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Essays on Faith Diplomacy

Edited by Naomi Leight

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CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy

CPD Perspectives is a periodic publication by the USC Center on Public Diplomacy, and highlights scholarship intended to stimulate critical thinking about the study and practice of public diplomacy.

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Preface

by Philip Seib

Throughout much of the world, faith is a dominant element in the lives of individuals and broad political communities. For those conducting public diplomacy, reaching these people requires a thoughtful, sophisticated understanding of the role of faith.

The Faith Diplomacy Initiative of the USC Center on Public Diplomacy (CPD) featured a conference in March 2011 that examined intersections between foreign policy and religion. In that conference and during our continuing research, several aspects of the topic became apparent:

- Governments and the larger public do not understand the historical context and multi-faceted nature of faith diplomacy.
- A tendency exists to demonize faiths that are not well understood or that are perceived as being inimical to one's own.
- Numerous policymakers, including many in the United States government, are reluctant to address faith issues because of their domestic standards related to separation of church and state.
- As the dissemination and influence of religious beliefs are enhanced by new communications technologies, the world is becoming more religious, and public diplomacy must reflect that.

Despite the complexity of these matters, many who endorse the importance of public diplomacy also recognize the need to study and implement faith diplomacy as an integral part of broader foreign policy. This special edition of our *CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy* series addresses faith diplomacy from diverse perspectives:

- A case from the 16th century in which Christian emissaries reached out to the court of China's Ming Dynasty.
- A study of the history of the Catholic Church's global diplomacy.

- An appraisal of modern China's efforts to take advantage of its array of domestic religions as it further develops its public diplomacy.
- An analysis of post-secular discourse between the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds.

This publication is just our initial contribution to the literature of this field. As we continue to study and assist the faith diplomacy work of scholars and practitioners, we will be looking for new approaches to this topic. As part of CPD's commitment to faith diplomacy, we urge those interested in the subject to listen to faith-related stories from individuals and groups and search for the common narrative of belief that runs through them. We hope this volume will prove useful in that search.

Author Biography

Philip Seib is Professor of Journalism and Public Diplomacy and Professor of International Relations at the University of Southern California, and is director of the USC Center on Public Diplomacy. Seib is author or editor of numerous books, including *Headline Diplomacy: How News Coverage Affects Foreign Policy*; *The Global Journalist: News and Conscience in a World of Conflict*; *Beyond the Front Lines: How the News Media Cover a World Shaped by War*; *Broadcasts from the Blitz: How Edward R. Murrow Helped Lead America into War*; *New Media and the New Middle East*; *The Al Jazeera Effect: How the New Global Media Are Reshaping World Politics*; and *Global Terrorism and New Media: The Post-Al Qaeda Generation*. He is editor of the Palgrave Macmillan Series in International Political Communication, co-editor of the Palgrave Macmillan Series in Global Public Diplomacy, and co-editor of the journal *Media, War, and Conflict*.

**Matteo Ricci's Sixteenth Century Mission at the
Court of the Ming Dynasty: Lessons from an Ante
Litteram Western Public Diplomat in China**

by Paolo Sigismondi

Abstract

This paper situates Matteo Ricci's sixteen-century mission in China within a twenty-first-century public diplomacy theoretical framework. His cultural accommodation method within a holistic approach contributed to bridging the gap between the East and the West, fostering mutual understanding between vastly different cultures. Ricci was a Christian missionary whose deep knowledge of Western achievements in humanities and in science enabled him to make unprecedented inroads at the court of the Ming dynasty. While his specific results were limited, a renaissance of his approach could provide suggestions and inspiration for public diplomacy efforts of twenty-first century scholars and practitioners.

Keywords: China, cultural accommodation, holistic approach, faith-based public diplomacy

Sixteenth Century European Explorations and Interactions with the Far East

Matteo Ricci was thirty-two years old when he entered mainland China in 1583. That would turn out to be the last leg and the final destination of a long journey, which had led him from his native Macerata, Italy to Portugal first, then Goa, Malacca, Macao, and finally to the mysterious and fascinating China, where he died in 1610. What he encountered there appeared vastly different from his native town and from the splendor of the adventures and tales of the land of Cathay chronicled by his fellow Italian, Marco Polo, in his *Milione* almost three centuries earlier. In sixteenth-century China the two-hundred-year-old Ming dynasty was in fact experiencing signs of decline under the emperor Wan-li, who would rule for forty-eight years. Although Ricci never met with the emperor, his work at the emperor's court and in the *literati* circles of China helped bring the West and the East surprisingly close, with mutual understanding and admiration of each other's scientific discoveries and cultural achievements, within their respective differences.

From the 1500s on, thousands of individuals from the Western world, driven by vastly different ambitions and goals, interacted with different cultural landscapes after explorations had shown that it was technically possible to circumnavigate the planet, reach and chart territories previously unexposed to the European culture, and showed further that a variety of diverse civilizations were thriving above and beyond the known "old world." The uniqueness of Ricci's mission and adventure in China, however, makes it a public diplomacy case still relevant in the twenty-first century, it is argued in this paper. What are the lessons we can learn from his experiences as we strive to develop public diplomacy exchanges among different cultures in a globalized, evolving landscape?

Twenty-first Century Western Public Diplomacy Efforts in the PRC

The relevance of the People's Republic of China in a globalized twenty-first century landscape could hardly go unnoticed: Economically it is the world's second largest economy, with a GDP estimated (with purchasing power parity) at nearly ten trillion dollars in 2010¹, and with a population of more than 1.3 billion people representing the most populous country in the globe. Its political relevance vastly exceeds the boundaries of East Asia, as the Chinese government's transnational influence is increasing, just as the geographical reach of the products manufactured within its borders. The country has been undergoing major changes in the last decades of the twentieth century since the economic reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping in the post-Mao era. It is now a major economic force within the unfolding phenomena of globalization.

