Chapter 2: Chinese Image in International Politics

Since the establishment of the PRC, the country’s images have gone through roughly four phases. Most of the 1950s saw China’s image as a staunch ally of the Communist camp led by former Soviet Union. The second phase came as the rift within the Sino-Soviet alliance began to deepen in late 1950s and further worsened in the 1960s. Mao appointed China as the world’s revolutionary force against “Imperialist” America and “Revisionist” Soviet Union. Then came the third phase in the 1970s where Mao developed his famous “Three Worlds” theory: the two superpowers, the wealthy allies of the superpowers, and the non-allied nations which included China.

In the early 1980s and up to the present, the image of post-Mao China entered its fourth phase dominated by a new mindset along the line of peace and development. Seeking a peaceful international environment and at the same time assuring the world of its peaceful intentions, China increasingly looks to building its image as a cooperative and responsible global player. The transformation was a gradual and bumpy one and not without interruptions. This chapter aims to discuss the Chinese images, forces driving China to reshape its images, and the necessities for China to pay due attention to its images abroad.

2.1 Conceptual Meanings of State Image and Its Reshaping

At personal level, image is largely the sum of a set of perceptions being translated into an iconic mental representation of an object or a person. Jungian psychology defines image as a personal façade that one presents to the world. Nimmo and Savage describe image as “a human construct imposed on an array of perceived attributes projected by an object, event, or person.” However worded, these
definitions explain the same core idea of a personal image involving interaction between what is expressed and what is understood. Likewise, a nation’s global image involves how it presents itself—what it says and what it does—and how it is generally understood by other nations. The mentioning of America, for instance, may associate with varied impressions: the world’s sole super power, the R&D center of the world’s most advanced technologies, Hollywood, McDonald’s, and freedom and democracy, depending on the context. In addition, many people tend to associate African nations with poverty, rich natural resources, unstable politics, ethnic tensions, and HIVs.

The construct of a state’s image involves what images are projected, channels through which the images are delivered and re-presented, and reception and interpretation of the projected image by the receiver. The process in which an image is made and perceived is therefore highly subjective. Manheim and Albritton note that image is subject to influence by messages issued by some external factors. The statement indicates an interesting dynamic between the presenter and receiver, both under the influence of their subjective perceptions of the self, the other, and their respective surroundings. As a result, images of nations may be mishandled, distorted, or interpreted otherwise by the receiver in the channeling process.

National images of the self and others play a significant role in foreign-policy making because perception is a determinant of human behavior. The channels or means by which images are delivered—media reports, speeches by state leaders, and film representations, among others—can lead to varied outcomes. As Boulding has pointed out, “It is what we think the world is like, not what it is really like, that determines our behavior…it is always the image, not the truth, that immediately
determines behavior. In Boulding’s view, image is cumulative and a “highly structured piece of information-capital.” In real life, this “information capital” often blends perceptions into what we know as stereotypes.

Moreover, image reflects one’s “belief system” and is closely related to decision-making behavior. Ole R. Holsti denotes image as a subpart of the belief system, which organizes perceptions into a “meaningful guide for behavior” and establishes goals and preferences. Holsti points out that decision-makers act upon their image of the situation rather than upon objective reality. Further, decision-makers rely on their images of states—others and their own—to define the situation they face. Therefore, as Holsti notes, it has been suggested that international conflicts often result from distorted images of states.

Image distortions often occur on the part of the recipient under the influence of preoccupied perceptions and established believe system. As will be illustrated in greater detail in section three, the reactions by the Chinese government to the NATO bombing the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 and the collision between U.S. Navy plane and a Chinese naval fighter over the South China Sea are cases in point. Historical memory of foreign invasion and lingering distrust from the Cold War era worked to convince China that the two incidents were deliberate, ill-intended actions to test Chinese response and probe into China’s military preparedness. What followed was an explosion of Chinese nationalism.

This link between image and behavior prompts state actors in international politics to attend to their images abroad. On the one hand, the fact that images and perceptions are highly subjective by nature makes it difficult for a state presenter to

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account for exactly how intended messages come to result in a distorted form when they reach the recipient. Misinterpretations, perversions, and information discrepancies that occur during transmission are likely to lead to misunderstandings and conflicts between states. On the other hand, images are subject to manipulation, particularly with the availability of advanced and diversified mass communication tools today.

Images are under the influence such factors as the nature of various forms of media through which those images are presented and the recipient’s and disseminator’s subjective knowledge with regard to the presenter—their belief systems, previous experiences, historical memories, and recent contacts. The list can go on. Don D. Smith has pointed out in 1973 that, “the little that we do know about the nature of international images suggests that these images might be particularly susceptible to change.”

For most people, their perceptions of the world are developed without first-hand contact and largely rely on channels available within their own society as sources of information.

Today more than ever states seek to shape their own images through better communication with foreign audiences so as to achieve their foreign-policy objectives. Whereas foreign policy is known as a set of goals that seeks to outline how that particular country will interact with other countries and non-state actors, decision-makers rely on their perceived images of other states when they strategize their foreign policy. National leaders, policy-makers, and the general public alike, depend largely on mass communication outlets in shaping their images of the world and their own images abroad.

