

### 3 Soft language, soft imagery and soft power in China's diplomatic lexicon

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#### Introduction

China's rise in the world involves power calculations in the hard-term sense of tangible economic and military assets but also in the soft-term sense of more intangible attractiveness and imagery. In 2004 Joseph Nye dubbed this *soft power*; the attractive (i.e. attracting) "means to success in world politics".<sup>1</sup> Consideration of China's "soft power" (*ruan shili*) quickly ensued in the People's Republic of China, the PRC.<sup>2</sup> Over the years, state-regulated media outlets like the *People's Daily* have regaled its foreign reader with articles titled "The Charm of China's Soft Power", "Making China's Charm Visible by Soft Power", "How to Improve China's Soft Power Image" and "China's Soft Power Set for Global Audience".<sup>3</sup> For its offshoot the *Global Times*, it is recognition that "soft power is a buzzword often floated around these days in China, with both the government and the public having reached a consensus that the country's rise cannot do without it".<sup>4</sup> PRC officials incorporated this into China's "'smiling diplomacy', all of which fall under the category of soft power."<sup>5</sup>

This soft power, China's "hidden wings", emerging in this first decade of the twenty-first century, is something that is mediated in part through China's foreign policies and programmes.<sup>6</sup> It is also manifested through the PRC's "public diplomacy" (*gonggong waijiao*), which deploys specific English language terms directed by the PRC to the international community.<sup>7</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick's categorization of the "tools of business" and the "tools of culture" within China's soft power "charm strategy" can perhaps be supplemented by another category, the PRC's public diplomacy terms of a "tool of language".<sup>8</sup>

PRC figures are ready enough to make such public diplomacy linkages; "to play the card of public diplomacy ... to better the international image, China needs to resort to public diplomacy ... a more mature PR policy".<sup>9</sup> In 2010, it was a question for Yu Xintian of "advancing China's international image ... pursuing public relations and building up national soft-power".<sup>10</sup> With good reason, China's wider soft power image is wrapped up for Wang Yiwei in China's public diplomacy utterances:

In recent years, China has sought to supplement its traditional use of “hard power” with “soft power,” and thus the Chinese government has paid more and more attention to public diplomacy ... to make full use of the modern media ... [B]y creating a Chinese international image in the twenty-first century, public diplomacy can be the mirror of China’s rise ... public diplomacy can be the lubricant for China’s rise.<sup>11</sup>

China’s rise, and international scrutiny of it, makes China’s choice of language all the more important; the *People’s Daily* noting that “public diplomacy has become the main battlefield of governments to enhance their soft power and expand their influence.”<sup>12</sup> A key context for China’s current diplomatic language has been the post-Cold War “chorus of China Threat” perceptions outside China, in which the PRC shows “ultrasensitivity” to its image.<sup>13</sup> The PRC, in its own words, is “always haunted by the China Threat” image label, if and when held in the international system.<sup>14</sup> The reason is simple enough; China Threat perceptions could lead to a balancing against China, the strategic “encirclement” nightmare for Beijing.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, China’s public diplomacy language is an important avenue for the PRC to reassure the international community, and avert such China Threat perceptions and consequent alliance formation balancing against it.

Six specific terms stand out in China’s current public diplomacy lexicon. These are “multipolarity” (*duojihua*), “multilateralism” (*duobian zhuyi*), “democratization of international relations” (*guoji guanxi mingzhu hua*), “peaceful rise” (*heping jueqi*), “peaceful development” (*heping fazhan*) and “harmonious world” (*hexie shijie*). This chapter follows the use, assumptions, implications, problems and reception of these public diplomacy terms. This reveals a three-fold descriptive–objective, aspirational–subjective, and important instrumentalist use of language by the PRC as an instrument of government and diplomacy.

Such terms all show what Callahan argues is “the importance of language politics in Chinese foreign policy” terminology; a public diplomacy which remains “official language games ... reinforced through persistent and ever-present repetition.”<sup>16</sup> To these six PRC public diplomacy terms, and their related language games, we now turn.

### **Multipolarity (*duojihua*)**

Since the 1990s, “multipolarity/multipolarization” has been a phrase frequently invoked by the PRC in its analysis of China’s international environment.<sup>17</sup> Deng Xiaoping was clear enough on multipolar openings for China back in 1990: “in future when the world becomes three-polar, four-polar or five-polar ... in the so-called multi-polar world, China too will be a pole. We should not belittle our own importance.”<sup>18</sup> It was for this reason that the *Joint Statement* issued by China and Russia in 1997 was entitled *Multipolarization of the World and the Establishment of a New International Order*, a title pointing to existing trends but also indicating an attempt to hasten its arrival. Chinese scholars have

1 recognized the importance of multipolarity for China's strategic horizons. Wang  
 2 Jisi argued in 2001 that "the key notion and belief in China's conceptualization  
 3 of international politics today is multipolarization".<sup>19</sup> Five years later, and Ren  
 4 Xiao's sense of multipolarization was that "no other theoretical reasoning has  
 5 greater impact upon actual Chinese foreign policy than this".<sup>20</sup> Chinese analysts  
 6 continue to argue that the "embryo of multipolar world" is now emerging, to  
 7 China's benefit and in part as a result of Chinese initiatives.<sup>21</sup> China's position as  
 8 one of the big five United Nations (UN) Security Council members plays into  
 9 this setting: "the structure of the Security Council itself, with five permanent  
 10 members who have veto powers, it lays the foundation for the multipolar world"  
 11 for China.<sup>22</sup>