The relations between China and the Western world represent a central element in the twenty-first century global economic and political landscape, and public diplomacy efforts and exchanges among these entities are at a complex and critical juncture in the development of global international relations.² The central economic, social, and political role of China in the twenty-first century was underlined by the magnitude and relevance of the Shanghai Expo in 2010, which attracted a record number of visitors and exhibitors from around the globe, eager to interact with the Chinese public and elites.

As Cull pointed out, the foreign pavilions of the delegations in attendance tried to capture the attention of worldwide attendees while establishing distinct nation brands in a sort of "soft power showdown" on Chinese soil. While the broad achievements of different states were on display in the pavilions, the spiritual dimensions, in particular those stemming from Western cultures, were marginal if not completely absent³, as if the religious and faith-based components of a nation were deemed too divisive and therefore to be hidden in any public diplomacy efforts reaching out to foreign cultures.

Faith-based engagement and initiatives, however, are attracting increasing attention within an evolving body of literature generated by both public diplomacy scholars and practitioners analyzing unfolding conflicts around the world:⁴ These intellectual voices urge us to broaden public diplomacy approaches and to consider initiatives that engage the spiritual dimensions of different cultures. While their implementation could be challenging, these activities could be considered as part of the solution among contrasting points of view, rather than a problem. These scholarly conversations, which appear to be further confirmed by evolving public diplomacy practices⁵, suggest that ignoring or marginalizing faith-based dimensions of different cultures to focus only on the display of the materialistic achievements of a nation could prove short-sighted in fostering understanding and long-term relationships among different nations.

Effectively incorporating the spiritual dimensions of one culture into concrete steps of public diplomacy, however, still represents a challenge for both scholars and practitioners. The goal of this paper is to bring to the fore the sixteenth-century mission of Matteo Ricci in China, and to situate his approach within a public diplomacy theoretical framework. His method of creating mutual understanding between cultures, while fostering greater appreciation of each other's uniqueness, offers still today an inspiration and suggestions for public diplomacy scholars and practitioners to draw on. His holistic approach to bridging the gaps between the East and the West combined and harmonized the different aspects, aspirations, and desires that human beings face as they go through their daily lives, including their spiritual dimensions.

Matteo Ricci's Mission at the Court of the Ming Dynasty: Cultural Accommodation within a Holistic Approach

Driven by curiosity, commerce and prospects of richness and fame, Italian-born explorers, such as Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, Giovanni da Verrazzano, and John and Sebastian Cabot had been expanding the boundaries and the overall role of the Ancient World around the globe on behalf of the dominant

European dynasties in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁶ Matteo Ricci was, instead, a priest of the recently formed Society of Jesus. He became one as sixteenth-century Europe was undergoing major changes in its spiritual, political and academic landscapes. The medieval unity of Christendom was disintegrating as a result of the Protestant Reformation, and the evolving Renaissance humanism had been modifying existing positions and dynamics in the research and applications of knowledge for a few decades. Ricci, the eldest of thirteen children of a patrician family of Macerata, Italy in the papal domains, was instructed from an early age in Latin and ancient Greek and was exposed to a comprehensive education, combining humanities and science. Instead of following in his father's footsteps, as a pharmacist, Matteo Ricci decided instead to become a priest and a missionary. He continued his studies in Rome, and he was sent to Asia, eventually settling in China, where he spent almost three decades until his death. During this period of time, Ricci traveled in the country, met with ordinary people and *litterati*, learned the local language and assimilated its culture while introducing elements of his European heritage.

While faith was the driver of his mission, Ricci brought with him, in addition to his curiosity and determination, the knowledge and skills of a highly educated sixteenth-century European as he immersed himself into the ancient and mysterious Chinese culture. He was able, through the method of cultural accommodation, to absorb Chinese culture and to blend in the foreign Chinese society connecting with local *litterati* on multiple levels: culturally, technologically and spiritually, he exchanged knowledge with local cultures through a holistic approach. Drawing on classical Roman masterpieces and humanistic skills, he shared with Eastern audiences achievements and applications from the Western cultures. For example, he introduced techniques drawn from the studies on rhetoric to improve memory through specific exercises, such as the memory palace: the technique to associate concepts or ideas to places (real or fictional) in order to remember them within their sequence.⁷ At the same time, Ricci presented European scientific achievements and their applications, attracting "the attention of the learned sector

of the population with maps, clocks, [and] prisms, and other items from Europe.”⁸

He merged deeply in the culture of the hosting country, learning its language and mores, which allowed him to both translate Western classics into Chinese and Chinese landmark texts into Latin, such as the Confucian *Four Books* (Ssu-shu). Furthermore he was able to write in Chinese his *Treatise on Friendship* (Chiao-yulun) and *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (T’ien-chu shin-i). Through these complex activities addressing the different aspects of human lives, Ricci was able to overcome the daunting task of bridging the existing gaps between sixteenth-century East and West. His approach was truly holistic, as he was able to integrate humanistic, scientific and literary knowledge while incorporating spiritual dimensions. As his method, he utilized cultural accommodation: Ricci experienced a total immersion in the hosting country on multiple dimensions, with both the common people and the local elites. He learned to speak, dress, and to a certain extent, look Chinese. At the same time, he never lost sight of his country of origin and of his heritage.

Matteo Ricci was a pioneer whose adventures can be paired with those of the aforementioned sixteenth-century explorers, and whose fascinating journey from Italy to the court of the Ming dynasty has been chronicled as a unique and captivating story.⁹ But he was also a trailblazer who left to his successors a path to follow in his footsteps, shedding light on how to harmonize vastly different cultures: sixteenth-century Europe and China, with apparently little in common.¹⁰ This last aspect makes his adventure, and specifically his method, still relevant today as an interesting tool for twenty-first century Western public diplomats to draw on, as they face a similarly difficult task in fostering long-term relationships between East and West.