Smith’s 1973 study on image and attitude change may shed some light on the

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relationship between image and mass communications. The study draws on two social-psychological theories, one attributing opinion-attitude change to credibility of the source of information measured against the individual’s internal standard and the other, to the relative judgment measured against the individual’s expectations, respectively. Using Radio Moscow’s North American broadcasts as a presumably low-credibility source of information for U.S. university students to test how they measure the broadcasted messages, Smith’s findings confirm that, among others, individuals who unexpectedly find the incoming message from a source of low credibility to be less negative than they had expected tend to change their attitude toward a more positive direction.

Smith concludes that the process of attitude change as a result of broadcasted messages is a relative judgment against the individual’s expectations and suggests that international images are highly vulnerable to broadcasts. One instance may help illustrate how relative judgment affects opinion and attitude. When American ping pong players returned home from their visit to China in 1971, they spoke of how they were greeted by Chinese unexpectedly friendly and gracious. That surprise defied the athletes’ previously held images and assessments of the Chinese and therefore worked to change their opinions about the Chinese as a whole. This visit marked a thaw in US-China relations and paved the way for Nixon’s visit to Beijing the next year.

Moreover, the two World Wars provide plenty of evidence confirming the influence of broadcasting. Joseph Nye in illustrating the effect of soft power notes that the introduction of radio in the 1920s “led many governments into the arena of foreign-language broadcasting, and in the 1930s, Communists in the Soviet Union and Fascists in Germany and Italy competed to promote favorable images of their

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5 Smith, p. 119.
countries and ideologies to foreign publics.” Britain was soon to realize that, as in the words of then British foreign secretary Anthony Eden, “it is no exaggeration to say that even the best of diplomatic policies may fail if it neglects the task of interpretation and persuasion which modern condition impose.” By the end of 1930s, Nye notes, British Broadcasting Corporation was broadcasting in all major European languages as well as Arabic.⁶

Nimmo and Savage have also pointed out that an individual’s images of the world are “subject to influence by messages issued by some external actor.” Whereas a projected image conveys messages by the image-makers in an attempt to influence public opinions, the perceived image marks the degree of success that the intended messages are able to achieve. The distance between projected images and perceived images, then, is a matter of who says what, how it is said, and how successful the messages work to change or shape attitude. In the context of international politics, the process of conveying messages is linked to propaganda, public relations, traditional diplomacy and public diplomacy.

Propaganda, widely known as “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist,”⁷ has come to be deemed as counterproductive as the it is usually associated with blatantly biased and one-sided messages that live up to the negative expectations of now more seasoned publics. Today, many governments with intent to forge a positive image abroad turn to public diplomacy for achieving the goal of shaping favorable public opinions in target countries. As Hertz has pointed out in 1982, “It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that today half of power politics consists of image making. With the rising importance of

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public in foreign affairs, image making has steady increased.”

The USIA defines public diplomacy as seeking “to promote the national interest and the national security of the United States through understanding, informing, and influencing foreign publics and broadening dialogue between American citizens and institutions and their counterparts abroad.” The agency’s major functions are two-thronged: international dissemination of information and international education and cultural exchange. To a broader extent, public diplomacy refers to “understanding, informing, and influencing foreign publics.” These definitions point to a fact: that public diplomacy plays a major role in shaping a country’s global image.

Nye believes that a “soft sell,” the use of soft-power resources through public diplomacy, is critical to successfully forge a favorable global image conducive to shaping desired responses. China is among those governments that seek to reshape favorable global images with great enthusiasm. In contrast to the abolishment of United States Information Agency in 1999, China established its global-image maker apparatus, the State Council Information Office, in 1990. As Joshua Kurlantzick observes, “Until recently China either paid no attention to public diplomacy or, when it did, made clumsy attempts that bordered on pure propaganda, like China Radio International merely repeated Chinese leader’s statements.” That has changed as China continues to upgrade its public diplomacy and invest in improving its diplomatic corps.

The following discussions will follow the issues related to China’s image-making efforts, particularly what factors are driving the country to reshape its images and what is being done to change foreign publics’ perceptions and attitudes

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toward a rising China. Predicated on the foregoing discussions on image, the study of China’s image-making effort will focus on how China develops its soft-power resources and better its public diplomacy to win favorable response abroad.

2.2 The Importance of Images in International Politics

As previous section notes, decision-makers of a country act upon their “image” of the situation—how they define the situation—rather than upon the “objective” reality. How they interpret the situation and their image of other states also depend on their believe system, which are prone to stereotyped images that may run contrary to the truth. Therefore, images of nations, both how they perceive other players and how they intend to be perceived, serve as a significant factor in the dynamics of the international order. International conflicts often arise between distorted images of states, as Holsti pointed out, rather than between states.

