

**Chinese Soft Power and Public Diplomacy:  
An Analysis of China's New Diaspora Engagement  
Policies in the Xi Era**

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Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania


April 2014

## Knowledge-Net for a Better World

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## Chinese Soft Power and Public Diplomacy: An Analysis of China's New Diaspora Engagement Policies in the Xi Era

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*To strengthen China's soft power, the country needs to build its capacity in international communication, construct a communication system, better use the new media and increase the creativity, appeal and credibility of China's publicity. The stories of China should be well told, voices of China well spread, and characteristics of China well explained.*  
— Xi Jinping<sup>1</sup>

THE GROWING ROLE THAT CHINA IS PLAYING IN GLOBAL ECONOMY, INTERNATIONAL SECURITY, AND OTHER countries' calculation of their national interests has caused policymakers, academics, and the media around the world to take note of the impact of China's new ascendancy on world peace and international order. There has been a more or less consistent belief that a rising China spells trouble to the existent Western-dominated international order (Goldstein, 1997; Johnston, 2003; Glasner and Medeiros, 2007; Buzan 2010). Since the new generation of communist leaders came to power in 2012, many Western powers and Asian states have become increasingly wary of China's growing assertiveness in both foreign and defence policies. Besides its eye-catching development of blue-water and space warfare capabilities such as the rollout of its new stealth fighter and aircraft carrier, China has become ostensibly hawkish in its handling of territorial disputes with Asian neighbours. In addition, as an authoritarian state on the rise, communist China's policy orientations have always raised doubts for liberal democratic states. Against this backdrop, Chi-

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from Chinese President Xi Jinping's speech 'Elevate Soft Power, Realize the Chinese Dream', in the New Year's edition of *People's Daily* (Overseas Edition). See Xi 2014.



na's new communist leaders face an uphill battle to communicate with international audiences, promote its national image, and advance its national interests.

Soft power, an important conceptual approach to understanding a state's foreign policy, has been embraced by China's policymakers and applied to the country's many foreign policy initiatives during the last two decades (Kurlantzick, 2008; Ding 2008; Barr 2011). Harvard professor Joseph Nye (2010) has argued that government-led international communication can contribute to the country's public diplomacy in three communication dimensions — daily, strategic, and long-lasting. After the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989, China's communist leaders continued to emphasize the role of public diplomacy in developing and wielding Chinese soft power. The 41-million Chinese diaspora, including both foreign citizens of Chinese ancestry and Chinese citizens living abroad, has become an increasingly important factor in China's public diplomacy.<sup>2</sup> During the past few years, China's communist leaders have adopted a series of new diaspora engagement policies to wield Chinese soft power and communicate China's ideas to the outside world.

Through conceptual discussions and policy analyses, this article examines China's new diaspora engagement policies in the Xi era. First, this article presents conceptual discussions of the Chinese diaspora, the soft power concept, and the needs of a rising China for public diplomacy. It is argued that while China is pursuing firmer projection of its hard power, the new communist leaders need to actively wield Chinese soft power and effectively engage the Chinese diaspora with its improved public diplomacy. Second, this article examines the evolution of the communist government's policies and practices in dealing with the Chinese diaspora from the perspective of public diplomacy. Based on historical and policy comparisons, it is argued that China's new diaspora engagement policies need to fit China's new vision of public diplomacy. Third, this article explicates the three new diaspora engagement policies in the Xi era — new immigration reform to win the minds and hearts of overseas Chinese, new international communication tactics to improve China's national image, and new cultural and education campaigns to shape the cultural identity of overseas Chinese.

## **Chinese Diaspora, Public Diplomacy, and Soft Power**

The Chinese have been involved in international migration for centuries, but large-scale emigration is a product of China's modern history and its focus on three periods. In the nineteenth century, Chinese emigrants, primarily peasants from Guangdong and Fujian provinces, went abroad for purposes of employment, taking jobs as labourers, traders, and farmers. As the Middle Kingdom became weak due to internal wars and external invasion, the trickle of Chinese emigration widened into a continuous stream until 1949. In this period, Chinese emigrants' primary destina-

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<sup>2</sup> This author defines the Chinese Diaspora or overseas Chinese as people of Chinese birth or descent who live outside mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau.



tion was Southeast Asia. From the 1950s to the early 1990s, tens of thousands of ethnic Chinese quitted Greater China and Southeast Asia in the wake of continuous political instability in the region.<sup>3</sup> During this period, Chinese emigrants' new destinations of choice shifted to North America, Europe, Latin America, and Oceania.<sup>4</sup> As of the end of 2012, about 30.7 million overseas Chinese lived in Asia; nearly 7.7 million lived in the Americas; about 1.6 million lived in Europe; about 1 million lived in Oceania; and about one-quarter million lived in Africa (OCAC, 2013). As the destinations of Chinese emigration diversified, Chinese diaspora identities became ever more complicated due to the geographic and political complexity of the evolving diasporic communities around the world.

In the twenty-first century, ethnic Chinese have become a central part of global migration flows that have arisen in response to technological, economic, and immigration policy changes in Western societies. Since 1999, the growth of the overseas Chinese population has remained roughly 1.8 per cent annually and as of the end of 2012 its total population reached 41.35 million (OCAC 2013). In this period, there were two major changes for Chinese emigration. First, new Chinese immigrants who originated in mainland China began to occupy a dominant position in the Chinese overseas population. Second, new Chinese immigrants and second- and third-generation overseas Chinese are better educated and more highly skilled than previous generations of immigrants. Most new Chinese immigrants are students-turned-migrants or emigrating professionals and their family members (Ding, 2007). This stands in contrast to the widely held image of the unskilled *coolie*, which was symbolic of previous waves of Chinese emigration.