Cultural accommodation within a holistic approach unites studies in humanities and science while combining spiritual and technical aspects as drivers of unity in exchanges between cultures. This method requires a profound understanding of both landscapes and

the capacity to bridge existing gaps by focusing on the similarities, not on the differences. A similar approach could prove particularly effective in a globalized world, and it could be implemented by an increasing number of individuals who, for different reasons, live “between cultures”: their original and their adopted one. These diaspora communities could provide the necessary bridges to connect different landscapes and cultures. While in absolute terms Ricci’s mission had interesting, albeit limited results, his contribution of a better understanding between cultures remains to this day. Given the complexity of the current international landscape shaped by the unfolding phenomena of globalization, his experience urges us to think long-term and holistically in public diplomacy efforts involving physically and culturally distant nations, such as China and the Western world.

After his death in 1610, Ricci received the honors of obtaining a place of burial from the Emperor in the outskirts of Beijing, half a mile from the city, in recognition of his contributions to Chinese society. His legacy continued through his successors, but his method received condemnation and attracted opposition from his native country. Cultural adaptation, resulting in a deep understanding of the “other” (in his case combining elements of Confucianism and Christianity), drew specific criticisms from within the Christian world, which led to Pope Clement XI’s 1704 decree prohibiting specific forms of Adaptations, such as homages paid to Confucius and offering on the graves of the dead, for example.¹¹ This and other setbacks eventually lead to the suppression in 1773 of the Society of Jesus in China. It returned only after the opium war of 1840, and as Cronin put it “the privilege formerly won for Christianity by the virtue and wisdom of its missionaries had now been obtained by superior rifles and long-range guns.”¹² The East and the West were bound to face other decades of mistrust and misunderstanding, having seemingly squandered the favorable cultural *milieu* Ricci and his followers had been able to create toward the West.

Conclusion: A Model for Twenty-first Century Public Diplomats?

Matteo Ricci's mission in China was extraordinary in the sense that he almost single-handedly attempted to bridge the gap between the geographically and culturally distant cultures of East and West in the sixteenth century. We live in a vastly different global landscape in the twenty-first century, with phenomena of globalization driven by technological, political, and societal forces, connecting different world populations and effectively collapsing time and space distances across the globe. Cultural differences, however, still remain, combined by contrasting and competing views on major world issues. In particular, the spectacular rise of China at the turn of the twenty-first century rendered the interactions between this culture and the West a central element in many geopolitical issues. As these current interactions unfold, the ancient method of cultural accommodation within a holistic approach could have a renaissance and provide useful tools to foster better understanding between the East and the West. In particular, the experience of Matteo Ricci could shed light on how to establish long-term beneficial mutual relations between vastly different cultures, as well as offer inspiration and suggestions to be replicated also in our fast-paced, communication-technology-driven global landscape. Today's Macerata, Italy and Beijing, China are connected at the click of a mouse in our globalized world, but their cultures remain almost as distant as they were when Ricci entered mainland China in 1583: his experience and method though could serve as a model to this day, to bridge the existing gaps between the East and the West.

Endnotes

1. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) *The World Factbook 2010, China*. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html>
2. The complexity and relevance of Western public diplomacy efforts in China are for example explored by the author in “Hollywood piracy in China: An accidental case of US public diplomacy in the globalization age?” *Chinese Journal of Communication* 2(3), 2009, pp. 273-287
3. Nicholas J. Cull in “Looking for God at the Shanghai Expo: Religion, Nation Branding and the Soft Power Showdown” CPD Blog http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/index.php/newswire/cpdblog_main/author/Nicholas_J_Cull/
4. See for example Farr, Thomas F., and Terry Miller. *Diplomacy in an Age of Faith: How Failing to Understand the Role of Religion Hinders America’s Purposes in the World*. Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation, 2008 and Appleby, R. Scott., Richard Cizik, and Thomas Wright. *Engaging Religious Communities Abroad a New Imperative for U.S. Foreign Policy*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2010. On the broader topic of the role of religion in modern public lives, see Butler, Judith, JurgenHabermas, Charles Taylor, and Cornel West. *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*. New York, NY: Columbia UP, 2011.
5. Johnston, Douglas M. Jr. *Religion, Terror, and Error: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Challenge of Spiritual Engagement*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011
6. Interestingly, these explorers did not leave a specific trace of their Italian heritage, as they were at the service of other European kings and queens (from Spain, England, Portugal, etc). Italy would have to wait until the 19th Century, and a few wars in the process, to create its own nation state. As a result for example, none of the territories they “discovered” and claimed adopted the Italian language.
7. The role played by the teaching of this technique is analyzed by Spence, Jonathan.D. *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*. New York: Penguin Books, 1984
8. Ronan, Charles E. & Oh, Bonnie B. C. (Eds.). *East meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582 – 1773*. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1988, p. xx

9. See for example Vincent Cronin *The Wise Man from the West*. New York: Dutton & Co., 1955.
10. Ronan and Oh situate the method of cultural accommodation within the early Jesuits activities designed to propagate Christianity in the Far East, pointing out that both Francis Xavier and Alessandro Valignano inspired the mission and actions of Ricci, who effectively “implemented the method in China and set the pattern of Jesuit work in the country for years to come” (Ronan & Oh, (Eds.) 1988, p. xvii). They also points out that, prior to Ricci’s arrival in 1583, twenty-five Jesuits, and a limited number of Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians had entered China, albeit only for limited periods of time, as they were not allowed to remain longer.
11. It is worth noticing that in 1939 the Vatican issued a decree tolerating these practices.
12. Vincent Cronin *The Wise Man from the West*. New York: Dutton & Co., 1955, pp. 283-284.

Author Biography

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**Peace and Dialogue: The Faith Diplomacy of the
Catholic Church in Historical Perspective**

by Lan T. Chu

Since September 11th, religion has been regarded with increasing suspicion and consternation because of the irrational, violent acts that have claimed religion as its basis and justification. Publicly associated with terrorism, fundamentalism, or scandal, an aura of close-mindedness or resistance to modernity has characterized religion in the 21st century. Yet, to dismiss religion and religious institutions as irrelevant or antagonistic to the development of peace in the international community would be premature and misguided. This article examines the Catholic Church and its practice of faith diplomacy from a historical perspective, specifically focusing on the case of Poland during communist rule. This case demonstrates the Church's approach to international dilemmas and decision making, which, since the Second Vatican Council, has been to promote dialogue, cooperation, and self-limitation in order to ensure respect for human rights and human dignity.

