other states, as well as in the state-regulated media. Media outlets like the *China Daily* are nominally independent but in practice are government-sanctioned and government-controlled. Even closer to the state are three particular publications that conduct China's public diplomacy discourse: *Xinhua*, the official state press agency; the *People's Daily*, the official newspaper of the ruling Chinese Communist Party; and the *Global Times*, an offshoot of the *People's Daily*. A further important feature is that they all provide online English-language platforms that, by definition, aim at an English-speaking international audience. China's 'online platforms have become important for public diplomacy,' thus as much as print media, they are important in understanding how and where China pitches its international message.[5]

The public diplomacy rhetoric from 1990 to 2012—the third and fourth generation leaderships provided by Jiang Zemin (1990–2002) and Hu Jintao (2002–2012)—reveals a three-fold use of language by China: descriptive-objective, aspirational-subjective, and, above all, instrumental. This analysis considers when these public diplomacy terms came about and how China pitches them—terms in China's public diplomacy lexicon all aimed in various ways at reassuring the outside world. They form part of the 'China discourse' [*zhongguo huayu*] inside and outside China on the country's strategic future within the world order.[6]

The immediate historical context for China's public diplomacy reassurance rhetoric of the 2000s was the way in which the crushing of democratisation calls at Tiananmen Square in 1989, followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, left China more prominent yet more isolated within the international system. During the 1990s, China may have emphasised 'multi-polarity' [*duojihua*] to underpin its prominence as one of the Great Powers [*da guo*], but in its own words, the People's Republic remained 'haunted by the China Threat' image derived from what was styled the 'China Threat Theory' [*zhongguo weixie lun*].[7] The reason remained simple enough: China Threat sentiments and 'perceptions of an assertive China' could lead, in a *balance of threat* logic, to a balancing against China—hence China's own on-going 'anti-encirclement struggle.'[8] Faced with this nightmare, Beijing systematically deployed a battery of related reassurance terms to counter these external sentiments and perceptions.

Such public diplomacy language was designed to improve and increase China's 'soft power' [*ruan shili*] attractiveness.[9] The Chinese government was open enough about this 'public diplomacy, which is a product of the times, as an important vehicle for the development of soft power'; consequently China sought to 'strengthen public diplomacy . . . and build a good image . . . actively guide international public opinion and help deepen the building of state soft power.'[10] In trying to shape international images, China did what other established Powers were doing, something reflected in the *People's Daily* comment that 'public diplomacy has become the main battlefield of

governments to enhance their soft power and expand their influence.'[11] In such a setting, another classification can perhaps supplement the categorisation of the 'tools of business' and the 'tools of culture' within China's soft power 'charm strategy': China's public diplomacy as a 'tool of language' used by the government.[12]

Soft power is all to do with images and perceptions. Here China's 'national image building' was activated by its 'ultrasensitivity to its less than honourable image.'[13] China wanted to shape a positive image in the world—the 'Brand China' or 'reputation management'—through appropriate and effective language.[14] Generally, concerns about 'international image' [*guoji xinxiang*] frequently appeared in Chinese publications on the rise of China.[15] Wang Yiwei argued instrumentally that, 'by creating a Chinese international image in the twenty-first century . . . public diplomacy can be the lubricant for China's rise.'[16] Hence, Li Hongmei's sense at the *People's Daily* that 'to better the international image, China needs to resort to public diplomacy . . . to play the card of public diplomacy.'[17] Her choice of the word 'card' is revealing, indicating a strategic game involving calculative strategies around public diplomacy like a card played for effect. China has been quite explicit on these image considerations, whereby 'public diplomacy will play an important role here, especially in helping with China's image-building.'[18] Wang Jiarui, minister of the International Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, stressed the importance of 'the establishment of a good international image of the CPC.'[19] Li Junru, the vice-president of the Chinese Communist Central Party School, similarly argued that faced with those who 'advocate 'theory of China threats' and distort 'China's international image,' it was 'an even more urgent work for China to build up its image of 'peaceful China."[20]