As China becomes a lodestone in international economic development, transnational cultural exchanges, and world security cooperation, more and more overseas Chinese have striven to re-embrace their ethnic and cultural identities. As noted by Wei-ming Tu (1994, p.18), a renowned China scholar, 'the ubiquitous presence of the Chinese state — its awe-inspiring physical size, its long history, and the numerical weight of its population — continues to loom large in the psycho-cultural constructs of diaspora Chinese'. In the global information age, the bonds between overseas Chinese and their ethnic motherland have been growing stronger as certain attributes of the Westphalian state system fall away, revealing the rise of transnational identities and dual loyalty (Cohen, 1996; Sassen, 2002). These psychological and cultural bonds have played major roles in serving as low-intensity transmitters of Chinese culture, traditions, language—and even China's political values—to external communities (Ding and Saunders, 2006). Therefore, they will provide China's communist government with new opportunities and resources for public diplomacy.

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<sup>3</sup> Greater China includes mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau.

<sup>4</sup> Statistics of Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission (OCAC), Republic of China (Taiwan), i <sup>4</sup> According to the statistics of Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission (OCAC), Republic of China (Taiwan), overseas Chinese who reside outside Asia has jumped from 5 per cent of total Chinese diaspora in early 1960s to about 25 per cent in recent years with the United States as the largest non-Asia resident country.



The communist government needs and benefits from engaging the Chinese diaspora in the country's post-Mao modernization. China's decades of Reform and Opening Up has changed the country from a marginal participant in the Western-dominated world system to a focal point in Pacific Asia's globalization processes, which requires Beijing to adopt a mode of competition between nations for loyalties of dispersed populations. Until the middle of the 1990s, as it emerged from the shadow of the Tiananmen Crackdown, China's communist leaders designed new statecraft to re-invigorate economic reform and improve its national image. During the last two decades, the communist leaders have continued to view soft power as indispensable for the country's efforts to increase comprehensive national strength (*zonghe guoli*) and regain its status as a great power. Among China's political elites there is the consensus that comprehensive national strength should include not only hard power — a form of national power based on a state's military might and economic prowess — but also soft power, a form of national power based on a state's political appeal and cultural attractiveness (Xinhua, 2007).<sup>5</sup>

According to Nye (2002, pp. 8-12), in terms of power resources, soft power is a state's attributes that produce appeal or attraction. The ongoing economic globalization and information revolution have transformed domestic and international politics significantly. While military preparedness and industrial capacity can no longer buy much leverage in international relations, soft power has become a more important approach for states to deal with many unprecedented challenges. In the global information age when the capacity to transmit information has become trivial, the states that can better develop and wield soft power are always those who have the capacity to attract attention to their dissemination of information and ideas. Therefore, the public diplomacy of the twenty-first century depends not only on a combination of a state's soft power resources, but also its capability for public communication. In his discussion on public diplomacy, Nye (2010) argues that government-led international communication can contribute to a state's public diplomacy in three dimensions: (1) to explain the context of domestic and foreign policy decisions in daily communication; (2) to develop a set of simple themes in strategic communication; and (3) to promote scholarship and cultural exchanges, training, seminars, conferences, and access to media channels in order to establish lasting relationships with key individuals over many years or even decades.

As global diasporas attain their transitional identities and dual loyalties in the global information age, their relationship with their motherland has become increasingly complicated. As states are forming and transforming diasporas, so diasporas are also reshaping states. Against this backdrop, the diaspora engagement policies can be defined in three categories.

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<sup>5</sup> According to China's official news agency, Xinhua News Agency, the concept of soft power has been widely accepted by Chinese political elites. '[Soft power] has once again emerged as a hot topic at this year's annual sessions of China's parliament and top political advisory body. Such an expression of soft power can be found in government agendas and suggestions offered by legislators and political advisors who are here attending the country's two most important annual political events'. See Xinhua 2007.



Capacity building policies, aimed at discursively producing a state-centric ‘transnational national society’, and developing a set of corresponding state institutions; extending rights to the diaspora, thus playing a role that befits a legitimate sovereign; and extracting obligations from the diaspora, based on the premise that emigrants owe loyalty to the legitimate sovereign.(Gamlen, 2006)

Based on these definitions, a state has myriad ways to engage its diasporas in a wide range of formal and informal manners, from attracting migrant remittances and investments, launching cultural and educational exchange programs, establishing government or nongovernment diaspora institutions, implementing friendly exit/entry laws and regulations, to strengthening international broadcasting toward diaporaic populations.

Since many overseas Chinese possess a sojourner mentality and lack a sense of permanence in their host countries, they cherish their various connections with China and being recognized by their ethnic motherland. Throughout history, overseas Chinese have provided financial assistance through remittance and investment, and have supported every major event for political and social change in their motherland. To a great extent, overseas Chinese have become one of most active players in the globalization of Chinese economy and politics. Against this backdrop, it is imperative for the communist government to engage the Chinese diaspora in its public diplomacy, which aims to protect and advance the country’s national interests. In the age of competition between nations for loyalties of dispersed populations, China’s diaspora engagement policies need to focus on promoting solidarity with, concerns for, and influences on the Chinese diaspora who are more likely to be persuaded and attracted by the appeal of Chinese soft power.