12 The Chinese official media and delegations have, in their own words,  
 13 "stressed" the role of multipolarity in the international system.<sup>23</sup> One of Hu Jin-  
 14 tao's first major foreign policy speeches, in 2001, emphasized that "multipolarity  
 15 constitutes an important base" for Chinese foreign policy.<sup>24</sup> Hu Jintao has con-  
 16 tinued over the years to call for "the establishment of a multipolar world".<sup>25</sup>  
 17 Multipolarity brings multiple relationships, partnerships and indeed multiple  
 18 potential alignments. This rebalancing and readjustment, is what Hu Jintao had  
 19 in mind in talking of how "the progress toward a multipolar world is irreversible  
 20 ... the international balance of power is changing".<sup>26</sup>

21 In any multipolar setting, it is relations with other poles of power, other Great  
 22 Powers, that become important; hence, Zhang's sense that "central to the  
 23 [Chinese] multipolarization discourse are Great Power relations".<sup>27</sup> For the  
 24 *People's Daily*, practical benefits accrue from such understandings between  
 25 Great Powers; "multipolarized development ... on the basis of developing con-  
 26 structive cooperation and strategic partnership with the major countries, instead  
 27 of [China] being a 'lone pacemaker' ".<sup>28</sup> Multipolarity has, thus, regularly fea-  
 28 tured in declarations drawn up by the PRC with other significant powers like  
 29 Russia, India, Brazil, France and Iran. China's "Great Power diplomacy" (*daguo*  
 30 *waijiao*) flatters those other Great Powers and suggests strategic partnerships for  
 31 the future. Typical was in the RIC (Russia, India, China) Summit Joint Declara-  
 32 tion in 2010 that "the Ministers shared the perception that the world is undergo-  
 33 ing major and swift changes. They expressed their support for a multi-polar,  
 34 equitable and democratic world order."<sup>29</sup> Virtually identical formulations had  
 35 been used at the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) Summit Joint Declara-  
 36 tion earlier in the year: "we underline our support for a multipolar, equitable and  
 37 democratic world order".<sup>30</sup> It has also featured in Chinese commentaries on  
 38 Germany, and in official PRC analysis of ties with the EU, though this has not  
 39 been explicitly reciprocated by the EU, which continues to generally use multi-  
 40 lateralism language.

41 In contrast, multipolarity has never featured in PRC-US declarations, where  
 42 China has sought to emphasize joint cooperation, in a rather bipolar framework?  
 43 However, at the *Global Times*, Wang Yizhou had been blunt enough to state that  
 44 "one of the basic goals of multi-polarity is to prevent the United States from  
 45 becoming the one and only hegemonic power in the world and to pre-empt its

possible negative impact or pressures on China”..<sup>31</sup> This “balancing” (with regard to the United States) understanding of multipolarity has been picked up by various Chinese scholars, unrestrained by some of the diplomatic niceties that constrain the official PRC rhetoric. Tang Shiping has argued that “the golden rule of ‘balance of power’ in international politics” logic called for an “axis of restraint” against the USA.<sup>32</sup> Shen Dingli welcomed multipolarity serving “as a likely counterweight to unchecked US power ... and from that vantage point it is not too early for China to envisage a truly multipolar global system”.<sup>33</sup> Jin Yinan, in arguing that multipolarity was “inevitable”, specifically saw it as reflecting “intense struggles between the United States which advocates unipolarity and a majority of others which countenance multipolarity”.<sup>34</sup>

Such compensatory balancing is why China sees America as unable in the long term to retain its so-called “unipolar moment” gained in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>35</sup> However, Chinese descriptions of the road to multipolarity are often prefixed by the term *luan* (turbulence/chaos). In their multipolarity debate, the official Chinese paper “National Defense in 2004” recognized an initial post-2001 re-strengthening of US military weight as generating “the prolonged existence of [existing] unipolarity vis-à-vis [emerging] multipolarity”.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, one transitional term coined in China was “one superpower, several great powers” (*yi chao duo qiang*). Nevertheless, in the longer term, the official PRC view is that “the multipolarization process may be zigzag, protracted and full of struggles, but this is a historical trend independent of human will”, a structural process.<sup>37</sup> It is such an underlying analysis that lay behind the China–Russia Joint Declaration in 2008 that “the trend towards a multi-polar world is irreversible”.<sup>38</sup> Amidst structural “decline” (*shuai luo*), US unipolarity (*danjihua*) is envisaged as giving way to multipolarity settings for the coming century. In the wake of US economic difficulties in early 2009, the *People’s Daily* argued that

China has grown to be a new heavyweight player and stepped into the lime-light on the world stage ... a new phase of multipolar world power structure will come into being in 2009, and the international order will be correspondingly reshuffled.<sup>39</sup>

Financial shifts brought similar deployment of multipolarity language in the Chinese media in 2010.<sup>40</sup>

Whilst multipolarity analysis of Great Power rise (China) and fall (USA) remains evident in China, it has become couched less in anti-American, anti-hegemonic balancing terms and more in terms of a balanced equilibrium. This has been done through coupling “multipolarity” with other terms like “democratization of international relations” (*guoji guanxi mingzhuhua*) or “globalization”, and supplemented by increasing use of “multilateralism” rhetoric. Chinese usage does not see the terms multipolar and multilateral as contradictory, as seen in Xia Liping’s talk of how “with the evolving of the world order into a multi-polar system, multilateral verification mechanisms must become the new standard-bearer in arms control”.<sup>41</sup> For the PRC position paper “National Defense in

2008”, it was a sense that “world multi-polarization [trends] are gaining momentum”; within which “China is playing an active and constructive role in multilateral affairs, thus notably elevating its international position and influence”.<sup>42</sup> Hence, the “official guidelines” that “major powers are the key [*daguo shi guan-jian*] ... multilateral forums are the important stage [*duobian shi zhongyao wutai*]” for PRC diplomacy.<sup>43</sup>