Whereas 'multi-polarity' and arrival as a 'Great Power' were the dominant paradigms in the 1990s for self-descriptions of China's role and place in the international system, official rhetoric during the 2000s subsequently pushed a greater range of public diplomacy terms. They were 'responsible big/great power' [*fuzeren da guo*], 'multi-lateralism' [*duobian zhuyi*], 'good neighbourhood policy' [*mulin zhengce*], 'democratisation of international relations' [*guoji guanxi mingzhuhua*], 'peaceful rise' [*heping jueqi*], 'peaceful development' [*heping fazhan]*, and 'harmonious world' [*hexie shijie*]. Each term requires consideration.

'Responsible big/great power' emerged in official usage at the start of the 2000s. China's growing strength had been widely commented on in the 1990s, with it increasingly considered a Great Power. Nevertheless, Beijing showed some pragmatic reluctance to use the unembellished term 'great power.' This hesitancy is explicable for practical instrumentalist reasons given the *realpolitik*, power-heavy, and perhaps hegemonic undertones of the term 'Great Power,' which could create counterproductive resentment and fears concerning China from other major and neighbouring powers. This

lay behind the caution at the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs about 'the hot air and the naive 'big power mentality' in the minds of some Chinese.' It could 'cause panic in the United States and other Western countries and make them feel the 'China threat' and [consequently] . . . mobilize forces to contain China.'[21] Faced with these potential responses, China added the prefix 'responsible' [*fuzeren*] in its diplomatic lexicon, with its connotations of being reasonable, sensible, and co-operative.[22] Hence, the phrase 'responsible Great Power' used by Xia Liping in 2001.[23] External perceptions of China remained a central concern for the government, about which the 'Chinese political elite understand the imperative of cultivating the image of a responsible player' in the international system.[24]

Micro-adjustments of language by the Chinese government continued to take place. Talk of China being a 'responsible Great Power' became more frequently nudged into official talk of China being a 'responsible big nation,' a 'big responsible country,' or a 'responsible major country.'[25] The logic was that the phrase 'big/major nation/country' sounded less threatening and less hegemonic than 'great power.' The use of such language for image purposes continued to be acknowledged by China's foreign ministers; 'China conveys an image of a responsible big country' [Tang Jiaxuan] with appropriate public diplomacy language actively and deliberately deployed during the 2000s by the Chinese government to 'build up an image of a responsible big country' [Yang Jiechi].[26] Overall, it was a question at the *People's Daily* about China's opportunity to 'shape the image of responsible big nation': 'China's image as a responsible great power . . . eases worries of neighbouring countries about the rise of China.'[27]

With regard to the term 'multilateralism,' China was cautious over adopting the term in the 1990s; with sovereignty sensitivities and Great Power sentiments leading it to instead emphasize the term 'multi-polarity.' In 2002, one assessment judged China as still pursuing 'nominal' rather than 'qualitative' multilateralism.[28] Nevertheless, there was a 'turn' towards multilateralism by China during the first decade of the new millennium.[29] It is significant that Chinese academic and policy journals from 2000 onwards 'show a gradual decline in discussion of multipolarity and a dramatic increase for multilateralism.'[30] By 2006, the *Beijing Review* was explaining that for a 'country that has risen rapidly . . . multilateral diplomacy has become a natural choice for China to cope with a complicated situation and safeguard its national interests.'[31] At the *People's Daily*, Li Hongmei was equally certain in 2009 on China's 'embrace' of multilateralism and confident that 'China's interest in multilateral diplomacy and multilateral institutions has correspondingly grown with its elevation of national strength and confidence.'[32] This is why Hu Jintao claimed in 2009, 'China has actively participated in multilateral diplomacy.' It came with a practical assertion that 'China's international status is rising and its influence is increasing,' an assertion that perhaps unwittingly indicates the instrumentalist rationale behind China's outward embrace of multilateralism?[33]