At no time was this approach more evident, and perhaps more successful, than when the Church clashed with communist Poland, especially between the late 1970s and 1989. Limiting the analysis to this instance of communism helps to highlight the Church's diplomatic skill when confronted with a political system antithetical to religion. Rather than capitulating to communism, the Church was able to peacefully challenge the Polish regime, and by extension the entire Soviet Bloc's proclaimed commitment to freedom and equality. Before a brief examination of the Polish case is given, I will review the significance of religion and the unique characteristic of the Catholic Church in diplomacy and world affairs.

The Political Significance of the Faithful

Although political scientist Juan Linz identified three levels of research for the study of religion (the normative, institutional, and behavioral), it remains understudied in academia.¹ Religion's normative component in particular, expressed in official religious doctrine, is often disregarded because of its unquantifiable nature and the frequent dissonance between theory and practice. Yet, it is the normative component that underscores the power of religion in

public acts. Such doctrines are living moral symbols and ethical principles that shape people's lives in otherwise relativistic, secular societies. Thus, "the *doctrines* of a religion must be taken seriously, even before one examines their institutional and class associations, since they provide a first orientation, as it were, for believers either to withdraw from social and political commitments or to throw themselves into such concerns as part of their efforts to reach salvation."²

Religion's institutional character, which includes its organizational structure and its linkages to the social and political community, allows for cross-regional/cross-cultural comparison. Advantages to the Church's uniformity and organization are outlined by Christian Smith in his study of religion and social movements. Smith refers to the established leaders and members, pre-existing communication channels, and "enterprise tools" (e.g. general office equipment and facilities), all of which add to the efficiency and speed in the dissemination of the teachings and methods of the Holy See.³ This uniformity in the Church's organization helps to structure behavior and its relationship to governments across borders as well.

Furthermore, despite its presence in different cultural contexts, the Church's doctrinal and institutional aspects allow it to regard itself as a universal institution. It is universal because:

[O]ne's belonging to a particular Church never conflicts with the reality that in the Church no-one is a stranger: each member of the faithful...is in his or her Church, in the Church of Christ, regardless of whether or not he or she belongs, according to canon law, to the diocese, parish or other particular community where the celebration takes place. In this sense...whoever belongs to one particular Church belongs to all the Churches; since belonging to the Communion, like belonging to the Church, is never simply particular, but by its very nature is always universal.⁴

This dialectical relationship between the universal and national is a reminder that the presence of a Church in a particular country has immediate ties to the international community. Because it is a

transnational religion, it reminds “individuals that ‘the common good’ can increasingly be defined only in global, universal, human terms, and that, consequently, the public sphere of modern civil societies cannot have national or state boundaries.”⁵ Along with its enterprise tools, it is clear how the Church can quickly and easily affect domestic political behavior as well as foreign policy.

Yet, the concern regarding the dissonance between theory and practice, e.g. between the doctrinal and the behavior aspects of religion, is not unwarranted since the Church itself has at various times promoted contradictory views. This is not an uncommon phenomenon – scholars have referred to the “ambivalence of the sacred” and religion’s ability to reduce and produce violence.⁶ As noted by Scott Appleby,

John Paul II has befuddled many secular observers with his seemingly confused mix of socially progressive and socially regressive attitudes. Some wonder how a pope who champions human rights and personal dignity could have... [opposed] measures designed to curb the developing world’s population crisis – a crisis that heaps untold suffering upon the very people the pope claims to defend.⁷

To demystify the Church’s ambivalence, it would be best if one examined its internal logic and a good place to start would be with the proceedings of Vatican II.⁸

Why and How Do They Do It? The Influence and Duality of the Catholic Church

Although the Catholic Church’s interests and concerns are many, its diplomatic missions are focused on three major international issues: religious freedom, international debt relief, and war and peace.⁹ It justifies its involvement in these arenas because of the value it places on human dignity, which serves as a bridge between religious and secular communities. This emphasis on human dignity in a modern world was one of the major themes during the meetings of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), which were held between 1962 and 1965.

Pope John XXIII convened Vatican II, which brought together Church leaders, laity, and outsider observers. During these meetings, the goal was to redefine the Church's position in the modern world so that it could more effectively engage in politics through civil society. These substantial doctrinal and institutional changes brought about the Catholic Church's public transformation; it found a way to speak the language of modernity without fundamentally altering its values. By the end of the council meetings, sixteen encyclicals detailing the value of human dignity, the relationship between reason and responsibility, the role of the Church in a modern, plural society, the significance of dialogue, and the duty of civility were drafted.

In accordance with the Second Vatican Council's redefinition of the Church's place within and relationship to political life, one of the Church's goals, both domestically and internationally is to protect the dignity of life, an essential component of human rights. Thus, with an anti-abortion position, the Church believes it is simultaneously addressing a broad range of human rights issues because of its view regarding the cycle of life.¹⁰ Although its stance on various issues can nonetheless be viewed as politically conservative, its goal in defending the very modern and progressive issue of human rights remains. This defense occurs even when its own position and popularity within civil society is at stake.

The Church's political conservatism, however, does not automatically render it a pawn in the agenda of the political right. John L. Allen raises an important point that it might be best to view the Church as politically homeless since it does not always have the complete support of secular conservatives. He states, its "officially anti-death penalty, anti-arms trade, pro- United Nations, and pro-immigrant – stances anathema to many on the right".¹¹ Because the Church places itself symbolically beyond the reach of politics (ironically, a significant political act), it would be analytically reductionist to apply the politically charged and ambiguous Right-Left labels that ideologically divide societies. Viewed instead as an ethical reservoir, either side of the political spectrum could find an ally in the Church as long as their political position is consistent with the Church's moral doctrines and ethical commitments.¹²

Faith Diplomacy in Historical Perspective

Although the Church's engagement in American domestic and foreign policy has been met with varying acceptance, it has, nonetheless, the freedom to influence political life without being sanctioned or censored by the government. For obvious reasons, the American Church's experience, however, does not travel well across cases, specifically when the Church finds itself in a communist country. Nonetheless, the contrasting political environment and conditions of the Church under communism did not affect the consistency of the Church's diplomatic engagement with the state.