### Multilateralism (*duobian zhuyi*)

As already noted, a problem with strident advocacy of multipolarity by the PRC is that it can give an image of Great Power elitism and arrogance, an image of China throwing its weight around at the expense of other Powers, both great and small. One way to defuse this is to stress cooperation with all through advocacy of multilateralism, which suggests positive cooperation with a wide range of countries and situations, all of which can improve China’s soft power image. As Chen Dongxiao put it, “multilateral diplomacy has provided a broad arena for improving our diplomatic capabilities and national image”.<sup>44</sup>

Advocacy of “multilateralism” (*duobian zhuyi*) has though been a relatively slow development for a PRC which has been “hesitant” over the term.<sup>45</sup> Such multilateralism language comes up against a noticeable emphasis on state “sovereignty” (*zhuquan*) by the PRC, partly caused by long-standing memories of China’s sovereignty being trampled by the outside world during China’s Century of Humiliation in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, China continues to “turn” towards multilateralism.<sup>46</sup> It is significant that Chinese academic and policy journals from 2000 onwards “show a gradual decline in discussion of multipolarity and a dramatic increase for multilateralism”.<sup>47</sup> By 2006, the *Beijing Review* was explaining that for a “country that has risen rapidly ... multilateral diplomacy has become a natural choice for China to cope with a complicated situation and safeguard its national interests”.<sup>48</sup> At the *People’s Daily*, Li Hongmei was equally certain in 2009 on China’s “embrace” of multilateralism, confident that “China’s interest in multilateral diplomacy and multilateral institutions has correspondingly grown with its elevation of national strength and confidence”.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, China has membership (for example in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Asia-Pacific Economic Community, the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Plus 3, and the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Programme) and observer status (for example in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation, and the Arctic Council) in a growing number of regional frameworks, as well as membership of global organizations like the World Trade Organization.

Chinese diplomats emphasize multilateralism filtered through the UN: “multilateralism with the UN as its center is necessary”.<sup>50</sup> The then Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing similarly saw “the United Nations, as the core of international multilateral framework and the key forum of multilateralism”.<sup>51</sup> From China’s sovereignty-sensitive point of view, the UN has the advantage of being

an organization where China's status as one of the five Permanent Members of the Security Council gives it key veto powers over UN multilateral operations. Hu Jintao's line was that "we should uphold the Council's authority by adhering to multilateralism ... by strengthening multilateral cooperation, enhancing the role of the United Nations and maintaining the authority of the Security Council in particular".<sup>52</sup> This line continues to be maintained by the PRC leadership: "we should uphold multilateralism, bringing into full play the role of the United Nations".<sup>53</sup> China's own involvement in UN activities, and its related agencies, has also become noticeable in the early years of this century, with China now providing the biggest number of peacekeepers amongst the five permanent members of the UN Security Council; a feature publicly flagged by the PRC state media during 2009–2010, as an attractive soft power feature of Chinese foreign policy.<sup>54</sup>

Hu Jintao gave an interesting "benefits" understanding of multilateralism in 2009: "China has actively participated in multilateral diplomacy, whilst taking on corresponding international duties. China's international status is rising and its influence is [accordingly] increasing."<sup>55</sup> The logic for such PRC advocacy of multilateralism is straightforward enough; it reduces outside fears of Chinese unilateralism and of China throwing its increasing weight around. It also has a practical power intent.<sup>56</sup> In a general sense, the argument in the PRC is that "multilateral participation will benefit China in its strategies gearing up to a peaceful rise. Additionally, only through partaking in the multilateral institutions, can emerging economies [like China] possess the likelihood to alter the existing international power structures and operating rules."<sup>57</sup> Chinese "multilateralism" can also be seen as a strategic calculation to restrain US "unilateralism".<sup>58</sup> A logic remained clear for Huo Zhengde, in that "in the past we opposed the Soviet Union hegemony, now we promote multilateralism to hold back US unilateralism."<sup>59</sup> Thus, China's "embrace of multilateral institutions" like the SCO was explained by the *People's Daily* as "intended to counterbalance the Western hegemony, and particularly the superpower clout of the US".<sup>60</sup>

However, China's readiness to follow multilateral practice is not always evident. Some European scholars argue:

Multilateralism is, however, not as dominant a feature of Chinese foreign policy as it would sometimes seem from official rhetoric ... problems remain, most notably over the issues of Taiwan, Sino-Japanese relations and US hegemony, which cause China to continue to rely on unilateralism in practice. Chinese unilateralism is similar to that of the United States in that it implies that Beijing cannot rely upon the goodwill of others for its safety, and therefore should be prepared to act on its own and if necessary by using force.<sup>61</sup>

Meanwhile it is also noticeable that on an issue like the South China Sea, identified in 2010 as a "core interest" (*hexin liyi*) for the PRC, China has blocked multilateral forums like ASEAN from going beyond initial confidence-building

measures like the PRC–ASEAN *Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea* (2002), and has blocked any multilateral negotiations therein on sovereignty issues. In such a vein, China refused Vietnam’s attempts to raise the issue at ASEAN in 2010: “Vietnam is making the issue a multilateral one and even involving more international players outside Asia. However its strategy will not be a successful one because China opposes such moves.”<sup>62</sup> US attempts to raise the South China Sea issue at the July 2010 ARF meeting were met with similar Chinese dismissal by Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi:

if this issue is turned into an international or multilateral one, it will only make matters worse and the resolution more difficult. International practices show that the best way to resolve such disputes is for countries concerned to have direct bilateral negotiations.<sup>63</sup>

The only trouble for China is that such bilateral emphasis can awaken images of power disparities in negotiations and relationships, something that can damage China’s soft power image, but which can be remedied by bringing in the “democratization of international relations” language.