The U.S.-China relations featuring periods of conflict and détente provide some instances that may illustrate how their images of the other came into play in their reactions to each other. Up until 1989, the U.S.-China rapprochement since early 1970s had gradually toned down the Chinese public’s images of the United States as a major security threat and ideological arch-rival. Instead, increased bilateral contact and the inflow of US capital, technology, and culture helped the publics of the two countries to view each other in a more positive light. The 1989 crackdown on student protests and its fallout led into a shaky period of the bilateral relations.

For the United States, China’s role as a strategic partner diminished while its image as the “largest holdout in a rival ideology and political system” loomed large. China, on the other hand, feeling “besieged, alienated, and unprepared,” struggled to come to terms with this “change in both the tone and essence of the bilateral
relations.” Wang and Lin analyze three images projected by Chinese scholars, respectively from the ideological, geopolitical, and global interdependence perspectives, that the Chinese held of the United States in the wake of the 1989 incident.

On the ideological front, the Chinese believed that the ultimate goal of U.S. foreign policy was to eliminate communism from the planet:

They view the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as a sad result of long-time American and Western efforts toward “peaceful evolution”…the struggle between capital and socialism will continue to be an important phenomenon even with the end of the Cold War…People who hold this image tend to regard American policy as inherently hostile…they see the United States waging another “Cold War” or anti-communist crusade against China…People use the term “bloc hegemonism” to emphasize uniformity in promoting “world democratization.” Here, a “siege” mentality similar to that in the 1960s is apparent.

In terms of geopolitical image, people basically view the post-Cold War international system in the framework of traditional realpolitik, asserting power and interest would continue to be the key concepts in order to understand world politics. Therefore, they view the U.S. global strategy as “expansionist in nature due to its superior comprehensive power,” and they believe that “a new world order is predetermined by power balance among major countries.” In this light, Wang and Lin point out, proponents of this geopolitical image project a Sino-U.S. relation resembling that in the 1970s when China was convinced that it could exploit the “contradictions” among major powers to serve its national interests.

13 Wang & Lin, p. 906.
14 Wang & Lin, pp. 908-911.
The third group, who holds the image of global interdependence, did not view post-Cold War American foreign policy in purely ideological or power terms, Wang and Lin observe. They recognized “a real realistic dimension in U.S. foreign policy,” that the United States may intend to promote its value systems worldwide. Holders of this image emphasize that China and the United States shared common interest in maintaining regional and global stability, that China should work more closely toward international rules and standards, and that manipulating “contradictions” among major powers may not be productive for China’s interest.

While the three images denote the spectrum of Chinese images of the United States, Yong Deng noted in 2001 that Chinese scholars had followed closely the course and the dynamics of the international order. In the first half of the 1990s, Chinese elites in general held that the U.S.-dominated unipolar order would not last long. By the late 1990s, however, the view was largely reversed. China had inclined to see the advent of a multipolar world where it would constitute a pole and enjoy much freedom to act internationally. Beijing repeatedly made statements opposing a single country “acting unilaterally,” which it described as “hegemonic behavior.”

Deng observed that after the NATO expansion and its air war in Kosovo, many Chinese commentators concluded that the United States had adopted an offensive-oriented, “neo-imperialist,” “neo-interventionist” strategy geared to consolidate it hegemonic status. China’s inclination to view American foreign policy as guided by expansionist, hegemonic intentions has led to see ill intentions and sinister motives in every U.S. act. When the NATO bombing in Belgrade hit the Chinese embassy in 1999, an act claimed to be accident, the Chinese public were infuriated and denounce the act as “a deliberate, calculated attack to punish China’s opposition to the war, to destabilizing and humiliate China, and to probe Beijing’s external reaction and domestic response” to such a move. Chinese university students
express their anger by attacking the U.S. embassy in Beijing.

The Belgrade bombing illustrates how images and perceptions define reactions. It was soon followed by another incident that revealed the flimsy trust between Beijing and Washington. In April 2001, a U.S. Navy EP-3 reconnaissance plane and a People’s Liberation Army naval F-8 fighter collided over the South China Sea. The F-8 fighter crashed, while the U.S. crew survived the near-fatal accident and made an emergency landing of their damaged plane onto the PLA’s Lingshui airfield on Hainan Island. The PRC detained the twenty-four crew members for eleven days during a standoff between Washington and Beijing as they disagreed over the cause of the accident, the release of the crew and plane, whether Washington would “apologize,” and the PRC’s right to inspect the EP-3.

Again, strong anti-U.S. sentiment erupted as the Chinese public again spelled out their suspicions of U.S. conducting secretive military act against China. Beijing later released U.S. crewmembers as Easter approached, but the incident again manifest the importance of communicating with foreign publics to reduce chances of conflict. On the part of the United States, American public opinions toward China are also mixed and fickle. People who view China’s economic growth and military expansion as a likely ill-intended have made their views known as “the China threat.” Others hold optimistic pictures where China would be incorporated into current international system and hence act with the parameters of existing institutions and rules.