## **Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Engagement Policies in China: Past and Present**

In ancient times, China’s governors rarely made efforts to interact with the Chinese diaspora. Both the Ming and Qing governments had restrictive laws to limit or ban international emigration and trade, although the number of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia had increased to almost two million by the end of the nineteenth century (Bolt, 2000, p. 38). Until the period of the Republic of China (1912-1949), the Kuomintang (KMT) government made efforts to engage overseas Chinese. The KMT government’s diaspora engagement policies aimed to attain political and financial support from overseas Chinese, particularly in its competition with the Japanese-supported collaborationist government during the anti-Japan war and with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the Chinese civil war. Based on the principle of *jus sanguinis*, the KMT government claimed that the Chinese abroad were nationals of the Republic of China and they should be loyal to China and serve the interests of the Chinese government (Fitzgerald, 1970). In 1932, the KMT government formally established a special government institution — the Overseas Chinese Affairs Council (OCAC) — which was in charge of mobilizing, managing, and communicating with all overseas Chinese around the world. In the Republic of China’s Constitution en-



acted in 1946, the KMT government even listed overseas Chinese affairs among its fundamental national policies.

After the CCP came to power in mainland China, Mao Zedong and his deputy Zhou Enlai faced enormous challenges in handling the relations between China and overseas Chinese, specifically in Southeast Asia. On the one hand, their overseas Chinese policies needed to serve the overriding interests of the communist government's foreign policies—to break down the political and economic isolation imposed by the Western states. On the other hand, Mao's ideology-driven international strategy and the strong bonds between overseas Chinese and their ethnic motherland did not sit well with those post-independence governments in the region. Those governments had always suspected the political loyalty of overseas Chinese and even regarded them as subversive forces threatening their political rule. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), those domestic overseas Chinese were labelled as 'bourgeoisie' or 'capitalists' and were often persecuted; any kind of contact between Chinese citizens and overseas Chinese was thought of as 'counter-revolutionary' behaviours; Chinese citizens who had an overseas Chinese background were under constant watch and suspected as 'agents of imperialism'. Although overseas Chinese affairs were considered by Mao and Zhou important to China's national interest, China's overseas Chinese policies had gone through a tortuous and disastrous pathway in the Mao era, failing to contribute to China's public diplomacy.

Only after ideology-driven politics was abandoned in the late 1970s, the post-Mao communist leaders came to recognize and nurture the important role of overseas Chinese in China's economic modernization and foreign relations. Under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the communist government determined to correct the mistakes made during the Cultural Revolution and pay more attention to overseas Chinese affairs (Chang, 1980). In 1978, a new administrative office — Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council (OCAO) — was established to protect the legitimate rights and interests of the overseas Chinese; enhance their unity and friendship; promote media and language schools among them; and accelerate the cooperation and exchanges of the overseas Chinese with China in terms of economy, science, culture, and education.<sup>6</sup> Li Xiannian, the vice chairman of CCP and vice premier of the State Council then, became the first director of OCAO. Additionally, many former organizations that were set up to engage overseas Chinese but abolished during the Cultural Revolution were re-established.

In the first two decades of the post-Mao reforms, the opening of China and the ensuing integration of the Chinese economy into the global economy has led to an accelerated pace of Chinese emigration to the developed countries. As a result, China's overseas Chinese began to shift from focusing on the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia to engaging the overseas Chinese around the world. From attracting the remittance and donations of overseas Chinese to welcoming their direct investments, the post-Mao diaspora engagement policy has continuously adjusted in order to

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<sup>6</sup> See the OCAO's detailed functions in the OCAO's official website. Available from <http://www.gqb.gov.cn/node2/node3/node22/node23//index.html> [Accessed 10 March 2014].





serve the state's economic modernization. Besides tapping the financial resources of overseas Chinese, the communist government also launched many policies and projects to encourage overseas Chinese talents to visit and even return to China to facilitate scientific exchange and technology transfer. Since the end of the Cold War, China's national image has been constantly haunted by its human rights records and the China Threat Theory. Against this backdrop, overseas Chinese have become a valuable platform for China's national image management. The opportunities and resources provided by the Chinese diaspora to China's public diplomacy were highlighted in the following remarks of Jia Qinlin, a former highest-level communist leader.

[T]he first is that overseas Chinese can live harmoniously with local people and actively push forward the development and progress of the country they live in. The second is that China welcomes overseas Chinese, with their own advantages, to take part in China's modernization in various forms. The third is that overseas Chinese can be united closely in opposing 'Taiwan independence' secessionist activities in any form, and continuously promote personnel, economic and cultural exchanges across the Straits so as to push for an early realization of China's reunification. The fourth is that overseas Chinese, while learning from other countries, can carry forward and promote Chinese culture. The fifth is that overseas Chinese can help promote people-to-people friendship between China and other countries in the world.<sup>7</sup>

Obviously, the new generations of communist leaders in China understand that the success of China's diaspora engagement policies depends on both the appeal of Chinese soft power and the state's capability to communicate with overseas Chinese. In many aspects, China's development and projection of soft power is equivalent to its efforts to strengthen domestic and international broadcasting. First, by trumpeting China's own soft power resources such as its cultural attractiveness and its economic development model, the communist government can persuade Chinese people to accept its political legitimacy. Second, by presenting the appeal of Chinese soft power, China aims to improve its national image and to challenge any biased foreign media coverage of China. Third, by talking up China's soft power development and wielding, China wants to maintain a peaceful international environment for its economic modernization. In the past few years, China's soft power campaigns have been overshadowed by its continuous military build-up and growing assertiveness in handling territorial disputes. There has been new wariness from other great powers as well as tumultuous relationships between China and some Asian neighbours. Many wonder if Xi Jinping will stick to China's international strategy established by his predecessors, for China to rise peacefully to become a responsible great power. As a pragmatic policy maker, Xi's international strategy can be interpreted as firm but flexible, which is a prudent projection of Chinese hard power along with active wielding of Chinese soft power. On the one