The Case of Poland

When Poland was divided among the nations of Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary in the late 18th century, society's participation in Church activities was an important way in which the people maintained their national identity. Under communism, it is of little surprise that the Church became a medium of dissent, as the totalitarian regimes were unable to bridle its strength and popularity.

Catholicism, therefore, was an undeniably strong force and an inextricable part of the Polish ethos. Ironically, the established strength of the Polish Church hierarchy actually made it more resistant to receiving the Vatican II changes, making it "one of the most pre-second Vatican Council churches".¹³ Not only were the Polish bishops dissatisfied with the absence of an explicit condemnation of Marxism and communism, they were also displeased with the overall more hierarchical and uniformed structure of authority, with the Vatican gaining greater authority over national Church operations.

Although the Polish Church was described as being resistant to some of the organizational changes of Vatican II (especially prior to 1979), it did incorporate the spirit of dialogue in its program. One of the earliest responses of the Polish Church to Vatican II's call for greater dialogue was in 1966 when it sent a letter of reconciliation to the German episcopate and its people. The purpose of the letter was to address the attitude and treatment of the two peoples towards one

another during World War II. To the regime and the secular members of civil society, the letter was a betrayal to the Polish nation, especially considering the Nazi past and the ongoing dispute over the Polish-German border. Nonetheless, the letter is an example of action that has implicit political meaning: the Polish bishops did the unprecedented act of raising the issue of mutual forgiveness between the two peoples. They stated: “Today, we need not polemics, not cold war, but the beginning of a dialogue, which the Vatican Council and Pope Paul VI are now trying to introduce everywhere. If there is goodwill on both sides... a serious dialogue must surely come about, and will in time bring good results.”¹⁴

Although the immediate response to the Church was criticism and greater control by the regime, as well as the silent ire of the Polish intellectuals, a change in strategy had been introduced. Citing Vatican II and their responsibility to their Christian mission, the Polish bishops defended their letter to the German bishops. As a religious and not political act, the Polish bishops noted that their purpose was to remain outside the realm of formal politics and to exemplify the significance and viability of dialogue during contentious times. Such dialogue would be crucial to the Church’s relationship with the discrete entities of Poland’s civil society, strengthening their abilities to counter the divisive measures of the regime.

Despite the criticism by the secular members of civil society, the Church continued on this new path. In the coming decade, the Church would increasingly incorporate into its pastoral letters and church sermons, Vatican II’s view of man as a rational being, the importance of human dignity, and the free exercise of civil liberties such as religious freedom and the right to political participation.¹⁵ During the latter half of the 1960s, however, the separation between the members of civil society continued to exist. While all desired similar goals, they carried out their projects independently of one another. Thus, the secular members of civil society remained largely silent during the regime’s verbal attack on the Church. Violence by the regime, however, would alter the relationships within civil society.

Although intellectuals had previously joined the regime in their criticism of the Church, they became the targets of repression in 1968 following student protests against censorship. The regime reacted to the protests by closing entire university departments and launched an anti-Semitic campaign against the “Jewish” intellectual community.¹⁶ In light of the events, the Church issued a statement with the intent of defending the students. It stated:

Each constituent of the nation and every citizen of the state must be free to help shape the common good according to his own legitimate convictions and conscience. No one should be called an enemy simply because he holds different views... The Catholic Church...attaches great importance to dialogue between representatives of different viewpoints, including dialogue between believers and non-believers. Such dialogue truly serves the cause of progress. It teaches respect for the truth as well as for the human individual, whose dignity is expressed by his approach to freedom and truth.¹⁷

Similar to its letter to the German bishops, the Church indicated that dialogue was the primary path the Church would follow when dealing with the modern world. Prior to Vatican II, inter-religious dialogue was not an important component of the Church’s mission. After Vatican II, however, as long as the common good was the genuine focus, the Church was willing to work with anyone. Sermons and letters such as this one led the outspoken Polish and non-Catholic dissident Adam Michnik to conclude that the Church was indeed on the side of oppositionist intellectuals and student protesters. Michnik reminded fellow left-wing and secular critics of their own failure as an opposition movement when they remained silent during the regime’s slandering of the Church in 1966.¹⁸ Poland’s secular civil society recognized it could establish a relationship with the Church, one that was based on human dignity and freedom.

The hypocrisy of the communist regime and the collaboration of the Church with secular groups of civil society only further necessitated the need for honest dialogue with one another. In its support for workers’ rights, however, the Church demanded from

both the regime and civil society a commitment to moral standards. By not officially or formally allying with either side, the Church was able to distance itself from crossing into the realm of the political and it was also prudent in its own actions by refraining from criticism during times of national crises.¹⁹

The space for civil society was, therefore, maintained to a large degree by the actions of the Polish Church. At times, priests were able to use the pulpit to denounce the regime, and attending Church services had become one of the few public displays of public resistance and Polish unity. As Poland's Karol Józef Wojtyła assumed the name of Pope John Paul II on October 16, 1978, the spirit of the Catholic and secular resistance movements behind the Iron Curtain were renewed with the message of "Be not afraid" in his inaugural address. The Pope's discussion of solidarity (as a concept) and the formation of the Solidarity movement (the oppositional trade union) exemplified the diplomatic skill and cooperative will of the Church as well as the secular members of civil society. The Church's greatest contribution at this time, therefore, was its commitment to moral values that resonated with the Polish people. While not actively and explicitly engaging in political protest, by authentically championing values that transcended religion, class, and ideology, the Church and its commitment to a dignified, human life was a symbolic source of strength to the opposition movement.

On December 13, 1981, Poland's regime declared martial law following widespread strikes and protests. During this time, the regime often turned to the Church to minimize social outbursts.²⁰ Nonetheless, the Church utilized faith diplomacy to appeal to both sides. In his sermons, Cardinal Józef Glemp's sermons referred to the regime's coercive measures as unconstitutional. To the Polish people, he urged "Personal honour remains, the preservation of one's dignity and one's full personality."²¹ Between 1985 and 1989, economic crisis in the Soviet Union influenced Gorbachev's decision to withdraw 50,000 troops and to allow each Eastern European country to go "its own way."²² The Polish communists were left to handle the deteriorating political and economic situation in Poland.