2.3 Factors Contributing to China’s Image Reshaping

In 1954, the Geneva Conference recognized China’s international status as a great power.\textsuperscript{15} Comparatively speaking, however, China was a “weak” great power in

terms of economic and military strengths. The pragmatic Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping had openly recognized that China constituted a much weaker position in the Sino-Soviet-U.S. triangular relationship. After decades of self-imposed isolation from the international society, China gradually broke that isolation and reemerged with a will to substantiate its great-power status with real economic and military potency. Change of leadership from mass-liner Mao Zedong to pragmatic reformer Deng set a new course for the country, one that would shock the world with phenomenal success in market-oriented economic reforms carried out by a closed political system.

Whereas China unavoidably experienced tremendous political and social changes due to change of leadership, its reemergence as a global player was also accompanied by rapid changes in the international community. The interplay of domestic and international factors has since further prompted changes in the way China interacts with the outside world. The following discussion aims to look at the major factors contributing to China’s image consciousness.

### 2.2.1 Regime type

On October 1, 1949, the PRC came into being after the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) defeated Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT) in the Chinese Civil War. The concept of China as a country has since been associated with the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, the color of red, revolutionary Communist regime, one-party dictatorship, and so on. Prior to the CCP’s final victory over the nationalist government, Mao Zedong had secured the top position of the CCP in the Zunyi Conference held in 1935, three months after the famous Long March where the Red Armies retreated from the southern province of Jiangxi to northwest Shaanxi province. Mao assumed the position as the paramount leader of Communist China after the establishment of the PRC, introducing a new form of regime unprecedented in the
Chinese history that endowed Mao with absolute power until his death in 1976.

The Chinese Communist regime under Mao’s rule carried many attributes of a totalitarian polity: a tightly controlled society under strongman leadership, propaganda disseminated through state-controlled media, personality cults, regulation and restriction of free speech, single-party states, widespread use of mass surveillance, populations mobilized in support of the official state ideology, absolute intolerance of activities in dispute with the goals of the state, and state-controlled business, labor unions, political parties, and religious practices.

During the years that followed the establishment of the PRC, the CCP moved quickly into effective control over the people by restructuring them in such a way allowing its cadres to penetrate into every level of society. The common masses: families, communities and work units, were broken down and organized into cells—the basic unit of study groups, each comprised of a few people, overseen by CCP cadres. Mass surveillance was carried out as members in a study group spy on one another in exchange for self-protection. The top seat of the hierarchical CCP was of course chaired by Mao, who as Chairman Mao enjoyed unchallengeable power cemented by his tight grip of the party machine. With this widespread party apparatus Mao’s China became “a police state without secret police.” The party also controlled the media, turning them into the mouthpiece of the party and promoter of Mao’s image.

In addition, Mao’s rule was also marked by the absence of law and constant mobilization of the people in the form of various government-initiated campaigns. Throughout the years Mao was in power, he launched one campaign after the other to serve his political purposes. At the outset of the PRC era and in the name of land reform and the suppression of counter-revolutionaries, Mao and the CCP openly executed an estimated several million people including KMT officials, businessmen,
weighty members of the rural gentry, intellectuals, and former employees of Western enterprises, while 1.5 million more were sent to remote areas for reform through labor. More terror and deaths were to follow. Mao initiated the Hundred Flowers Campaign in late 1956, which encouraged open criticism against the CCP and the leader. In less than a month the campaign took a sharp turn as Mao charged against those who criticized the CCP and himself, introducing another wave of terror known as the Anti-Rightist Movement that condemned an estimated half a million people.

What’s more, in 1958 Mao launched the second five year plan, known as the Great Leap Forward, which entailed most notably merging small agricultural collectives into the people’s communes and doubling the total domestic output of steel. The mishandling of the plan resulted in a famine that claimed the lives of an estimated thirty million farmers in the three years between 1959 and 1962. Four years later, before the country and its people could recover from done damage, Mao lunched the infamous Cultural Revolution that killed and tortured tens of millions more people. Mao singled out Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping as the targets at the start of the decade-long turmoil. The real target of this campaign was Liu Shaoqi, whose popularity among the people irritated the suspicious, power-obsessive Mao.

Sadly, it was the death of Mao that finally shed new light on the future course of China. The reform-minded Deng Xiaoping, who had survived three serious political crises, including the Cultural Revolution that nearly put him to death, eventually rose from a series of power struggle within the CCP to succeed Mao. Although Deng remained loyal to Mao and firm on maintaining CCP’s one-party rule, he was nevertheless able to use his newly gained power to push for economic reform and open-door policies that would undoubtedly softened the totalitarian nature of the CCP regime under Mao.

Deng marked the last of the CCP’s paramount leader from the revolutionary
past—no one after him would be able to enjoy power legitimized by the glory of the successful communist revolution in 1949. Even with his revolutionary background, however, Deng was never able to enjoy the kind of absolute power that Mao enjoyed for such a long period. And Deng’s successors would have to rely on their own feat to legitimize their inherited power. Luckily for them, Deng not only opened the door for foreign capital to enter China with his economic reform policies, but also permitted the possibility for his successors to rely on economic achievements for political legitimacy. Mao’s death, Deng’s rise to power, and the changes introduced by Deng’s reforms altogether helped transform the nature of Chinese regime into what is known as authoritarian.