Outwardly, then, during the first decade of the new millennium, China donned a more multilateral jacket. It pursued a *ad hoc* multilateral co-operation through participation in the Six Party steering group on North Korea set up in 2003, and its navy co-operated with other navies involved in Gulf of Aden anti-piracy operations after 2008. China also joined the World Trade Organisation in 2001. At the global level, China emphasised multilateralism filtered through the United Nations [UN], 'multilateralism with the UN as its center is necessary.'[34] Hu Jintao's line emphasised the UN or, more precisely, the Security Council:' . . . we should uphold the Council's authority by adhering to multilateralism . . . by strengthening multilateral cooperation, enhancing the role of the United Nations and maintaining the authority of the Security Council in particular.'[35] From China's sovereignty-sensitive point of view, China's status as one of the five permanent members of the Security Council had the advantage of giving it key veto powers over multilateral operations sanctioned by the UN.

The image-logic for this Chinese advocacy of multilateralism was straightforward enough; it reduced outside fears of Chinese unilateralism and could reassure the international system of China's willingness to co-operate on a regular basis over international issues. Advocacy of multilateralism also had a practical power intent that the scholarship of International Relations *realism* would recognise: it could exist as a strategic calculation to restrain United States 'unilateralism.'[36] Thus China's involvement in 2009 in the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation [SCO] and the Brazil–Russia–India–China fora was explained by the *People's Daily* as 'intended to counterbalance the Western hegemony, and particularly the superpower clout of the U.S.'[37] In such settings, some outside observers have interpreted China's establishment of the Forum on China–Africa Co-operation in 2000 and the Sino–Arab Co-operation Forum in 2004 as a form of 'soft balancing.' It is a way in which 'multilateralism has come to represent an effective way for China to increase her power projection in the two regions, while side-lining direct confrontation with the superpower [United States].'[38]

Still, China's multilateralism remained problematic. Beijing's concerns to retain full 'sovereignty' [*zhuquan*] cut across multilateralism in the South China Sea dispute, where it continued to stress bilateralism rather than wider multilateralism: 'we oppose the internationalization, multilateralization, or expansion of the issue.'[39] American attempts to raise the South China Sea issue at the July 2010 Association of Southeast Asian Nations [ASEAN] Regional Forum meeting were met with Chinese dismissal; 'if this issue is turned into an international or multilateral one, it will only make matters worse . . . the best way to resolve such disputes is for countries concerned to have direct bilateral negotiations.'[40] China's multilateralism in Northeast Asia also remained in doubt with, for example, a sense there of 'the hollowness of China's ostensible and much-touted commitment to multilateralism.'[41] At a more general level, doubts also remained about how far China's general

advocacy of multilateralism represents genuine normative change or whether it is just a tactical ploy. After all, some Chinese academics reckoned that 'for China, multilateralism is more like a kind of diplomatic tool rather than a mechanism for international order.'[42] This was an overtly instrumentalist rather than normative, view of multilateralism.

With regard to the 'good neighbourhood policy,' the international uproar and isolation from developed countries resulting from the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown spurred China's stress on good neighbourliness; a consequence was that China began to pay its Asian neighbours greater diplomatic attention.[43] In 1992, the 14th National Congress made no particular mention of any 'good neighbour policy,' whereas Jiang Zemin's report to the 1997 15th National Congress emphasised that the state 'must adhere to the good neighbour policy.'[44] At the 2002 16th National Congress, there was continuing focus on China's 'good-neighbourly relationship. . . . We will step up regional cooperation and bring our exchanges and cooperation with our surrounding countries to a new height.'[45]