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<sup>7</sup> At the opening ceremony of the 9th World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention held on 15 September 2007, Jia Qinglin voiced his five-point hope for overseas Chinese. The convention, with the theme of 'To win with peace, harmony and cooperation and to benefit the world', was aimed to promote exchanges among global ethnic Chinese.  
[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-09/15/content\\_6729877.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-09/15/content_6729877.htm)



hand, Xi is eager to build his domestic support by drumming up his nationalistic discourse and advancing China's core national interest via shrewd manipulation of power politics. On the other hand, Xi is willing to utilize effective public diplomacy measures to brand China as a peaceful and responsible great power and create a friendly international environment for China's continuous and smooth modernization.

On 19 August 2013, Xi Jinping made an important speech at the National Publicity and Ideology Work Conference. Although a transcript of the speech has never been made public, some high-level government officials have tried to explicate Xi's ideas on foreign publicity. In his article published in *People's Daily*, Cai Mingzhao (2013), the current director of the State Council Information Office (SCIO), describes Xi's vision of China's new public diplomacy in detail. According to Cai, the core idea in Xi's vision of China's public diplomacy is that China must develop its own messages about itself to be able to better set the terms of international communication, rather than being forced to discuss itself in a vocabulary designed and controlled by others. Cai notes that China's new public diplomacy needs to fit China's own cultural and political values; focus on explaining China's own views and policies to the outside world; and pay attention to foreign audiences' thoughts, habits, and concerns. Since overseas Chinese have become increasingly important to China's public diplomacy, what new diaspora engagement policies based on Xi's new vision of China's public diplomacy can Beijing adopt to communicate with and mobilize Chinese Diasporas around the world?

In a special interview in March 2014, He Yafei, the deputy director of OCAO, talked about the new policies in China's diaspora engagement. According to He, China's public diplomacy that targets the Chinese diaspora must incorporate the ideas and practices of traditional public diplomacy; focus on cultural and education exchanges, international broadcasting, and the passing on of Chinese culture and language; and make a systematic and institutional approach to interacting with overseas Chinese. He also took note of how overseas Chinese can contribute to China's public diplomacy. For example, more than 20,000 overseas Chinese schools, 20,000 overseas Chinese communal groups, 1,000 overseas Chinese media organizations, and numerous Chinatowns, Chinese restaurants, Chinese medicine clinics have already become important platforms for transmitting Chinese culture in host countries. Moreover, overseas Chinese have possessed strong economic and technological strength, mature marketing networks, wide-ranging political connections and business contacts, and fast-growing communication and media resources. He believes that through diaspora engagement policies, the communist government can conduct its public diplomacy to shape the identity of Chinese diasporas and their descendants over many years or even decades (CNS, 2014).



## China's New Diaspora Engagement Policies in the Xi Era

The communist government may adopt various diaspora engagement policies, but those policies will not contribute to China's public diplomacy if they are not addressed directly to the needs of the targeted populations. Furthermore, China's approaches to and instruments of public diplomacy will not become successful if they lack effective means of communicating them to the people for whom they are intended. Based on Xi's new vision of public diplomacy, the communist government has adopted a series of new diaspora engagement policies in the past few years.

### Strengthening International Broadcasting by Managing Global Chinese Media

International broadcasting is always an important component of public diplomacy. Since the mid-1990s, the communist government has made consistent efforts to increase its competitiveness in international broadcasting. According to David Shambaugh (2007), China's post-Mao foreign publicity is oriented towards four principal missions: (1) to tell China's story to the world, publicize Chinese government policies and perspectives, and promote Chinese culture abroad; (2) to counter what is perceived to be hostile foreign propaganda (such as the so-called China threat theory); (3) to counter Taiwan independence proclivities and promote unification; and (4) to propagate China's foreign policy.

More specifically, China's foreign publicity with Chinese characteristics aims to strengthen its international broadcasting capability in various venues. First, the Chinese government and its state-owned enterprises have hired foreign lobbyists, brand consultants, and policy strategists to convey their ideas and advance their interests worldwide. State-owned Chinese media like Xinhua News Agency, China Radio International, China Central Television, and *China Daily* have stepped up their efforts to improve their international status and broadcasting capacity. In a sweeping liberalization of its reporting rules, the communist government lifted its decades-old restrictions on foreign journalists at the end of 2006. Furthermore, Beijing has comprehensively utilized its state-controlled media outlets, including the Internet, to publicize its own views on politically sensitive issues in China.