### **Democratization of international relations (*guoji guanxi minzhuhua*)**

China’s use of the term “democratization of international relations” (*guoji guanxi minzhuhua*) is another way of getting away from damaging elitist Great Power realpolitik undertones of “multipolarity”. The term was rolled out as a “new security concept” (*xin anquan guan*) in 2000 by Jiang Zemin, where the PRC message was simple enough: “China stands for democracy in international relations, under which all countries are equal members of the international community.”<sup>64</sup> This was all part of China’s new diplomatic image drive, its claims of its “new thinking and approach. First, we should strive for the democratization of international relations.”<sup>65</sup> Hu Jintao’s rhetoric on this term was soon evident: “democratization of international relations constitutes an essential guarantee for world peace. All countries, big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, are equal members of the international community.”<sup>66</sup>

One advantage of the term is that a critique and external contrast with US “hegemonism” is achieved. Thus, Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan argued that it was a question of “[PRC-fostered] democratization in international relations, not [US-fostered] hegemony and unilateralism”.<sup>67</sup> Whereas the word “democratization” casts an uncomfortable light on PRC political restrictions, the term “democratization of international relations” gives a comforting stress on the sovereignty of individual states, enabling the continued political grip of a Communist Party-led PRC against any internationally generated pressures for regime democracy change and interventionism.

Meanwhile, China’s diplomacy amongst smaller countries across the world can seem attractive and flattering for those minor powers, given attention as they

are in the term “democratization of international relations”. Typical of these flattering dynamics was the joint communiqué released when Jiang Zemin visited Moldova in 2003. Moldova’s population of fewer than four million is dwarfed by China’s population of around 1,300 million. Nevertheless, their joint communiqué still read that “democratization of international relations and freedom in choosing development mode should be upheld. All countries, big or small, strong or weak, pool or rich, are equal members of international society” and “have the equal right to take part in world affairs”.<sup>68</sup> A similar situation was seen with the joint declaration between China and Cambodia (with a population 14 million, little more than 1 per cent of China’s), that “democratization of international relations reflects the common demand of all countries in the world.”<sup>69</sup> The joint communiqué between China and Papua New Guinea (population 6.25 million) had two angles to it. On the one hand, it declared that:

both sides agree that the democratization of international relations conforms to and reflects the demands and aspirations of the overwhelming majority of countries and people of the international community. They maintain that, countries, big or small, rich or poor, strong or weak, are all equal members of the international community.<sup>70</sup>

On the other hand, it went on to acknowledge different levels within the international system, “the PNG side attaches importance to China’s important role in international affairs ... as a permanent member of the UN Security Council”.<sup>71</sup> Shades of *Animal Farm* perhaps can be seen here, and its famous phrase: “all animals [read states] are equal, but some are more equal than others”?

Like China’s use of the term “multilateralism”, the democratization of international relations concept has also been embedded by China through the mechanism of the UN. From China’s point of view, this emphasis again on the UN gives China extra Security Council veto-wielding security, as well as a re-emphasis on state sovereignty. It also flatters the UN General Assembly ranks of smaller states, who might otherwise be worried by China’s rise (away?) from the Third World ranks. This brings to the fore the nature of China’s undoubted rise, and the international uncertainties thereon.

### **Peaceful rise (*heping jueqi*)**

China’s power “rise” presents problems of reaction by the international system. One way is to down play that rise in the PRC. The *People’s Daily* has run articles arguing that “exaggeration of China’s rise can be made with some ulterior motives, and may be allied with the evil intention to overstate the ‘China threat’”.<sup>72</sup> However, China’s power rise is difficult to ignore, leastwise within the PRC. China is very aware of its “rise” (*jueqi*), a sense apparent by the 1990s, and exemplified within China in the title of Yan Xuetong’s seminal 1997 work *Zhongguo jueqi (China Rise)*. Yan Xuetong argued that “the Chinese people take the rise of their nation for granted”.<sup>73</sup> The clearness of China’s rise seems





“peaceful rise” was immediately explained by him as a tool to help China’s ongoing national strengthening: “in promoting China’s peaceful rise, we must take full advantage of the very good opportunity of world peace to endeavor to develop and strengthen ourselves”.<sup>85</sup> “Peaceful rise” is, at least in part, a tool for the leadership to buy time until mid-century completion of China’s “Four Modernizations” (*Si ge xiandaihua*) programme: “China’s rise will require a long period of time and probably the hard work of many generations of Chinese people”.<sup>86</sup> It is a question of not only waiting for time, but also of shaping the optimum conditions for China’s rise to take shape. For China, an environment of peace rather than conflict is by far the best environment for its long-term economic modernization to be completed. Strategic time scales and grand strategy were certainly involved in Wang Yiwei’s surprisingly blunt analysis in the *Beijing Review*: “China is a rising power ... right now China is keeping a low profile but preparing ... this build-up period is expected to last for twenty years.”<sup>87</sup> For Wang, this low profile current transition period “will be used by China to serve its grand strategy of peaceful rise ... to grasp the 20 year period of opportunity, winning time at the cost of ... a degree of concession” in the short term.<sup>88</sup> In the long term, though, China could look to shifts in the international system whereby “the US is today’s only superpower and China will be tomorrow’s world power”.<sup>89</sup>