The concept served various purposes. As China's then prime minister put it in 2011, 'the principle of good-neighbourliness' constituted 'a policy of securing an amicable, tranquil and prosperous neighbourhood,' with instrumental benefits accruing for China's own political stability and control of its own sensitive periphery like Xinjiang.[46] This was all the more explicit at the *People's Daily*, with the argument that the "good-neighbour" policy acts as China's diplomatic guideline in the region, as China counts on a friendly neighbourhood for its sustainable development.'[47] Its design also included a reassurance mechanism to avert China-threat perceptions. Image considerations were in play at the *People's Daily* whereby China's 'good neighbourhood policy' in Southeast Asia served 'to reassure South-east Asian countries and improve its [China's] image in the region.'[48] Chinese media claims indicated the overlapping of concepts in this image-impact role about how 'Southeast Asia has become a region for China to shape its image as a responsible power.'[49] Beijing could use this concept to reassure neighbours about China and warn them against American regional behaviour. In such a double-edged vein, Chinese diplomats told ASEAN:

> Some people still do not quite believe our intention. . . . when people associate it with the behavior of some big countries in history, it is natural that they may feel a bit worried. But I want to assure you that China is not to be feared. It is a reliable neighbour. . . . It always pursues a good-neighbourly and friendly policy towards its neighbours. . . . In short, we want to be a good friend, good neighbour and good partner of ASEAN and Asian countries for ever.[50]

The repetitious nature of the phrasing was formulaic, but designed to shape a reassuring positive image and contrast Chinese behaviour with that of 'some big countries' like the United States.

Good neighbourliness also resulted in China's engagement with regional frameworks. China joined several, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation grouping in 1991, the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Programme in 1992, the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1994, SCO in 1996, the ASEAN Plus Three in 1997, the East Asia Summit in 2005, and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-plus in 2010. China also gained Observer/Dialogue Partner status with the Indian Ocean Rim-Association for Regional Cooperation and the Pacific Islands Forum in 2000, the South Asia Association for Regional Co-operation in 2005, and the Melanesian Spearhead Group in 2012. China's biggest success with its neighbourhood rhetoric was in Southeast Asia in mid-decade, which matched pragmatic win-win economic agreements. Dialogue status with ASEAN occurred in 1996, and an ASEAN–China Free Trade Agreement signed in 2002 came into effect in 2010.

Nevertheless, growing military-security frictions in the South China Sea at the end of the decade undermined the reassuring language of the 2003 Sino–ASEAN *Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea*. The Chinese media may have argued in 2011 that it had 'been sincere in developing good-neighbourly relations, promoting cooperation and seeking common development with its neighbours. It has exercised great patience and considerable restraint in dealing with the South China Sea dispute'; and that 'China firmly supports ASEAN's leading role in regional cooperation. ... China is committed to deepening practical cooperation with ASEAN.'[51] However, China's readiness during 2010 and 2011 to take assertive-coercive actions against Vietnam and the Philippines, and its continued rejection of any role for ASEAN in actually resolving the disputes, seemed to make a mockery of that decade earlier Sino–ASEAN *Declaration on Good Conduct in the South China Sea*.

With regard to the term 'democratisation of international relations,' Jiang Zemin rolled out this term in 2000, where the official message was simple enough: 'China stands for democracy in international relations, under which all countries are equal members of the international community.'[52] Hu Jintao's rhetoric on this term was soon evident, 'democratisation of international relations constitutes an essential guarantee for world peace. All countries, big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, are equal members of the international community.'[53]

One advantage for China of the term 'democratisation of international relations' was that it was a critique and external contrast with American behaviour. In such a vein, China's then foreign minister, Tang Jiaxuan, argued that it was a question of '[Chinese-fostered] democratisation in international relations, not [American-fostered] hegemony and unilateralism.'[54] Another advantage of the term was that it served as another way of getting China away from damaging elitist Great Power undertones of 'multi-polarity' through proposing the 'equal' nature of all countries in the international system. A final instrumental advantage of the term was that whereas the word 'democratisation' cast an uncomfortable light on China's domestic political

restrictions, the term 'democratisation of international relations' had a comforting stress on the sovereignty of individual states. It could thus serve as a bulwark for the continued post-Tiananmen political grip of the Chinese Communist Party [CCP] against any internationally generated pressures for democratisation and regime change.