Besides all the above efforts of spending money and allocating resources to build world-class international broadcasting hardware, the communist government has paid more attention to improving the software of China's international broadcasting. According to Cai's (2013) explication of President Xi's vision of public diplomacy, [t]o strengthen the construction of international dissemination capacity, we must innovate 'marching out' methods ... move topic planning, production, marketing, distribution and other such segments into target countries and regions, progressively realize the indigenization of organs, the indigenization of personnel and the indigenization of content, orient dissemination products and dissemination targets even more precisely, provide



products and services that conform to the demands of foreign audiences, and shape ‘indigenized’ expressions of the Chinese voice.”<sup>8</sup>

Under this guidance, the communist government has made great efforts to partake of and even manage global Chinese media. The transnational identity and dual loyalty of the Chinese diaspora has always been important channels for China to communicate with overseas Chinese for centuries. As a new generation of overseas Chinese grow up and new Chinese immigrants join in, these cosmopolitan ethnic Chinese struggle to maintain their cultural and ethnic identities (Ding, 2007). In their diasporic communities, Chinese newspapers, magazines, Web sites, TV stations, and other media have all emerged as new communication pathways for Chinese culture and language. These communication pathways contribute to the establishment of a global Chinese identity with shared values while simultaneously elevating the level of cultural *Chineseness* abroad and creating new forms of transnational modernity among ethnic Chinese beyond China’s borders (Pieke, 2004). Therefore, overseas Chinese cultural and communal activities have contributed to China’s international broadcasting.

In order to improve its software of public diplomacy, particularly indigenizing its international broadcasting, China’s government-owned media organizations have actively utilized the instruments that directly target their intended audiences. For example, the CCTV-4 channel, an international Chinese channel launched since 1992 and targeting overseas Chinese, has three different time-shifted feeds—Beijing Time, Greenwich Mean Time, and Eastern Standard Time. This schedule enables overseas Chinese to watch the same programs that mainland Chinese people watch on a similar daylight schedule. Since 2004, China Central Television has cooperated with DISH Network, one of the leading satellite television services in the United States, to provide overseas Chinese with the Great Wall TV Package featuring twenty-three Chinese TV channels. Additionally, the free-to-air satellite signals of CCTV-News, a twenty-four-hour English news channel, can be received by more than 85 million viewers in over 100 countries and regions. The CCTV-E and CCTV-F channels are two specific international channels that target Spanish-speaking and French-speaking audiences around the world. In recent years, through its network TV platform (CNTV), CCTV has added Arabic, Russian, and Korean TV channels. Launched in early 2012, CCTV America has highlighted China’s new vision of public diplomacy. Aiming to mimic the success of Al-Jazeera, CCTV America is based in Washington DC and employs many veteran American journalists.

Moreover, many international Chinese media events sponsored by the Chinese government underlie Beijing’s efforts to incorporate overseas Chinese and their international broadcasting resources into its own public diplomacy. Since it was launched in 2001, the Chinese government has successfully organized the World Chinese Media Forum on seven occasions. In September

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted from the translation of Cai Mingzhao’s article provided by Rogier Creemers’s China Copyright and Media blog. Available from <http://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2013/10/10/chinas-foreign-propaganda-chief-outlines-external-communication-priorities/#comments> [Accessed 10 March 2014].



2013, 450 overseas representatives of Chinese media organizations from fifty-eight countries and regions participated in the seventh World Chinese Media Forum with the theme of ‘Chinese dream – the changing global situation and the new mission for Chinese Media’. In its concluding document — *Qindao Declaration* — all forum participants agreed, ‘We hereby call on the media in China cooperating with overseas Chinese media to act as heirs of the Chinese culture and spirit, and tellers of “Chinese stories” in the world, and to create a fair, balanced, and rational environment of international public opinions’ (CNS, 2013).

According to a survey report, many owners and editors of overseas Chinese media organizations want to maintain close ties with the Chinese government and state media entities that can provide various economic and political benefits ranging from preferential treatment for business initiatives in China, to advertising from state-owned firms, to becoming delegates in China’s high-level political organizations. Moreover, in the fifth World Chinese Media Forum held in September 2009, the communist government spearheaded a new organization, the World Chinese-Language Media Cooperative Alliance, in order to increase cooperation among Chinese-language media and widen their influence. The new organization has been headed by Liu Beixian, the director of the China News Agency, which is the second largest official news agency in China. As of August 2013, the organization had recruited 335 overseas Chinese media organizations to become members and organized seven training sessions for overseas Chinese media organizations’ owners, editors, and journalists. Therefore, with China’s promise of political and economic incentives and deliberate professional training and even ideological indoctrination, the overseas Chinese media organizations are being indigenized to become an international branding force for China’s public diplomacy.

## Reforming Immigration-related Laws and Regulations to Win Hearts and Minds

In December 1956, in his talk with a group of overseas Chinese in Rangoon, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai persuaded overseas Chinese to choose local nationality (Fitzgerald, 1970).<sup>9</sup> This policy change exemplified the principle that the communist government had always subordinated its overseas Chinese policy to its foreign policy. In addition, the tragic treatment that many domestic overseas Chinese experienced in the Mao era had alienated many overseas Chinese. From the anti-colonial movements in the nineteenth century, to the anti-Japan war in the 1930s and 1940s, to post-Mao economic modernization, the overseas Chinese, in myriad ways, provided their enormous financial and political support to their motherland. However, while facing their dilemma of ethnic and political identities, overseas Chinese feel that they are still being treated with official suspicion and individual disdain today (Barmé, 2010). To utilize the Chinese diaspora in

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<sup>9</sup> Premier Zhou Enlai announced that overseas Chinese ‘who acquire the nationality of the countries of residence by voluntary decision and according to local laws, are no longer Chinese people.’ See Fitzgerald, 1970.



its public diplomacy, the communist government needs new engagement policies to win their hearts and minds. Since 2012, new communist leaders in China have introduced a series of new entry/exit laws and regulations to reform the country's out-dated immigration system.