“Peaceful rise”, though introduced with a flourish in 2003, quickly encountered criticisms both inside and outside China.<sup>90</sup> Inside China, the term could be seen as unnecessarily restricting the PRC’s use of military force in a future Taiwan crisis; Yan Xuetong arguing that “Peaceful Rise is wrong, because it gives Taiwan a message that they can declare independence and we will not attack them.”<sup>91</sup> Outside China, emphasis was at times given to the noun “rise” rather than the adjective “peaceful”. China may have been arguing that its rise “benefits” and was a win-win “opportunity” for the world.<sup>92</sup> However, there was also the association of *jueqi*, or “rise” with a sense of earthquake/eruption, and a widespread sense that in effect such a rise would be at the expense of others, and that a “rise” for China inherently meant a Paul Kennedy-style “fall” for others. China’s prime minister may have argued that “the rise of China will not stand in the way of any other country or pose a threat to any other country, or be achieved at the expense of any particular nation”; but that is precisely the problem for other neighbours like India, Vietnam and Japan?<sup>93</sup> Faced with such criticisms, China’s “peaceful rise” concept was overlaid in 2004 with talk of China’s “peaceful development” (*heping fazhan*), as a new “policy of reassurance” and as a new “strategic option”.<sup>94</sup>

## 5 Peaceful development (*heping fazhan*)

The basic image, and usefulness or usability, of the term “peaceful development” is simple for the PRC: “China’s Peaceful Development poses no threat” to the world.<sup>95</sup> China’s sensitivity was apparent over word associations, its UN ambassador hoping that China could avoid

1 the traditional pattern of clashes triggered by the rise of a large power. ... In  
2 its push for development China will not and cannot retrace the path tradi-  
3 tionally taken by powers on the rise. Our only option is peaceful develop-  
4 ment in which all countries are winners.<sup>96</sup>

5  
6 Zheng Bijian, the architect of the “peaceful rise” concept, recognized the  
7 advantages in deployment of an effective reassurance language; “some interna-  
8 tional communities are also concerned about the potential threat of the rise of  
9 China”, so “China needs to build up the image being both ‘peaceful’ and ‘civi-  
10 lized’ in its adhering to the road of peaceful development”.<sup>97</sup> This image con-  
11 sideration was also admitted by the PRC leadership. Li Junru, the vice president  
12 of the Chinese Communist Central Party School, faced with a “distorted China’s  
13 international image ... by those to advocate ‘theory of China threats’”, argued  
14 that “therefore, it is an even more urgent work for China to build up its image of  
15 ‘peaceful China’ ... China’s peaceful development means that China will emerge  
16 in the world with ethical and progressive image”.<sup>98</sup> There is a functional–instru-  
17 mentalist, as well as a reflective, sense in this adjustment by China of its termi-  
18 nology. The advantage of “peaceful development” as a term is that it focuses  
19 attention onto China’s internal socio-economic development rather than its exter-  
20 nal political–military rise. Does it seem less threatening for the international  
21 system? PRC sources admit that “the strategic benefit of peaceful development  
22 is apparent” as a “projection of influence”; since it is it being “least likely to  
23 evoke strong resistance ... that makes it effective” as a term to deploy.<sup>99</sup>

24 Consequently, “peaceful development” is now firmly embedded in China’s  
25 foreign policy lexicon. For example, “China’s participation in the UN peace-  
26 keeping missions is telling evidence that China adheres to the road of peaceful  
27 development”.<sup>100</sup> One sign of this official public favour was China’s full-blown  
28 White Paper in 2005, “China’s Peaceful Development Road”, with its assertions  
29 that “looking back upon history, basing itself on the present reality and looking  
30 forward to the future, China will unswervingly follow the road of peaceful devel-  
31 opment”.<sup>101</sup> As such, the PRC message is that “the road of peaceful development  
32 accords with the fundamental interests of the Chinese people ... China is now  
33 taking the road of peaceful development, and will continue to do so when it gets  
34 stronger in the future”.<sup>102</sup> The first proposition is true enough – it is in China’s  
35 own interests to have peaceful development to enable its peaceful rise. However,  
36 not so self-evident is the second assertion, that China “will continue” to take  
37 such a path once its modernization process is finished, and it is stronger in the  
38 future. That remains a problematic feature, through its innate unknowability at  
39 this point in time. The PRC may stress that “the resolve of the Chinese govern-  
40 ment and the Chinese people to stick to the road of peaceful development is  
41 unshakable”, and it may use words like “unswerving” and “forever”; but it is  
42 precisely the longer-term resolve of the PRC state that is under question for the  
43 latter decades of the century.<sup>103</sup>

44 Within the “peaceful development” phrase, a stress on China’s socio-  
45 economic “development” can also be problematic in some ways. Calls from the

leadership to take advantage of economic modernization led to the call in the PRC to “speed up the modernization drive of our national defense and military forces”, a consequence that negatively impacts on neighbours.<sup>104</sup> The *People’s Daily* headline “Chinese Ocean Presence a Must for Peaceful Development” is the sort of development that other maritime powers like the United States and India feel uneasy over; more so with its sense of

China with the right to claim maritime interests, but the country cannot shirk its obligation to acquire the military power to secure those rights. With President Hu Jintao aboard the inspection warship in the fleet review, the Navy took a new step forward in shouldering more responsibility for the nation’s peaceful development.<sup>105</sup>

Military concerns have been joined by economic ones. The PRC public message may be “China’s development an opportunity not threat” for the outside world; but this is not necessarily so in the United States and Europe, where increasing trade deficits with China have gone hand in hand with soaring Chinese foreign exchange dollar reserves.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, economic development, scarcely dented by the global recession of 2008–2009, is entwined with China’s industrialization and with it the potential environmental threat to the rest of the world. China’s economic development drive has brought with it increasing foreign assets; the “going out policy” (*zouchuqu zhanhue*) which raises some external fears of China asset stripping and commandeering scarce minerals and vital energy resources, despite Chinese reassurances to the contrary.<sup>107</sup> Amidst such troubled scenarios China has put forth yet another reassurance concept, “harmonious world”; identified in 2004 as “the next big idea” for Chinese foreign policy.<sup>108</sup>