The term 'democratisation of international relations' was also attractive and flattering for smaller powers with which China was dealing. China's population of around 1.3 billion dwarfed Moldova's population of fewer than four million. Nevertheless, their *Joint Communiqué* in 2003 still read, 'democratisation of international relations and freedom in choosing development mode should be upheld. All countries, big or small, strong or weak, poor or rich, are equal members of international society' and 'have the equal right to take part in world affairs.'[55] In a similar way, with a population of around six million, Papua New Guinea saw its 2004 *Joint Communiqué* with China declare, 'democratisation of international relations conforms to and reflects. . . . that, countries, big or small, rich or poor, strong or weak, are all equal members of the international community.'[56]

With regard to 'peaceful rise,' the influential foreign policy advisor, Zheng Bijian, wheeled out this term officially in April 2003 at the high-level Boao Forum for Asia conference; and the Chinese leadership then used it over the following months. Ultimately, the term 'peaceful rise' was a linguistic tool, admitted as much in the Chinese media in officially sanctioned comments that 'China's peaceful rise is all about soft power,' that 'the peaceful rise of China is the most favorable counterblow at the theory of 'China threat.'' and that ''peaceful rise' provides a theoretical instrument to refute scares of a 'China threat.''[57] In clearly instrumental undertones, the architect of 'peaceful rise,' Zheng Bijian, emphasised a mutually beneficial situation for China and for the world whereby 'China's peaceful rise, in particular, will contribute to the creation of a win-win situation and common prosperity.'[58] It is striking that China's premier, Wen Jiabao, explained the term 'peaceful rise' as a tool to help China's on-going national strengthening; 'in promoting China's peaceful rise, we must take full advantage of the very good opportunity of world peace to endeavor to develop and strengthen ourselves.'[59] In other words, 'peaceful rise' was, at least in part, a tool for the leadership to buy time until mid-century completion of China's 'Four Modernisations' [*si ge xiandaihua*] programme.

Though introduced with a flourish in 2003, the term 'peaceful rise' quickly encountered criticisms.[60] Inside China, robust commentators like Yan Xuetong saw it as unnecessarily restricting Beijing's use of military force in a future Taiwan crisis. Outside China, the unsettling nuances of 'rise' rather than the reassuring sense of 'peaceful' attracted greater attention. China may have reassuringly argued that its rise was a benefit and an opportunity for the world.[61] Its prime minister may have claimed that China's rise would create no problem—'the rise of China will not stand in the way of any other

country or pose a threat to any other country, or be achieved at the expense of any particular nation.'[62] However, international relations *power transition* theory and the patterns pinpointed in Paul Kennedy's magisterial 1989 work, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*, pointed to a different process in which China's 'rise' would involve in all likelihood others' 'fall.'

As an official diplomatic term, 'peaceful development'—a phrase specifically described by Qingguo Jia as a 'policy of reassurance'—replaced 'peaceful rise' in talk at the 2004 Boao Forum for Asia.[63] A sign of official public favour for 'peaceful development' were China's subsequent White Papers: 2005 *China's Peaceful Development Road* and *China's Peaceful Development* released in 2011. This was a deliberate choice by the Chinese government, flagged by the 2005 White Paper's sense that 'taking the path of peaceful development is a strategic choice made by the Chinese government' and designed to achieve 'mutual trust' and 'common development' between China and the world.[64] The 2011 White Paper reiterated the value to China that 'the central goal of China's diplomacy is to create a peaceful and stable international environment for its [China's] development.'[65] Diaspora Chinese scholars were clear on what had happened. 'China's subsequent decision to play down 'peaceful rise' in favour of 'peaceful development' is simply window dressing to remove the negative connotation of the word 'rise'; its gradual abandonment is a sign of China's sensitivity towards its international audience.'[66]