Post-Mao China began to enjoy economic liberation and limited political openness. Deng’s open-door policy first exposed a xenophobic China locked in self-imposed isolation by Mao, then ushered in international influences unlikely to be contained within economic sphere. With the death of Deng ended the last of CCP’s strongman rule since its establishment. Collectively leadership, which should have been put into practice after the formation of the PRC, finally became reality for the CCP. Factional struggle within the CCP has since featured the Chinese politics, and members of CCP politburo have had discussions about democratization within the party. To force change within the party, the CCP went as far as to set a retirement age for those in the older generations to step down and make way for younger ones. In any case, however, China remains an authoritarian regime that on the one hand, practices strict political control and restricts freedom of speech domestically, and on the other hand, actively reaches out internationally with increased attention to making its global images more agreeable.
2.2.2 Change of Leadership and Decline of Political Ideology

Mao as the first-generation leader of PRC was best known as a “romantic revolutionary” envisioning a Chinese Communist utopia, a “mass-liner” with remarkable charisma, and a paranoid dictator with a borderline personality particularly showing during the later years of his life. He was also described as “a Marxist scientist, a journalist, and even a revolutionary humanist!”\textsuperscript{16} It is believed that Mao’s radical character took form in the May Fourth period, where the upsurge of Chinese anti-imperialist nationalism called for a reevaluation of Chinese cultural institutions and promoted the spread of Marxism.

Stuart Schram points out that Mao owed more to Leninism than Marxism.\textsuperscript{17} While Mao deeply believed in the Marxist idea of the struggle between oppressor and the oppressed as moving history forward, Mao’s approach to politics was substantially in agreement with Lenin’s view that only disciplined action under the tight guidance of a revolutionary elite to seize power would thrust his country into modern era. Mao believed that “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.” Moreover, Schram further notes that Mao also developed the view that “the educational effects of participation in revolutionary struggle, supplemented by indoctrination and thought reform, were capable of changing people’s objective nature.”\textsuperscript{18}

Taking those ideas together with his mass-line approach and political charisma, Mao rose to a position where he romantically believed in the vision of building China into a model of socialism. His political instrument after 1949 was “the people’s democratic dictatorship,” namely, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the

\textsuperscript{18} Schram, p. 128.
widespread arms of the party machine. Mao’s utopian dreams of China leaping into the future, surpassing Britain and catching up with the United States in a short period of time, proved a disastrous failure for the country. What’s worse, Schram notes, his self-image undoubtedly became more and more imperial as he grew older, and he reveled in the perquisites he enjoyed and the aura by which he was surrounded. The destructive Cultural Revolution that came later eventually stigmatized his image as a romantic revolutionary.

Marxism-Leninism largely shaped Mao’s political thoughts, while Mao Zedong Thoughts dominated the course of China until years after his death. Deng Xiaoping succeeded Mao, whose prolonged leadership had been marred by hunger, chaos, and violence. Mao’s rigid ideology, political influence, and personal charisma still lingered after his death. Even Deng himself was a loyal follower of Mao, despite changes in his attitude towards Mao after the failures of the Great Leap Forward. But Deng had to reconcile between the charismatic Chairman Mao and the wayward Mao whose inexcusable wrongs undercut the CCP’s power legitimacy.

Deng was pragmatic communist determined to modernize China through economic reform measures and preserve the CCP’s one-party dominance. To achieve both, what he did was to distinguish Mao from Mao’s word—the Mao Zedong Thoughts. The campaign on the one hand identified Mao’s dogmatism and personality cult as responsible for dragging China from moving forward and on the other hand claimed to have “restored the original features of Mao Zedong Though,” of which Mao was merely the “chief representative” rather than a sol creator. Deng went to great lengths to sift out words from Mao’s writings for the “scriptural basis” of his policy initiative.19

For instance, Mao’s emphasis on the importance of investigating real conditions

19 Robinson, p. 363.
before making policy served Deng’s purpose of persuading his audience to prioritize economic reform so as to overcome poverty. Deng also cleverly borrowed such phrases from young Mao as “seek truth from facts” and “practice is the sole criterion of truth.”²⁰ By adding flexibility to Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, also by directing Chinese politics from Mao’s class struggle to the development of productive forces,²¹ Deng was able to wind through the ideological roadblock on the way to reforms and to engage with the outside world. As market economy continued to reinforce its foothold in China, the importance of Communist ideology continued to decline.

Benjamin Yang points out, Deng “joined the Communist revolution when it became a popular trend, and he converted to communism more for personal than ideological reasons…Deng was never devoted to Communist doctrines from the start, thus making it much easier for him to shake them off at the end.”²² Deng paved the way for his successors, the third-generation leader Jiang Zemin and Chu Rongji, to build a “socialist society with Chinese characteristics.” More and more, economic development marginalized once all-important ideology.

By the time the fourth generation leaders of China, Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao know as pragmatic technocrats, took over the top job, it had become that the CCP would have to rely on competence rather than ideology for power legitimacy. And as China’s economic integration with world economy deepened, Chinese leaders must adjust their foreign policy to create an external environment favorable for their economic and political agenda.