## 6 Harmonious world (*hexie shijie*)

The phrase “harmonious world” (*hexie shijie*) has been wheeled out under Hu Jintao’s imprint; with embassy headlines like “Harmonious World: China’s ancient philosophy for a new international order.”<sup>109</sup> It is a globalist phrase, appropriate in an age of globalization; and is seen by Chinese commentators like Shen Ding as “one of the most popular lexicons for talking about Beijing’s ideal of international order in the age of China’s rise”.<sup>110</sup> The phrase formed the setting for Hu Jintao’s high-profile speech, “Build Towards a Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity”, given at the UN World Summit in September 2005. Official formal prominence was given to the concept at the seventeenth National Congress in 2007, where the Chinese Communist Party Constitution was formally modified to adopt an amendment on the building of “a harmonious world characterized by sustained peace and common prosperity”.

Invocation by the PRC of “harmonious world” invokes an attractive enough concept, which is part of a wider harmony discourse in and by the PRC. In this harmony discourse, the state claims to be building a “harmonious society” inside

China, and a “harmonious world” outside China, with both strands helping in regime survival for the PRC. The PRC leadership has high claims for the “harmonious world” concept. For Tang Jiaxun, “building a harmonious world is a major strategy and a new vision that the Communist Party of China and the Chinese Government put forward in the new stage of development in the 21st century”.<sup>111</sup> It is put forward as a worthy concept, an “important proposal” for Yang Jiechi whereby “China is working together with all other countries to achieve the lofty goal of building a harmonious world”.<sup>112</sup> The state media has not been afraid to pull its punches on the supposed impact of the “harmonious world” concept. For the *People’s Daily* the harmonious world term was “very inspiring to the world”, as something strengthening China’s soft power.<sup>113</sup> For the *China Daily*,

the idea of a harmonious world expresses a long-coveted dream of humankind ... building a new international political and economic order characterized by peace, tranquility ... this new take on the development of the ancient Chinese dream of Tianxie Datong (great harmony of the world).<sup>114</sup>

The term “harmonious world” is connected to the term “great harmony” (*datong*), a quite traditional concept rooted in old Confucian norms. From this picture of the past comes the sense that “the wheel of equilibrium and harmony has been running in Chinese society for over 2,000 years. It could provide insight for contemporary states in an interdependent world, which cannot be peacefully sustained without a philosophy of harmonization.”<sup>115</sup> For the *People’s Daily* it has all become a matter of “China’s diplomacy: pursuing balance to reach harmony”.<sup>116</sup>

PRC scholars are revealing on the issue. The “harmonious world” concept is indeed a “strategy”, with an undoubted “pragmatic” instrumental edge to it.<sup>117</sup> Consequently, it is deployed “to enhance China’s foreign cultural strategy and improve soft power”, as a tool “undoubtedly advancing the worldwide trend to soft power”.<sup>118</sup> By the end of 2006, stalwarts like Yan Xuetong were talking in image terms of the PRC’s “harmonious world-oriented diplomacy” as something whereby “China’s own national interests have also been materialized on a broader scale with its positive image and international status increasing globally.”<sup>119</sup> It can also be used to differentiate China from other types of overbearing big powers; “our philosophy on building a harmonious world ... should set a good example for the rest of the world, especially other big powers” like the USA.<sup>120</sup> All in all, “harmonious world” can be seen as yet another reassurance term serving to deflect criticism of China’s international rise. The *People’s Daily* saw its advantages in direct terms: “‘Harmonious World’ helps rebut ‘China Threat’” theory.<sup>121</sup>

There are some problematic areas surrounding the “harmonious world” concept. The “harmonious world” concept brings with it claims for tolerance and enhancement of dialogue amongst diverse civilizations. The sense of civilizational diversity is seen as meaning that the “harmonious world” concept does

not, for China, mean or include universal standards of human rights, especially when it comes to question of individual political liberal democracy norms.<sup>122</sup> This includes what has been called “Human Rights with Chinese Characteristics”. Yet such a rejection of human rights universalism, behind the wall of sovereignty, damages China’s image in the outside world.

The “harmonious world” concept has other problematic areas. Critics point out that China’s views of earlier soft hierarchy international order based on Chinese soft power values, the “*Pax Sinica* mission” distorts China’s conflictual and at times aggressive *past* history.<sup>123</sup> The *future* is also problematic. Shi Yinhong may have extolled the “harmonious world” concept in the *China Daily*: “it is not likely that a wise Chinese government would discard this strategy in the future, unless changes take place in the landscape of world politics”.<sup>124</sup> However, Shi’s reassuring assumption begs the question as to “future” possible changes. The very landscape of world politics could change as the PRC gains more hard power strength, and others respond accordingly by balancing against it, with PRC encirclement and/or containment nightmares arising. In the exposition on “Harmony and Chinese Diplomacy” delivered by Li Zhaoxing the former Minister of Foreign Affairs at the Beijing Forum on the Harmony of Civilizations and Prosperity for All in 2007 (itself an image-making event), Li argued that “some say that China is at the so-called ‘strategic crossroads’ and its future is still uncertain, and they will therefore ‘hedge’ relations with China. Such views and practice are totally unwarranted.”<sup>125</sup> In saying such “hedging” by others towards China was unwarranted, he deployed the “harmonious world” phraseology, along with other reassuring rhetoric like “peaceful development”, “democracy in international relations”, “globalization”, and “win-win” outcomes, whilst stressing China’s present *and* future benign intentions. However, it remains the future uncertainties surrounding the PRC, despite present rhetoric, that other states continue to hedge against – inevitably, as IR *realism* would argue.