The advantage of 'peaceful development' as a term was that it focused attention in a less threatening way onto China's internal socio-economic development rather than its external political-military rise. The term 'peaceful development' was yet another reassurance term for the targeted international audience, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Qin Gang arguing, 'China's development has neither posed a threat nor undermined anybody's interests.'[67] The calculative undertones of the term were clear in Chinese sources that admitted, 'the strategic benefit of peaceful development is apparent' since the term is 'least likely to evoke strong resistance' and 'that makes it effective' as a term to deploy so as to increase China's 'projection of influence.'[68] Acknowledging this deliberate shift of terminology as externally driven, China sources admitted a deliberate shift of terminology: 'in response to the concerns of countries, such as the United States, Japan and India, over 'the rise of China,' the Chinese government has reiterated China's adherence to the path of peaceful development.'[69] Zheng Bijian recognised the image advantages in deployment of such language; 'some international communities are also concerned about the potential threat of the rise of China,' so 'China needs to build up the image being both 'peaceful' and 'civilized' in its adhering to the road of peaceful development.'[70] Li Junru similarly argued, 'China's peaceful development means that China will emerge in the world with [an] ethical and progressive image. . . . its image of 'peaceful China,'' re-enforced by the appropriate terminology.[71] His sense of

the image-related consequences of such a change of terminology implied a similar functional-instrumentalist cause and motivation by China.

However, there were some problems with the 'peaceful development' concept. The 2005 White Paper came complete with assertions that 'the road of peaceful development accords with the fundamental interests of the Chinese people. . . . China is now taking the road of peaceful development, and will continue to do so when it gets stronger in the future.'[72] The first proposition was true enough—it was in China's interests to have peaceful development to enable its peaceful rise. However, not so self-evident was the second assertion that China would 'continue' to take such a path in the future once its modernisation process was finished and it could operate from a greater position of strength. The government may have stressed its unshakable, unswerving steadfastness to maintain its peaceful development approach, but it was precisely the longer-term future resolve of Chinese governments that remained under question. Moreover, within the 'peaceful development' phrase, a stress on China's socio-economic 'development' was also problematic in some ways. China's public message may have been that China's development was an opportunity not a threat for the outside world; but this perception was not so necessarily in the United States, Europe, and India, each of which faced increasing trade deficits with China.

Hu Jintao first put forward the phrase 'harmonious world' in 2003 as a foreign policy initiative: 'the international community should cooperate fully with unremitting efforts, so as to build a harmonious world.'[73] In turn, it formed the setting for Hu's high profile speech, *Build Towards a Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity*, given at the UN World Summit in September 2005. The foreign minister, Yang Jiechi, put it forward in 2006 as a worthy concept, an 'important proposal,' whereby 'China is working together with all other countries to achieve the lofty goal of building a harmonious world.'[74] By 2007, China's diplomatic machine was trumpeting 'harmonious world: China's ancient philosophy for a new international order.'[75] Official prominence for the concept came at the 17th National Congress in 2007, which modified the CCP Constitution with an amendment on the building of 'a harmonious world characterized by sustained peace and common prosperity.'

Invocation by the Chinese diplomatic machinery of seeking a 'harmonious world' was part of a wider 'harmony' [*hexie*] discourse for China. In this discourse, the state claimed to be building a 'harmonious society' inside China and a 'harmonious world' outside, with both strands helping in regime survival. The 'harmonious world' term can certainly be seen as, yet, another reassurance term serving to deflect criticism of China's international rise. The *People's Daily* saw clearly that "Harmonious World' helps rebut 'China Threat" theory.[76] It was also used to differentiate China from other types of overbearing big Powers; 'our philosophy on building a harmonious world . . . is in response to questions raised by the international community

on where China is headed . . . China's declaration should set a good example for the rest of the world, especially other big powers' like the United States.[77]