Without the threat of an invasion from the Soviet Union, dialogue between the Polish communists and the representatives of Solidarity was all the more imperative with massive civil disorder in Poland hanging in the balance. The crowning achievement of dialogue in Poland occurred in April 1989, when round-table talks took place with representatives from the regime, Solidarity, and the Church. The move towards democracy occurred later that year (with power sharing between the Communist Party and Solidarity) and resulted in the free election of Lech Walesa, former shipyard worker and leader of the Solidarity movement, to the presidency in 1990.

Conclusion

The Church's role in the political liberalization and eventual democratization process of communist Poland has been well documented and analyzed. The purpose of its review here is to highlight the significance of dialogue in the use of faith diplomacy to foster cooperation. How does this translate to international relations? In a discipline traditionally preoccupied with states and hard power, recognizing the influence of ideas (religious and secular) and non-state actors has become increasingly popular and necessary. Oftentimes, the presence of religion in political matters produces derogatory and dismissive responses with observers summarily associating religion with reaction, violence, and terrorism. We must keep in mind, however, that while religiously inspired terrorists have resorted to violence to change state behavior, there are other religious actors, such as the Catholic Church, that adhere to an agenda of dialogue and peace. It is time that we study the attempts at peace with as much energy and interest that is already given to the violent ones. International relations research agendas, therefore, must recognize the unique form of faith diplomacy to properly capture the significant role of religious organizations in promoting peace and justice. In terms of the Catholic Church, its organizational structure *and* normative substance have been extremely influential in affecting political life.

Endnotes

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China's Faith Diplomacy: Initiatives and Vulnerabilities

by Juyan Zhang

Abstract

This research analyzes China's recent initiatives in Buddhist diplomacy, Islamic diplomacy, Christian diplomacy and Taoist diplomacy to project its soft power to the world. In its faith diplomacy, the Chinese government prioritizes the religions as its diplomatic resources. Confucianism and Buddhism have more "Chineseness" and the Chinese government actively promoted both domestically and internationally. At the same time, it was cautious with engaging in Christian and Islamic diplomacy. China's faith diplomacy has inherent vulnerabilities given that the religions are associated with its complex nationality issues and social issues.

China's Faith Diplomacy: Initiatives and Vulnerabilities

On January 30, 2011, China's state-owned Xinhua News Agency reported a seemingly celebratory news headline, "Jesus to join Confucius as Qufu plans church." The report says that Qufu, the hometown of Confucius in east China is scheduled to build its first large Christian church, the Holy Trinity Church. According to the report, the church will be located 3 km from Confucius' Temple. It will cover 2667 square meters and will be able to hold 3,000 people. An exchange center for Christianity and Confucianism will also be built "as a venue to hold forums for the exchange and dialogue between the two civilizations." The story quoted a Chinese pastor as saying that "to build a church here means it will be a place where two different civilizations meet and mix." (Xinhua News Agency 13 December, 2010)

This news is undoubtedly the Chinese government's latest showcase to the world of its tolerance to the growth of Christianity in China because it was first posted in English at the state media's English website. However, soon after the reporting, Chinese police detained dozens of Christian worshippers from an unapproved Christian church who were trying to hold services in a public space after they were evicted from their usual place of worship. China allows worship only in state-approved churches and cracks down upon independent churches, or "House Churches." According to the Chinese government, there are over 55,000 churches and 23 million Christians in China. But scholars and church activists believe that more than 60 million Christians worship in "House Churches." (Associated Press 2011)

The two starkly contrasting events illustrate the irony on the part of the Chinese government in dealing with religious faiths: It has attempted to harness them for domestic and international political purposes, and at the same time it very often finds itself opposing the adherents of the those faiths. This is true not only with Christianity, but also for Buddhism and Islam.

Historically, Chinese civilization did not produce a religion that has worldwide impacts as Christianity and Islam did. Confucianism, which has greatly influenced the East Asia region in history, is more a system of moral and political beliefs than a religious faith. Taoism is more like a religion, but it had lesser influence than Confucianism. Regardless of their differences, however, these major belief systems, along with Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, had all been vehemently attacked and persecuted by the atheist communist regime for more than a decade shortly after the Communist Party took power in 1949. The Chinese government became more tolerant of faiths since it started the open-door policy in 1978. But only in the past decade has it realized that religion could be employed as statecraft in boosting its soft power to the world as it fully embraced the concept proposed by Joseph Nye.

For this purpose, also as part of its systemic socioeconomic and political reforms, China has been doing its homework by making and enacting a series of new religious policies in recent years, which expanded the institutional autonomy of religious organizations and limited the power of religious affairs bureaus (Tong 2010). In 2001, China's then president Jiang Zemin for the first time acknowledged that religion could act as a stabilizing force in society and, as such, could be mobilized as a positive force for national development (Leung 2005). Religions are now deemed to play a positive role in social development, representing positive values and contributing to the development of a harmonious society. Both religious elites and the echelons of the state are interested in institutionalizing religion and religious activities (Ashiwa and Wank 2009). Not surprisingly, religions are considered by the Chinese government a diplomatic resource.

1. The goals of China's faith diplomacy

The goals of China's faith diplomacy, as stated by the Chinese government, include promoting international understanding and acceptance of China's religious policy, advocating for China's actions regarding religions, improving China's image, and "building

a harmonious world.” which is obviously an extension of its domestic slogan of “building a harmonious society.” The Director of the Department of Religious Policy of China’s State Bureau of Religious Affairs wrote:

[The party and the government] support China’s religions to further building international friendship and promoting mutual understanding with foreign peoples and religions so as to make contribution to building a harmonious world. [China’s religions] should actively propagate the reality of religious freedom in China, and present to the world a positive image of China’s religions, so as to decrease misunderstanding in international community and gain their understanding and support of China religious policy and religious work as well as to improve China’s national image (Chen 2008).