²⁰ Robinson, pp. 360-361.
2.2.3 International Socialization and Evolving National Interests

As discussed earlier, political socialization denotes the process by which an individual or a group acquires political culture in a given society. It is a lifelong process encompassing the learning of more sophisticated political ideas, orientations, and institutions. Agents for political socialization include such intrinsic qualities as gender, race, age, and geographic origin, as well as various social forces that come in contact with an individual or a group, including family, peers, teachers, politicians, media, culture, institutions, and belief systems. Apply the concept to state actors, which represent a sum of individuals and social groups, states in an international society go through an international socialization process as they interact with one another.

At the state level, socialization is variously defined as “the process by which states internationalize norms arising elsewhere in the international system” or “a process by which social interaction leads novices to endorse expected ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.” As the following discussions will show, China’s international socialization since 1949 can be divided into two phases, Maoist period and post-Mao era, with an interruption of self-imposed isolation during the years after the 1955 Bandung Conference up until the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. While the first phase concluded with failures, the second phase started our slowly and remained an ongoing process to this day. Chinese national interests have changed along the process, shifting from Mao’s waging ideological war to spread Communism to acquiring material gains and great-power status through economic development.

Early on, Mao’s decision to intervene in the 1950 Korean War alerted the U.S. to change its China policy and to include China as a target of its containment deployment. As the Cold War spread globally, Mao’s China saw the United States as

23 Alderson, p. 417; Johnston, p. 495.
the foremost “imperialist” power and the leader of the “world cities” of North America and Western Europe. Mao appointed China as the foremost revolutionary force and leader of the “world countryside”—Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The Bandung Conference marked China’s early effort to seek allies in the Third World to strengthen its position against the United States.

And the results came as no surprise, as Chinese foreign policy under Mao was characterized by “bombastic language, strong opposition to the super powers (the United States and the Soviet Union), close association with developing countries, and economic autarky.” Chinese rhetoric failed to win over many Third World countries, which saw it as nothing but to serve China’s own interests. China’s early attempt failed, and only failed once again in early 1960s when it tried to warm up relations with African nations. That failure pretty much concluded the first phase of China’s international socialization, as the latter half of the 1960s saw China preoccupied with internal affairs—the Cultural Revolution.

The start of the second phase can be traced back to the outbreak of the Zhenbao Island armed conflict in 1968, the fight over a small, unpopulated isle located in the middle of the Ussuri River. The event marked the peak of Sino-Soviet confrontation rooted in the aftermath following Stalin’s death in 1953. Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization movement put Mao in an awkward position where his political correctness would be questioned. Also angered by Khrushchev’s showing little respect for his seniority in the Communist world, Mao openly dismissed Khrushchev as “revisionist.” Some believed that Mao encouraged armed conflicts along the Sino-Soviet borders to divert political attention pointed at him and rally for popular support by working up Chinese nationalism.

The fight over the Zhenbao Island, however, forewarned an imminent major war. Recognizing Soviet’s military superiority and China’s position against the world’s two super powers at one time, Chou Enlai persuaded Mao to manage the crisis by befriending the United States. A new power dynamics, so-called “strategic triangle,” hence took shape to transform the world order. Slowly yet definitively, the United States pulled China back into the international community, most notably unseating Nationalist government’s representation of China at the United Nations in 1971 and established diplomatic tie with China in 1979.

As said earlier, American policy makers and public opinions expressed mixed views about China. Despite suspicions on both sides, Sino-U.S. relations experienced a “honeymoon period” since 1979, until the Chinese government’s crackdown on the 1989 Tiananmen student protests virtually shattered any positive Chinese images previously emerged and perceived by Western community. In the aftermath of the incident, Deng Xiaoping put forth a “Taoguang Yanghui” Strategy, which roughly means that China must lie low, “conceal capacities and bide our time.” China did not wait for long. With its fast-growing economic power, by 1992 when Deng reaffirmed China’s reform agenda in his South-tour speech, the county was ready to engage with the outside world again.

It became clear at this point that Chinese national interests had shifted from Mao’s ideological war against the Western industrialized countries to those involving economic development through further engagement with world economy. The 1990s highlighted the high tide of globalization, and China’s hesitation toward the trend changed over time. In 2001, China made a giant step toward globalization by becoming a member state of the World Trade Organization. China’s accession to the WTO marked its resolution to further integrate with world economy, and in so doing, it chose to observe international norms and institutions. In joining the world
competition for resources—capital, technology, and energy critical for continued economic growth, Beijing also came to realize the importance of marketing its views in order to strengthen its global image.26

Since the mid 1990s, China has publicly identified itself to be a cooperative, peaceful, and responsible power, and Beijing has taken such an image quite seriously in conducting its foreign policy. One of the main reasons for the shift is that the United States had insisted that China could be treated as a great power only if and when it acted responsibly. In addition to that peer pressure, and more critically, China has since modified its foreign policy orientations out of self-interest, namely, to create a stable external environment for pursuing its economic agenda. In this light, what has prompted China’s Changing behavior really is economic interdependence.