As he described America's soft power resources, Nye (2004: pp. 36, 42) credited the supremacy of American soft power to the country's technological leadership at the global level. The American government's friendly immigration policies, to a great extent, have facilitated academic and scientific exchanges between the US and other countries, enhancing American soft power. The communist government's new entry/exit laws and regulations that are more in the line with international standards and practices of more developed countries can be considered as part of the government's soft power campaigns to broaden China's openness and increase its attractiveness. After three decades of economic growth, which relied heavily on increasing the number of low-wage and low-skilled workers involved in production, it has become critically important for China to build up its own technological leadership. Significant numbers of highly skilled foreigners have been participating in China's economic modernization, but China still lags behind in producing, attracting, and retaining highly skilled professionals and high-value talents. According to the Global Talent Competitiveness Index, China ranked 47th among the 103 countries covered by the 2013 study (Lanvin and Evans, 2013).

The new immigration law — Exit and Entry Administration Law of the People's Republic of China — was adopted by the National People's Congress on 30 June 2012 and became effective on 1 July 2013. After the new immigration law was adopted, the communist government accelerated its pace of drafting new administration regulations in accord with the new law. On 22 July 2013, the State Council promulgated new Regulations on the Administration of the Entry and Exit of Aliens (RAEEA), which came into effect on 1 September 2013. The RAEEA covers foreigners' visas, entry, exit, temporary residence, and permanent residence as well as investigation penalties and deportation. With new immigration laws and regulations, the communist government is joining a trend among governments worldwide toward adoption of selective migration policies favouring immigration of the highly skilled. Beijing has clearly entered into this global competition for talent, particularly overseas Chinese talents (Ding and Koslowski, 2014).

Among those overseas Chinese talents targeted by the communist government, most are Chinese students or migrating professionals who are studying or working abroad. Some have already taken foreign citizenship; many are working as white-collar professionals and enjoying high socioeconomic status in their host countries. Some are highly skilled scholars, managers, and financiers who possess experience, exposure, a relationship network, and strong financial support. Not only are these overseas Chinese talents highly skilled human capital and foreign investors who can contribute to China's economic modernization, but they can also channel the appeal of Chinese soft power to the outside world (Qiu, 2009). During the 1990s, the communist government launched a variety of programs to attract the return of overseas Chinese scientists, such as the Hundred Talents Program, the program of the National Science Fund for Distinguished Young Scholars, and the Hundred, Thousand and Ten Thousand Talents Program, but a majority



of those who took advantage of such opportunities were not the ‘best and the brightest’ that the government was hoping to attract (Ding and Koslowski, 2014).

According to China’s Ministry of Education, from 1978 to 2011, more than 2.2 million Chinese students went abroad. In 2011 alone, there were about 340,000 Chinese students studying abroad. However, only 818,000 of the 2.2 million have returned to China (Xinhua, 2012). The rate of return is even lower for those who graduated with doctorate degrees in science and engineering in the Western countries. According Wang Huiyao, a veteran in the study of Chinese returnees, there is always an acute scarcity of high-level, innovative talent in China. Among various reasons why China has difficulty in attracting and retaining overseas Chinese talents, Wang (2013) put more blame on China’s out-dated exit and entry laws and extremely rigid permanent residence (green card) regulations. While overseas Chinese travel into or out of China, they have to deal with a wide variety of immigration-related problems. In addition, those who left to study abroad face problems after returning to China, such as acquiring work authorization and appropriate jobs for spouses and finding affordable bilingual education for their children born and raised abroad, which then often leads family members to remain abroad (Cao, 2008).

To provide more convenience to these overseas Chinese, China’s new immigration law and regulations set up new Q visas. The Q-1 visa will be issued to the relatives of Chinese citizens applying to enter and reside in China for purposes of family reunion, to the relatives of persons who have qualified for permanent residence in China, and to persons applying to enter and reside in China for purposes such as adoption. The Q-2 visa will be issued to the relatives of Chinese citizens and persons qualified for permanent residence in China who are applying to enter and stay for a short period to visit relatives. In addition, new immigration regulations allow any overseas Chinese who still hold valid Chinese passports to use their passports as ID cards in China. They can use their Chinese passports to open accounts in Chinese banks, purchase government-sponsored social insurance, apply for their driver licenses, and for similar purposes.

In addition, China has formulated many other preferential policies for overseas Chinese to work and live in China through such initiatives as expansion of issuance objects of residence permits and lowering of the threshold for application for China’s green card. In December 2012, China’s twenty-five ministerial-level departments amended and improved its Regulations on Examination and Approval of Permanent Residence of Alien in China. The amended and improved regulations allow China’s green card holders to enjoy the same rights and benefits as Chinese citizens, with the only exceptions being political rights and obligations. For example, China’s green card holders will be treated equally as Chinese citizens, from employment and investment to housing, social insurance, and even education for their children. The number of green cards issued by the communist government is also on the rise. 1,202 green cards were issued in 2012, an increase of 83 per cent over 2011.

During the annual meeting of National People’s Congress held in March 2014, Qiu Yuaping and He Yafei, the director and deputy director of OCAS respectively, made heavily pitched announcements that the communist government would further the expansion of issuance objects of China’s green card, lower its threshold for application, and accelerate its application process.



They promised that the communist government would listen to the concerns of overseas Chinese, pay attention to their needs, and continue to update its policies to provide more convenience to overseas Chinese.<sup>10</sup> Obviously, all these new immigration-related regulations, policies, and practices in the Xi era are part of China's new diaspora engagement policies aiming to win the minds and hearts of overseas Chinese. They are wholeheartedly welcomed by overseas Chinese.