### Softer image?

As can be seen, language is being used by the PRC in a deliberate instrumental way, in which soft power image considerations are noticeable. China remains concerned not to find itself boxed in, not to face a counterbalancing coalition against itself on China’s periphery, through negative images of itself. Phrases that make negative images more likely are not used, phrases that help avert negative images are used. All of these phrases – “multipolarity”, “multilateralism”, “democratization of international relations”, “peaceful rise”, “peaceful development” and “harmonious world” – are finely calibrated words and phrases. Part of the calibration is evidenced through terms being used less or more frequently at times. The earlier 1990s stress on multipolarity has been overlaid with greater talk of multilateralism, though multipolarity continues to be evoked at times, reflecting how relative usage depends on the respective audience being addressed. China seems to recognize the dangers in always emphasizing multipolarity, coupling it in more recent years with more cooperative wider terms:

[O]ur efforts to promote the development of the world towards multipolarization are not targeted at any particular country, nor are they aimed at restaging the old play of contention for hegemony in history. Rather, these efforts are made to boost the democratization of international relations.<sup>126</sup>

“Peaceful rise” has tended to be used less often after its initial flurry in 2003 and has been overlaid, though not totally replaced, by greater usage of “peaceful development”. China’s role as a “responsible” power has been a further reassuring twist.<sup>127</sup>

China’s concerns with negative “branding” are precisely why China’s public diplomacy face is a generally reassuring one; in which multilateralism is emphasized more than multipolarity, in which “peaceful development” is stressed more than “peaceful rise”, in which the democratization of international relations can draw a wide range of countries alongside China, and in which talk of a “harmonious world” can reduce friction and possible countermeasures and blocks on China’s rise.<sup>128</sup> This is how the PRC uses language, carefully deployed to try and dispel negative China Threat assessments of the PRC, to avert anti-PRC actions by others and to create positive images of the PRC. Has the PRC succeeded?

During the past few years, the Pew Global Attitudes Survey (PGAS) has tracked China’s positive image in Africa and some parts of Asia; it has also tracked continuing, and in some cases increasingly, negative images of China’s military and economic rise elsewhere. Broadly speaking, this can be looked at during the period 2002–2010 (Table 3.1).

The favourability score refers to the PRC government, with favourability scores towards the Chinese people being higher in general. With regard to the PRC government, the soft power attractiveness of the Beijing Consensus seems

Table 3.1 China’s overall “favourability” trends, 2002–2010

	2002	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
USA	NA	43	52	42	39	50	49
UK	NA	65	65	49	47	52	46
France	NA	58	60	47	28	41	41
Germany	NA	46	56	34	26	29	30
Russia	71	60	63	60	60	58	60
Indonesia	68	73	62	65	58	59	58
S. Korea	66	NA	NA	52	48	41	38
India	NA	56	47	46	46	46	34
Japan	55	NA	27	29	14	26	26
Nigeria	NA	NA	59	75	79	85	76

Source: 25-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey, 16 June 2010, <http://pewglobal.org/files/pdf/Pew-Global-Attitudes-Spring-2010-Report.pdf> (accessed 22 December 2010), p. 52.

Note

Data are presented as percentages.

at play in the attractiveness in Africa of China's development assistance without human rights or sovereignty strings. Volatility is apparent with regard to US opinion. However, elsewhere attitudes towards the PRC have generally deteriorated during the past decade, especially in Europe (including Russia), and in China's neighbours like South Korea, Japan, India and Indonesia.

China's problems in handling hard power (military and economic) assets give rise to continuing soft power image problems. This underpins warnings by Yan Lieshan, a columnist for *Southern Weekend*, on what he feels to be a dangerous gap in perceptions between China and the rest of the world over China's international presence.<sup>129</sup> Problematic image trends can be followed with regard to China's growing military power and economic power. As Table 3.2 shows, it is China's military power that causes particular concerns for China's immediate neighbours, for the United States and for Europe (including Russia).

From China's point of view, there are concerns about some of these 2010 PGAS figures. Already Russia has refused to transfer certain high-tech advanced weapons (i.e. advanced Sukhoi warplanes) to China, whilst being ready to supply them to India, despite China being Russia's strategic partner. Questions have been raised in the PRC over how firm a partner Russia is likely to prove in future years for China; given such high levels of military worries apparent in Russian circles (71 per cent) about China's growing power, and muted concerns over Chinese penetration into the Russian Far East.<sup>130</sup> Fears of China's military power as a bad thing remain virulent in Japan (88 per cent) and South Korea (86 per cent), with India recording increasing concerns rising to 64 per cent. US concern remains high, at 79 per cent. PGAS 2011 figures were similar to the 2010 ones. The *People's Daily* editor, Li Hongmei, admitted to the shortcomings of

Table 3.2 China's military and economic image, June 2010

	PRC growing military power		PRC growing economic power	
	Good thing %	Bad thing %	Good thing %	Bad thing %
US	12	79	40	47
France	12	87	32	67
Britain	11	74	44	42
Germany	8	81	37	58
Japan	4	88	61	29
South Korea	7	86	45	49
India	27	64	34	56
Australia (2009)	12	75	63	29
Indonesia	41	39	61	28
Brazil	34	40	62	21
Mexico	21	46	41	34
Russia	14	71	49	30
Nigeria	64	20	90	5
Pakistan	70	7	79	5

Source: 25-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey, p. 53.