China depends on other players for export markets and essential production factors—energy, technology, capital—as much as others rely on cheaper Chinese products and a huge Chinese market with fast-growing consumer power. As Hongying Wang contends, it is interdependence, rather than socialization, that proves to be a more effective means for promoting cooperative behavior on the part of China.27 Up to the present, Wang’s argument stands true. There is little doubt that international socialization plays an important role in changing Beijing’s foreign policy behavior. To be clear, however, that socializing effect is more evidently observable in China’s newly adopted diplomatic strategies and practices. When it comes to the internalization of international norms and values, international socialization meets obstacles as the CCP’s authoritarian nature and rule still persist.

Until quite recently, China consistently expressed its opposition to “hegemonic

26 See Medeiros and Fravel, p. 30.
power” and advocated “multipolarization of world politics.” To this end, China focused its great power diplomacy on the European Union, Russia, and Japan hoping to create a dispersed distribution of power. Over time, however, “Beijing has since realized the limitations of its great power diplomacy and the impracticability of swift multipolarization in terms of the distribution of material, hard power...Now China quietly but determinedly expends more diplomatic resources on building ties in the third world to promote pluralism and relativism in terms of non-material, soft power.”28 Again, this reflects the effect of international socialization on Chinese foreign policy practices, to the degree that befits Beijing’s current agenda. The following chapters will discuss China’s new attention to soft-power diplomacy in greater detail.

2.2.4 The China Threat

In international politics today, virtually no players can afford to overlook the re-emergence of China as a rising power. The “China threat” argument also emerged with China’s high-profile economic reforms and increased participation in global affairs. As Denny Roy points out, “Simply stated, the ‘China threat’ argument maintains that an increasingly powerful China is likely to destabilize regional security in the future. This idea became highly topical as China’s economy posted exceptional growth in the early 1990s.”29 According to Roy, analysts holding this viewpoint to three major concerns underscoring their arguments.

The first is Chinese military buildup. Chinese military spending increased annually as the country continued to gain from economic reforms. A Rand report

adopted the purchasing power-parity approach to conclude that China’s 1994 defense expenditure came to a stunning $140 billion. The following years China’s military budget continued to see double-digit growth year by year. The second concern targets at CCP values. China’s human rights record has long been an issue of concern for governments and non-government organizations around the world. Until recently, it had also been in dispute with the South East Asian nations over its claim to the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea.

Moreover, China launched missile test in the Taiwan Strait in 1996 and continued its arm sale to countries such Pakistan and Iran, including nuclear-capable missile technology. “Many critics accuse the Chinese government of hostility toward the modern values that are thought to promote peace and prosperity. A powerful China with the same anachronistic agenda could only undermine the pillars of regional stability.”30 The third concern aims at China’s great-power scenario, arguing that great-power status may embolden China to force its will upon other players. Critics believe that a powerful China would behave no differently from 19th century Britain, the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and Pacific War Japan.

The Chinese government’s bloody crackdown on Tiananmen student protests only worked to substantiate the “China threat” arguments. The economic sanctions and political aloofness by the Western countries that followed the Tiananmen massacre dealt a serious blow to China in terms of its foreign relations. Although it only took China a few years to break out of the consequent isolation by the international community, the lesson was enough for China to face up to the prevailing “China threat” argument and reconsider its foreign policy orientations. It also taught the Chinese authorities that, to achieve its economic agenda, it had to adjust its Cold-War mindset and to please an audience beyond its territorial borders. Allowing

30 Roy, p. 761.
China to be seen as a threat to the rest of the world would only hamper its agenda.

2.4 Necessity for Remaking Chinese Global Images

For a long period of time Chinese foreign policy behavior had been confined by Maoist ideology until the death of Mao in 1976 and Deng Xiaoping’s “open-door” policy introduced in 1978 literally drew a conclusion to China’s international isolation. The following decade saw China carefully carry out economic reforms while mending its guiding ideology to suit the transition from planned to market economy. On the other hand, China’s international involvement has continued to expand with further economic integration with global economy. Deng won international acclaim for his successful economic liberalization programs.

Deng’s ordering military troops to quell the 1989 student protests at the Tianmen Square nevertheless plunged the positive images of a reforming China into a threat being substantiated by its growing economic strengths. After the Tianmen Incident Beijing found itself confronted by suspicions and actual punishments an arm embargo installed by the European Union and denial of MFN status by the United States. Meanwhile, the incident lent a solid ground for the “China threat” argument, which arrested Beijing’s attention and compelled it to take measures to rectify the situation. In response to the “China Threat” argument, Beijing has repeatedly expounded its intention to achieve “peaceful development,” a toned-down version of the “peaceful rise of China” rhetoric.

Furthermore, China began in the mid-1990s to publish government white papers on controversial foreign policy issues to articulate and defend its position. It has also used the Internet to make its foreign policy more transparent. Measures as such clearly target at foreign audiences. Internet users may now visit the Chinese State
Council Information Office website to view all white papers. In addition, the website of Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides such information as policy position descriptions, press conference transcriptions, and key speeches. As the following chapters will demonstrate, Beijing has since launched an all-out publicity effort to defuse the “China threat” concern and to reshape Chinese global images as a cooperative and responsible member of the international society.