## Promoting Education Exchanges by Developing an International Education Hub

In their struggle for cultural autonomy, overseas Chinese have always tried to maintain a sense of *Chineseness*, inheriting, keeping, and passing on their Chinese language skills and traditional Chinese values. For them, their sense of Chineseness is the underlying bond between them and their ethnic homeland. Against this backdrop, overseas Chinese had traditionally sent their children to China for education in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. This tradition was supported by both the KMT government and the communist government before 1957. In the 1950s, while the post-independence governments in Southeast Asia had growing concerns about the close bonds of overseas Chinese with China, the communist government started to encourage overseas Chinese to integrate themselves into the countries of their residence. As Zhou Enlai told overseas Chinese, the language of the countries of residence should be studied by all overseas Chinese, it should be taught in the schools, and it should also be used in overseas Chinese newspapers. In a series of statements beginning in January 1957, the communist government informed the Chinese abroad that it was no longer interested in accepting overseas Chinese students for study in China (Fitzgerald, 1970). Until the era of Reform and Opening Up, the communist government's diaspora engagement policy regarding education exchange with overseas Chinese was changed to help overseas Chinese pursue their cultural autonomy and maintain their sense of Chineseness.

During the last three decades, as a result of China's dynamic economic growth and ascending international status, not only has China become an international business centre, tourism destination, and cultural lodestone, but China's uptick in soft power is also reflected in China's becoming an increasingly popular host country for international students. According to Nye (2004, p. 45), the political effects of cultural and education exchanges have always received the attention of policymakers. Both George Kennan and Colin Powell, two outstanding American diplomats, emphasized the contributions of cultural and education contact between foreign elites and the United States to American soft power (Nye 2004, pp. 44-46). International education exchange is an effective way to project a state's soft power appeal. Both the knowledge acquisition process and

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<sup>10</sup> See Chinese media reports on Qiu Yuaping and He Yafei's promises of continuing innovate policies to provide convenience to overseas Chinese. Available from <http://news.cntv.cn/2014/03/05/ARTI1394023790392468.shtml> and <http://news.uschinapress.com/2014/0307/971082.shtml> [Accessed 10 March 2014].





daily experiences in host countries will transmit lofty cultural and political values to international students. While living in the host country, international students will have good opportunities learn local languages and culture, observe local life activities, communicate with local people, and even participate in communal and social networks in host countries. After they return home, based on their first-hand observations, these former international students will become important information carriers of their former host country's cultural and political values as well economic and social development, thus helping to present the host country's appeal of soft power to the outside world.

Obviously, the communist leaders in China recognize the valuable role of international education in China's public diplomacy. As an important policy initiative in the country's Education Reform, China's Ministry of Education promulgated the Studying in China Scheme in September 2010. The scheme aims to strengthen international exchanges between China and other countries, advance the internationalization of China's education system, and enhance the country's attractiveness to international students. According to the Scheme, the communist government wants to recruit 500,000 international students to study in China by 2020. Among them, 150,000 students will be degree-seeking students. It will make China the largest international education hub in Asia. As explained by Xiuqing Zhang, a government official in charge of China's international education cooperation and exchanges, the ultimate goal of the Studying in China Scheme is 'to develop Chinese soft power and promote the Chinese concept of Harmonious World to the outside world'.<sup>11</sup>

China's efforts to promote education exchanges hinge on the global popularization of the Chinese language and its culture, for which 41 million overseas Chinese are the indispensable and fundamental basis. Today, not only is Chinese the language associated with the country's five-thousand-year-long civilization and oriental philosophical thought, but it is also a fast-growing commercial lingua franca in Pacific Asia. Many host countries of a large number of overseas Chinese such as Australia and New Zealand expect Chinese to become the most valuable business language — other than English — in the near future. In Singapore, Mandarin Chinese is vigorously promoted by the state's leadership as a way to promote greater ties across Southeast Asia and make Singapore the regional hub of Southeast Asia. Indeed, from Jakarta to Vancouver and on to New Delhi and Chicago, surging interest in studying the Chinese language has become a gauge of the greater magnetic pull that China exerts after three decades of galloping economic growth (Johnson, 2005).

The communist government has sought to tether its own goals of wielding Chinese soft power to the global popularity of Chinese language and culture. The Chinese government established the National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, *Hanban*, in 1987 to coordinate China's efforts to promote Chinese language and culture around the world. The two most important programs of *Hanban* are the Confucius Institutes (CIs) and Confucius Classrooms

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<sup>11</sup>Information retrieved from the official website of China's Ministry of Education. Available from [http://edu.china.com.cn/2010-09/30/content\\_21045439.htm](http://edu.china.com.cn/2010-09/30/content_21045439.htm) [Accessed 10 March 2014].



(CCs). They have unabashedly served as the global-local keystone for China’s commercial, cultural, and linguistic proselytization. To a great extent, the spread of CIs and CCs have forged strategic alliances with businesses, industries, governments, and other institutions with an interest in closer and more productive ties with China and the Chinese diaspora. Recognizing the centrality of the language in increasing cultural attractiveness, China has introduced a series of initiatives to promote the study and research of Chinese around the world, particularly among overseas Chinese. Such public diplomacy strategy, built on the close cultural and language bonds between overseas Chinese and their motherland, has already made significant headway in entering foreign education institutions, with the CIs targeting foreign universities and colleges and the CCs targeting the secondary and even primary schools.