With such goals in mind, the Chinese government has initiated a variety of activities of faith diplomacy in the past several years, and the momentum has continued today. On January 10, 2011, Wang Zuoran, the Director of China’s State Bureau of Religious Affairs, told media that China would actively engage in religious exchanges with the world that year to promote China’s vision of “religious harmony” in the world (Xinhua News Agency, 2011). Harmony is a core concept of Confucianism, but Wang’s statement indicates that China would not hesitate to employ other religions to promote the Confucian ideal.

2. China’s faith diplomacy initiatives

China’s faith diplomacy is an inter-agency effort coordinated between the State Bureau of Religious Affairs, the Information Office of the State Council, the Ministry of Culture, the Communist Party’s Department of Unified Front Work, as well as the national councils of the religions. There have been many news reporting and scholarly studies on how China has attempted to boost its soft power by setting up numerous Confucius Institutes in the world (Louie 2011; Paradise, 2009). But research on China’s attempts to utilize other religions for the purpose of public diplomacy is limited. This

essay will partially address the lacuna by examining China's faith diplomacy efforts in Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and Taoism.

2.1 *Buddhist Diplomacy*

With its official slogan of "a harmonious world" embedded in the themes, the Chinese government hosted two World Buddhism Forums in 2006 and 2009. The first forum, the theme of which was, "A harmonious world begins in the mind," was held in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, with more than 1,000 Buddhist monks and scholars from thirty-seven countries and regions invited. The forum naturally did not invite the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader in exile. The second forum, themed, "A harmonious world; Asynergy of conditions," brought in 1,700 monks and scholars from over fifty countries and regions.

The Chinese government's intention to use the events to showcase its soft power is clearly articulated by the Panchen Lama, a Tibetan Buddhist leader who is believed to have been elevated to a high-profile political role by the Chinese government to help build influence among the world's Buddhists as a counterbalance to the Dalai Lama. He said, "This event fully demonstrates that today's China enjoys social harmony, stability and religious freedom. It also shows China is a nation that safeguards and promotes world peace." (Xinhua News Agency, 28 March, 2009)

China first employed Buddhism for diplomacy with South Korea and Japan in 1995, when Buddhist monks from three countries met for the first time in Beijing. The China-South Korea-Japan Buddhist Friendly Interaction Conference has since been held thirteen times. Senior Chinese religious leaders expressed hopes that such conference should "promote friendship among the three countries in generations to come" (Xinhua News Agency, 19 October, 2010).

Not surprisingly, China has employed Buddhism in its diplomacy with South Asian countries. In 2003, the Chinese government lent the remains of one of the Buddha's teeth to Thailand to honor the 75th birthday of Thai King. When Chinese Foreign Minister Li

Zhaoxing visited India in February 2007, he used the opportunity to commemorate a memorial to the monk Xuan Zang, the Chinese monk who took Buddhist scriptures and teachings from India to China during the Tang dynasty (Brahm 2007). Such Buddhist diplomacy was even extended to North America, when China's National Museum held exhibition of ancient Chinese sculptures of bodhisattva Guanyin (Avalokitasvara) in Mexican City. The Mexican Foreign Ministry organized foreign diplomatic missions in Mexico for a tour to the exhibition (Chinese Embassy to Mexico, 2008). In April 2010, the Chinese government sent a 160-member Buddhist Orchestra Group to India to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Indo-China diplomatic ties. The group had been sent to South Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

These are some of the highlights of the Buddhist diplomacy activities that the Chinese government has orchestrated in the past decade. It appears that the Chinese government shows particular interest in tapping faith as a diplomatic resource. This probably has to do with the following facts. First, there are more than 100 million Buddhists in China. Promoting Buddhism internationally would have strong domestic political appeals for the Buddhist followers, which is conducive to the Chinese government's campaign of "building a harmonious society." Second, historically Buddhism has been more deeply rooted in China (for more than two thousand years) than Islam and Christianity and is largely considered a localized religion. Its doctrines and teachings have become a part of China's national mentality and thus bear strong "Chineseness" in cultural diplomacy. Third, promoting its version of Buddhism and symbolic figures such as the Panchen Lama would help counterbalance the world influence of the Dalai Lama. Fourth, it is a convenient resource given that many Asian countries have large number of Buddhists and are historically influenced by Buddhism. And finally, Buddhism was seldom associated with major upheavals and social conflicts in Chinese history and is thus deemed relatively harmless to the regime.

2.2 Islamic Diplomacy

As with other religions, Islam and its followers suffered from China's ultra-left policy for decades. The Chinese government allowed Chinese Muslims to make pilgrimages to Mecca only in 1979, with a strictly controlled number of pilgrims in the beginning. However, with its soft power strategy in mind in the past several years, the Chinese government has allowed more and more hajj pilgrimages to Mecca. The number of pilgrims from China rose to 13,500 in 2010, an action dubbed by some as China's "Hajj diplomacy" (Gresh, 2010).

But China seems to be cautious in employing Islam for faith diplomacy, compared to its enthusiasm toward Buddhist diplomacy. Its initiatives in this regard appear to have been mostly limited to business and the provinces where there are large number of Muslim populations, such as Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Yunnan, Gansu, and Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. Islamic scholars, religious and business groups from these provinces have travelled to Iran, Tunis, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, undoubtedly with approval and assistance from the Chinese government. The Chinese provinces also have started to accept charities from Islamic nations (Xinhua News Agency, 2008). Islamic artists from Ningxia and Xinjiang paid visits to Indonesia in 2010 as part of the initiatives to improve the two countries' relations.

The Chinese provinces that have large Muslim populations are eager to capitalize on the religious connections with Islamic countries. For example, the Minister of Publicity of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region traveled to Beijing to showcase the province's Islam-related culture to diplomatic missions from twenty-three Islamic nations, in a bid to boost "the soft power of the province" and attract investment (Xinhua News Agency, 15 January, 2010). Since 2006, China has hosted the China International Muslim Entrepreneur Peak Forums three times, which invites more than six hundred Muslim entrepreneurs and diplomats from China and around the world. The 2010 forum's theme is "Peace, Cooperation,

and Harmony”, another manifestation of China’s soft power strategy to promote the theme of harmony (Muslem.net 2010).