Instrumental undertones were apparent with China stressing 'harmonious world.' Hao Su defined the term as reactive and practical, 'the Chinese government has put forward a series of theories and principles to guide Chinese diplomacy, most of which were aimed at handling threats and challenges of the time.' Flowing from this, ''harmonious world' is China's first conceptual illustration of a future world order, which not only embraces abundant concepts and theories, but is a concrete strategic design with maneuverability.'[78] The 'harmonious world' concept had an undoubted 'pragmatic' instrumental edge for Shi Yinhong, the director of the Center on American Studies at Renmin University, who saw 'the harmonious world theory undoubtedly advancing . . . soft power' for China.[79] By the end of 2006, stalwarts like Yan Xuetong were talking in image terms of 'harmonious world-oriented diplomacy' as something whereby 'China's own national interests have also been materialized on a broader scale with its positive image and international status increasing globally.'[80] This instrumental use for smoothing China's rise was why Chinese commentators like Ding Sheng considered 'harmonious world' as 'one of the most popular lexicons for talking about Beijing's ideal of international order in the age of China's rise.'[81]

There were, however, some problematic areas surrounding the concept. It brought with it claims for tolerance and enhancement of dialogue amongst diverse civilisations. The sense of civilisational diversity meant that the 'harmonious world' concept did not, for China, involve or include universal standards of human rights, especially when it came to questions of liberal democracy norms. Yet such a rejection of human rights universalism, behind the wall of sovereignty, damaged China's image outside the country. The 'harmonious world' concept had other problematic areas. Critics pointed out that China's stress on earlier harmony-norms distorted its conflictual and at times aggressive history.[82] A rise in China's assertiveness late in the first decade of the millennium generated a discordant rather than harmonious undercurrent. The future was also problematic. Shi Yinhong may have extolled the strategic deployment of the 'harmonious world' concept: 'it is not likely that a wise Chinese government would discard this strategy in the future, unless changes take place in the landscape of world politics.'[83] However, his reassuring assumption begged the question as to 'future' possible changes. The very landscape of world politics is more than likely to change as China gains more hard power military strength and generates disharmony rather than harmony in the international system. It is also interesting that within China, from an explicitly International Relations realist theory standpoint, the chief editor of *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Yan Xuetong, argued in 2012, 'we realists don't believe the world can be harmonious.'[84]

What does this say about China's public diplomacy rhetoric from 1990 to 2012? On-going Chinese monitoring, adjustments, and calibration of its public diplomacy language was apparent. These adjustments were further indications of the importance of public language formulations in China's foreign policy. Various couplings and adjustments of public diplomacy rhetoric between 1990 and 2012 are thus:

- Multi-polarity   →   Multilateralism, Good Neighbourhood Policy
- Great Power   →   Responsible Great/Large Power/State/Nation
- Democratisation   →   Democratisation of International Relations
- Peaceful Rise   →   Peaceful Development
- Harmonious Society   ↔   Harmonious World

With regard to 'multilateralism' and 'multi-polarity,' the former follows in time from the latter in the sense that multilateralism became more noticeably evoked after 2000—in the 1990s, it was multi-polarity. China continues to employ multi-polarity with other major Powers like Russia and India, but multilateralism possessed some advantages for China as a term for co-operation with a wider range of countries and organisations in the early 2000s. Around China's periphery, multilateralism further pushed China's 'good neighbourhood policy' and involvement in regional initiatives. The term 'responsible' prefixed 'Great Power': at times, 'great' was substituted with 'large' and 'Power with 'state/nation.' These were all ways of tempering images of traditional Great Power arrogance. In turn, following the regime crisis seen in the turbulent events surrounding the 1989 crushing of democratisation calls at Tiananmen Square, demands for domestic 'democratisation' in China were subsequently countered by China's own appeals for external democratisation of the international system through the phrase 'democratisation of international relations.' The phrase 'peaceful rise' retained its component of 'peaceful,' but had the challenging word 'rise' replaced by 'development.' Finally, Chinese calls for domestic stability in the shape of a 'harmonious society' accepting the continuing leadership of the CCP were matched by Beijing's calls for external stability in the shape of a 'harmonious world' that would not seek to intervene against China and push for regime change.