As of the end of 2013, there were 440 CIs and 646 CCs around the world. As shown in the table 1, the numbers of CIs and CCs per one million overseas Chinese in Asia are much lower than in other regions. Such a distribution of CIs and CCs reflects the new development of Chinese emigration. During the last three decades, Chinese emigration into Southeast Asia has, for all practical purposes, ended, and the destinations of choice have shifted to North America, Europe, Latin America, and Oceania. As the destinations of Chinese emigration diversified, the communist government’s diaspora engagement policies also shifted from focusing on the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia to engaging the overseas Chinese around the world, particularly the Chinese diaspora in developed regions such as Europe, North America, and East Asia. As shown in table 2, among all the countries that host more than ten CIs, all of them except Thailand are from the developed regions.

**Table 1. Distribution of Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms**

Regions	Number of Overseas Chinese (in millions)	Number of Confucius Institutes	Number of Confucius Classrooms	Number of Confucius Institute per one million overseas Chinese	Number of Confucius Institute per one million overseas Chinese
Asia	30.24	93	39	3.08	4.72
North America	5.8	113	374	19.5	84
Latin America	1.89	31	10	16.4	21.7
Europe	2.09	149	153	71.3	144.5
Oceania	1.07	17	49	15.9	61.7
Africa	0.27	37	10	137	174

Source: the data about overseas populations are collected from OAOC’s official website. Available from <http://www.ocac.gov.tw/english/public/public.asp?selno=8889&nno=8889&level=B> [Accessed 10 March 2014].



The data about the distribution of CIs and CCs are collected from the *Hanban's* official web site. Available from [http://www.hanban.org/confuciousinstitutes/node\\_10961.htm](http://www.hanban.org/confuciousinstitutes/node_10961.htm) [Accessed 10 March 2014].

**Table 2. The Host Countries with largest number of Confucius Institutes**

Countries	USA	GB	Korea	Russia	France	Germany	Australia	Japan	Canada	Thailand	Italy
Number of CIs	100	24	19	18	16	15	13	13	13	12	11

*Source:* the data about the distribution of CIs and CCs are collected from the Hanban's official web site. Available from [http://www.hanban.org/confuciousinstitutes/node\\_10961.htm](http://www.hanban.org/confuciousinstitutes/node_10961.htm) [Accessed 10 March 2014].

Moreover, China's efforts to strengthen its international education have paid off in public diplomacy with overseas Chinese. For example, the number of foreign students who studied in China rose to 328,000 in 2012, compared to 290,000 in 2011. Among these foreign students, many are Chinese foreign students, that is, the offspring of Chinese nationals who emigrated abroad. This new generation of Chinese descendants aims to learn more about Chinese culture and language to improve their career prospects and maintain their transnational cultural identities. In addition, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office at all levels of government have collaborated with various overseas Chinese communal organizations to organize Chinese origin root search trips for younger overseas Chinese children. The Guangdong and Fujian provinces as well as some metropolitan cities like Beijing and Shanghai are popular destinations for those root-searching trips. These overseas Chinese students not only make new friends but learn more about China and its language.

It is always an effective public diplomacy approach to engage and mobilize the Chinese diaspora on the platform of Chinese language and culture. The overseas Chinese will be impacted most by the appeal of Chinese soft power when they speak the Chinese language, identify themselves as ethnic Chinese, learn popular Chinese culture, and pass on Chinese traditions to their descendants.

## Conclusions

Over the past few years, China's new generation of communist leaders have made efforts to wield the country's soft power and apply new public diplomacy approaches and instruments in their diaspora engagement policies. One could argue that a state government's diaspora policy and foreign policy are two sides of the same coin. Traditionally, the communist government in China subordinated its overseas Chinese policy to its foreign policy. While its overseas Chinese policy



must serve the overriding interests of foreign policy, the communist government has often found its limits of public diplomacy in its engagement with the Chinese diaspora. However, the communist government's diaspora engagement policy in the Xi era represents a departure from tradition. Not only is it a very non-ideological policy, but it is also based on Xi's vision of public diplomacy—indigenizing public diplomacy approaches and instruments to accommodate the needs and interests of foreign audiences. These new diaspora engagement policies reflect the new communist leaders' well-informed and realistic appraisal of the international environment and their new foreign strategy—prudent projection of Chinese hard power along with active wielding of Chinese soft power. In addition, through these new engagement policies, the Chinese diaspora can play more versatile and important roles in China's rising public diplomacy.

As a cornerstone of China's public diplomacy in the global information age, the Chinese diaspora has helped the communist government to project its appeal of Chinese soft power and improve China's national image around the world, especially in those new receiving countries of Chinese emigration in Europe, North America, and Oceania. Overseas Chinese who live in the culturally distanced regions have also felt the pull of China's soft-power-based public diplomacy. However, China's diaspora engagement policies may contribute to China's public diplomacy by facilitating daily communication and strategic communication between Chinese diaspora and their motherland. But they fall short of becoming the long-lasting sources of Chinese soft power for China's public diplomacy. Furthermore, China's efforts to strengthen international publicity and media capacity can only improve China's national image in the short term. In the global information age, the most effective national image builders are those who possess enough credibility to develop a long-lasting appeal of soft power. Public diplomacy without political reform is unlikely to increase China's credibility. Without political pluralism and the rule of law, China's new public diplomacy targeting of the Chinese diaspora will ultimately have limited soft power appeal. In this milieu, China's has a long journey ahead to attain its long-lasting appeal of soft power and effectively integrate Chinese diaspora into its public diplomacy. ■



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