China deemed a positive force rather than a threat serves Beijing’s interests, namely, to substantiate China’s great power status—economically and militarily strong nation admired worldwide. Presently, China is far from what it aspires to become—a great power enjoying the freedom to act independently and the amount of say tantamount to that status. Beijing has many items on its agenda that relies on good foreign relations for success: supply of energy and raw material critical for further economic development, safe sea-lane passage to transport energy and other materials, solutions to environmental protection for sustainable growth, export markets and foreign capital to continue growth, and technologies and business management know-how to upgrade its economy. The list could go on.

In any case, China would have to depend on its good images for efficient persuasion that leads to desirable outcomes. Over time, in part influenced by publicist practice in the West, Beijing has come to realize that good images and soft power often work more effectively in bringing out favorable outcomes in the fierce worldwide competition for available resources. It has continued to demonstrate improved skills in wielding Chinese soft power with various degrees of success in other parts of the world. The following chapter will continue the topic of Chinese soft power in greater detail.
2.5 Fundamental Issues surrounding Chinese Global Image

In general, Chinese global image is viewed as more positive in countries where Chinese influence is backed by economic incentives and where human rights and democratic values are less a prior concern. In the politically free, economically developed world, however, China’s image is heavily linked to its political fundamentals—its human rights record, freedom of speech, and democratization. Over the past few years, food safety has also emerged as one of the major issues affecting Chinese image, as Chinese-made products have flooded world markets to turn the issue into a global concern.

In 2006 and 2007, reports of poisonous Chinese-made products ranging from tooth pastes, pet food, to toys at an increased frequency began to cause consumer panic in many countries. The fear for Chinese products contributed to declines of China’s positive ratings in the 2006 and 2007 BBC World Service Polls, which track opinions across countries about selected countries’ global influence. China’s average positive ratings saw a downturn from 48% in 2005 to 45% in 2006, and further down to 42% in 2007. China sought to manage the crisis, only to find its efforts impaired by ensuing occurrences. In 2008, Chinese-made blood-thinner Heparin and infant formulas were blamed for causing deaths and illnesses at home and abroad, leading to even greater antagonism among consumers in many parts of the world.

In addition, as briefly discussed in chapter one and further in chapter two, a gap exists in the way the Chinese people see their place in the world and the way the world sees China. China’s economic success has contributed to the rise of Chinese nationalism and national confidence. Polls conducted by the Pew Research Center, the Pew Global Attitudes Project of July 22, 2008, have found that a vast majority of the Chinese people believe that they are generally liked by people in other countries.
By comparison, the Pew Global Attitudes of June 12, 2008, where views of the Chinese people was investigated across 23 nations, shows that the Chinese views of themselves may be overly optimistic. While largely positive ratings were found in 7 countries, including Nigeria (79%), Tanzania (71%), Pakistan (76%) Russia (60%), Egypt (59%), Indonesia (58%), and Australia (52%), majority negative ratings were found in 15 nations.

Figure 2. Chinese Self Perception

Is China Generally Liked or Disliked?

- liked 77%
- disliked 10%
- DK 13%

Question Text: “how do you think people in other countries of the world feel about China? Is China generally liked or disliked? (Q11a)

## VIEWS OF THE CHINESE PEOPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries surveyed</th>
<th>Favorable</th>
<th>Unfavorable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Korea</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Africa</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, the Chinese people are convinced that China acts cooperatively—taking into consideration of other countries’ interest in conducting foreign policy. By comparison, only 30% of the polled foreigners agreed that China takes into consideration of other countries’ interest in conducting foreign policy. The Chinese also demonstrate great confidence in China’s economic power. More than half of the Chinese people, 58%, envisioning China will one day replace the United States as the world’s leading superpower, while 43% of the foreigners share a similar vision.

Figure 4. Discrepancy between Chinese Self image and World Views of China

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>China’s Self Image and Its Global Image</th>
<th>How China sees itself</th>
<th>How World sees China</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China considers other countries in foreign policy</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China has/will replace U.S. as leading superpower</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China is world’s leading economic power</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*23 country median percentage from 2008 Pew poll.
Questions 17, 18, 44 and 45.


The differences in the perceptions of China held by the Chinese and by people in other countries became evident and fueled Chinese nationalism during the 2008 Olympic torch relay. The relay, designed to travel 85,000 miles worldwide in 130 days to mark the longest distance covered in Olympic history, was forced to cut short due to major protests staged by pro-Tibetan rights groups to condemn the crackdown on Tibetan riots on March 14, 2008 by the Chinese government. The protests both
shocked and infuriated the Chinese people, rousing a new wave of Chinese nationalism in which the Chinese felt besieged by bias and hatred. The incident signals that the Chinese-image discrepancy will continue to cause disagreements between the Chinese and their global counterparts in ways likely to damage the Chinese government’s public diplomacy efforts.