Ironically, as China's new leadership settled into power during 2013, a retrospective look at the 'harmonious world' concept appeared in the *Beijing Review*. It asked the question, 'Hu Jintao's 2005 concept of a harmonious international society was interesting in terms of international relations, but who really understands it?'; to which the answer was 'foreign diplomats don't understand this ['harmonious world' concept]. It has to be explained in a different way, and even translated differently.'[85] Another view suggests instead, however, that it was not foreign diplomats misunderstanding either

the claims surrounding or meaning of the harmonious world concept. The problem for China lay in many foreign diplomats not taking it seriously as a genuine expression of China's normative values. The danger for China is that a Sino-centric sense of superiority and self-righteousness deafens the government to what others perceive and think about China.

It points to a functional test. If Beijing's public diplomacy rhetoric was being crafted to improve China's image, then questions arise: Did it succeed? Did it have the desired effect on international opinion? The Pew *Global Attitudes Surveys* from 2002 to 2012 permit such image considerations; they generally show a deteriorating Chinese image in the Asia-Pacific and the West.[86] Here, the paradox is that although Beijing deployed a range of reassurance rhetoric from 2002 to 2012, China's image continued to deteriorate during that decade with widespread 'perceptions of an assertive China.'[87] The moral, then, is that public diplomacy rhetoric only goes so far and needs policies and actions to cap it. Where there is discrepancy between public diplomacy rhetoric and diplomacy in its practical form of policies and actions, a credibility gap opens up between words and deeds. The discussion of the 'credibility talk in public diplomacy,' raised with regard to Israel's diplomatic rhetoric, is just as relevant for discussion of the impact of China's diplomatic rhetoric for its international audience.[88] It remains significant that in a classic 1970 study of *The Logic of Images in International Relations*, and of statements of behaviour ['indices'], states ran the danger of 'getting caught manipulating indices,' with a consequent credibility gap opening up as actions speak louder than words.[89] The old adage that 'words are cheap' produced the argument that diplomatic rhetoric gives states some 'leeway to project images on the cheap,' but a leeway in matching language against actions with discrepancies then affects the credibility of the language.[90] Chinese rhetoric ultimately became counter-productive in the light of this credibility gap for many of its neighbours and the West. China's advocacy of such reassuring diplomatic terms, when its diplomatic actions seemed to many coercive and non-assuring, could appear as disingenuous arrogance.

Finally, there is the issue of how China's readiness to coin new public diplomacy terms was evident under Xi Jinping's Fifth Generation leadership after 2012. Whilst maintaining the reassurance rhetoric from the previous decade, introducing other additional terms occurred such as 'New Type of Great Power Relations' [*xin xing daguo guanxi*]. It seemed to indicate a willing acceptance by the new Chinese leadership openly to project China as a 'Great Power,' and it was a concept that China said would involve recognition by other Great Powers of its 'core interests' [*hexin liyi*] in the Asia-Pacific. This new term had a different more assertive undertone than the previous 'Responsible Great Country' catchphrase deployed in the previous decade; it would involve regional leadership and indeed potential hegemonism by China. The term also further undermines some of the credibility of the assurance rhetoric that had previously preached 'anti-hegemonism' [*fan ba*] and 'good neighbourhood policy.'

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David Scott, davidscott366@outlook.com, delivered postgraduate modules on China in the international system at Brunel University for many years till retiring in January 2015. A prolific writer, he is the author of three related books on China's international standing; namely *China and the International System 1840–1949* (2008); *China Stands Up. The PRC and the International System* (2007); and '*The Chinese Century'? The Challenge to Global Order* (2008). China-related articles have appeared in various journals like *Asia Europe Journal, Asia-Pacific Review, Asian Security, Asian Survey, Geopolitics, International Relations, and Journal of World-Systems Research*.