1 language deployment: “China has yet to present itself as constructive and trust-  
 2 worthy enough to its neighbourhood” and that “what is striking the nerves of the  
 3 neighboring states is nothing more than where China’s future development is  
 4 pointing to,” and that on their own “slogans and calls for advocating harmonious  
 5 and peaceful coexistence with all the neighbors will gain little in building a real-  
 6 istic good neighborliness as expected”.<sup>131</sup>

7 However, some success seems apparent with China’s stressing of economic  
 8 win–win situations. So the PRC leadership can but hope that important regional  
 9 neighbours like Australia, Indonesia and Japan follow positive economic percep-  
 10 tions of opportunities in China rather than negative military perceptions of  
 11 threats from China. Some soft power success seems apparent in China’s “good  
 12 neighbour policy” (*mulin zhengce*) vis-à-vis smaller states around its periphery  
 13 in Central Asia, South Asia and South-East Asia. However, the more assertive  
 14 Chinese rhetoric in 2010 over the South China Sea has probably damaged  
 15 China’s soft power image in the region. Chinese penetration into India’s neigh-  
 16 bourhood also heightens Indian concerns of its “strategic encirclement” by  
 17 China, despite the deployment of reassuring rhetoric from China.<sup>132</sup>

## 18 Conclusions

21 As has been seen, the PRC has employed a battery of terms, often simultane-  
 22 ously, but calibrated with regard to audience. “Multipolarity” has become sup-  
 23 plemented with “multilateralism”; calls for the internal democratization within  
 24 China have been met with PRC calls for the “democratization of international  
 25 relations” outside China. PRC calls for a “harmonious society” within China go  
 26 hand in hand with PRC calls for a “harmonious world” outside China.

27 Nevertheless, looking further ahead, question marks remain over the PRC,  
 28 which language used by the PRC cannot really address. There is something of a  
 29 “strategy of transition” by the PRC, operating since the late 1990s and still set to  
 30 run for another 30–50 years, which avoids the longer-term question of what  
 31 happens once China has risen and completed its long-term modernization pro-  
 32 gramme by the mid-century.<sup>133</sup> Public diplomacy language used now does not  
 33 really, and cannot really, tell one about the future. China may indeed argue that  
 34 “China does not seek hegemony now. Nor will we ever seek hegemony even  
 35 after China becomes more powerful.”<sup>134</sup> The trouble for China is that, despite  
 36 such reassurances, it is precisely this unknowable period *after* China has risen  
 37 that causes problems for some other states. Post-rise completion will Chinese  
 38 strength and policies mean other states balancing against China in a multipolar  
 39 world? Post-rise completion will China exert much more unilateral manifesta-  
 40 tions of power and strength? Post-rise completion will China exert Great Power  
 41 advantages over smaller states or will it maintain an egalitarian democratization  
 42 of international relations vis-à-vis smaller states. Post-rise completion will China  
 43 prove a divisive rather than harmonious force in the international system?

44 As concerns the first half of the century, language can of course be used in a  
 45 descriptive sense. In that sense, and as a matter of objective fact, China *is* clearly

becoming one of the “poles” (Great Powers) in the international system. China is engaged in a greater degree of multilateralism than in previous decades. China is undoubtedly on the rise, peacefully enough in the main, in the political and economic fields. Such public diplomacy language can also be used in an aspirational sense. In that sense and as a matter of subjective hopes: China *wants* to be given the respect and “status” of a multipolar Great Power.<sup>135</sup> China *wants* to achieve continued rise. China *wants* to achieve broad and substantive socio-economic modernization in its development by the mid-century. China *wants* to reach such rise and development through a peaceful rather than a non-peaceful process. Who wouldn’t? China *wants* to achieve harmony, albeit for Beijing in terms of continued Chinese Communist Party leadership “regime survival” within China.

In addition to such descriptive and aspirational uses of language comes a “calculative strategy” for China’s public diplomacy utterances; in which language is deployed and adjusted in an instrumental–functionalist way to counter China Threat perceptions and anti-China balancing from other actors, with English language terminology deployed as an instrument of government and diplomacy.<sup>136</sup> China remains concerned to use carefully calibrated win–win language to full political effect in the international arena. China wants to shape an image in the world, what has been called “Brand China”, or “reputation management”.<sup>137</sup>

There are some automatic frustrations in all this use of public diplomacy language. The PRC can and does point out that its use of reassuring language has been maintained for well over a decade, along with growing cooperative actions, as in the 2008–2009 global recession. Yet the PRC is still faced with uncertainty over its genuineness when using such reassurance language, and over its longer-term intentions. Long-term strategic hedging towards China by the United States, Japan and India looks set to continue, despite the use of cooperative engagement-fostering language by China. The trouble is that whilst China’s public diplomacy language *could* reflect a fundamentally assuring outlook and intentions, the same language *would* also be used by a state concerned to mislead others over its intentions and to win time for less reassuring actions in the future. There is little way round this conundrum of language impact, save the proviso that continuation of reassurance language and reassurance activities, if maintained by China for a few more decades until mid-century modernization is achieved, may gradually shape China’s political culture and attitudes over international behaviour. This is the argument used by advocates of the “international socialization” of China into the international community. Over time, psychological dynamics of self-attribution, self-persuasion and internalization may then root such language into norms, all of which resonate with traditional Confucian tenets on the efficacy of outward ritual, including language formulations, bringing about inward longer-term transformation of attitudes.<sup>138</sup> IR *liberalism* would also stress the positive and normative effects of such cooperative policies and language: IR *realism* would hold its breath amidst some scepticism.

This is all for the future. In short, for the PRC words and phrases are to be considered and used, not so much in terms of their truth or falsehood but rather

in terms of their being productive, un-productive or counter-productive for China's ultimate grand strategy of achieving long-term national rise within the international system. This is a pragmatic-instrumental view of language, as something to be used to construct images in order to further improve China's soft power attractiveness.

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T and F Proof