China is also opportunistic in using Islamic diplomacy in crisis communication. When the United States attacked Iraq in 2003, the Islamic Association of China, a state-controlled organization, issued condemnation of the attack on behalf of the 21 million Chinese Muslims. After the ethnic violence in Xinjiang in 2009, the Chinese government brought to Xinjiang four representatives from the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), a permanent delegation to the United Nations representing fifty-seven member states, to meet Chinese official and brief them about the causes and consequences of the unrest. This is an attempt to gain understanding of the Chinese government’s policy in the Uyghur region.

Overall, China’s Islamic diplomacy is limited compared to its enthusiasm toward Buddhism. This could be grounded upon the following reasons. First, compared to Confucianism and localized Buddhism, Islam is more of an imported religion and has less “Chineseness” in it. Second, Islam as a religion is highly associated with China’s complicated nationality issues. For decades the Chinese government has been worried over the Uyghur separatist movement in Xinjiang, which alone boasts of 11 million Muslims and 24000 mosques. Third, historically, the Muslim Dungan Revolt that swept across Northwest China in the 19th century paralyzed the Qin Dynasty’s rule in the region before it was put down by General ZuoZongtang. The uprising left hundreds of thousands to death. Such memory is still fresh for many Chinese. Lastly, there has been a Muslim Revivalism in China since the 1980s, which has become increasingly affirmative and in some cases become violent social upheavals and rebellions (Raphael Israeli, 1997; John Wang 2003). These factors likely serve to undercut China’s enthusiasm in Islamic diplomacy.

2.3 *Christianity Diplomacy*

China has had a complicated relationship with Christianity throughout history. This is still true today, as is illustrated by the events reported at the beginning of this essay. The Nestorian Christian missionaries arrived in China as early as the seventh century, but large scale spread of Christianity in China started in the 19th century. In 1954, with the approval and sponsorship of the communist government, the Three-Self Patriotic Churches was formally founded, which has since operated under the principles of self-governance, self-support and self-propagation. All Western Christians were forced to leave China. During the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976, Christians in China were persecuted.

In the past decade, as part of its soft power strategy, the Chinese government started to contemplate integrating Christian diplomacy in its public diplomacy. Although there is no as active state promotion as it did with Buddhist diplomacy, the Chinese government has become more tolerant and open toward international exchanges between Chinese Christian churches and overseas Christian churches.

The Chinese Christian churches reestablished engagement with the Christian world in the 1980s. According to the Chinese Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (CCCTSPM) (2010), such international exchanges focus on the following aspects: 1. Overseas churches such as the National Council of Churches USA and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have helped train faculty and church leaders for the 18 monasteries in China. 2. The overseas churches have donated paper and press to print bibles in China. By 2008, the Chinese Christian Council has printed more than 50 million copies of bibles. 3. With the sponsorship of the Chinese government, the Chinese Christian Council has held the Bible Ministry Exhibitions in the U.S. and other countries. The 2006 exhibition in the U.S., titled “The Bible Ministry of the Protestant Church in China: A Lamp to My Feet, A Light to My Path”, was co-

sponsored by the Episcopal Diocese of New York, American Bible Society, and the Council of Churches of the City of New York. 4. Overseas churches, through collaboration with Chinese churches, operated education, medical and charity programs. An 2009 annual review by the Gospel Times based in China shows that visits to Chinese Churches by Christian leaders from the U.S., Australia, South Korea, Japan, and Norway were frequent (Gospel Times 2009). Officials from the Chinese State Bureau of Religious Affairs told media that in 2011 it would sponsor another Bible Ministry Exhibitions in four U.S. cities and hold a Sino-U.S. Christianity Peak Forum before the exhibition (Xinhua News Agency, 2011).

This said, China's effort in Christian diplomacy has a thorn in its side: There is no official diplomatic relationship between China and the Vatican. China and the Vatican's relationship started to thaw in 1999 and the two held bilateral talks on establishing normal diplomatic relations. However, China insisted that the Vatican must sever its diplomatic ties with Taiwan and recognize the PRC as the only legitimate government of China. It also insists that the Vatican must not interfere with China's internal affairs, including appointing bishops in China. The Vatican disagreed. So far the two continue to battle over these issues.

In addition, the international exchanges between Christians in China and the world were basically "silo-ed" by the Chinese government into the church and news reporting about such exchanges is restricted to the church publications. It is clear that the Chinese government harbors suspicion and even antagonistic mentality in handling the Christianity affairs. It bans unregistered house churches and prohibits bringing bibles into China across borders. For example, an articles by an official in the State Bureau of Religious Affairs called for "high vigilance toward and strong prevention of use of religion to infiltrate into China by foreign enemies" (Chen 2008). Such mentality has more to do with the Chinese government's anxiety over the power of international NGOs as well as losing control of the civilian society, rather than with the memory of China's modern history that suffered from colonialism and imperialism.

2.4 Taoist Diplomacy

Taoism is a late-comer in China's arsenal of faith diplomacy. This is perhaps due to the fact that the religion does not have worldwide influence as other religions do. In addition, Taoism as a religious institution is not fully developed as Christianity and Buddhism.

China's State Bureau of Religious Affairs sponsored the International Forum on the Daodejing (or Tao TeChing, the Taoist canon) in Hong Kong in 2007, but the majority of the participants are from Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. In January 2011, Wang Zuonan, the Director of China's State Bureau of Religious Affairs told media that China would sponsor the second International Forum on the Daodejing and hold an international seminar on Taoism and Conservation of its Holy Land "so as to demonstrate to the world the Taoist idealism for peace and nature." (Xinhua News Agency 2011) To better prepare the religion for faith diplomacy, Wang made recommendations earlier in 2010 on how to improve the religion's institution and management so as to better adapt it to faith diplomacy. He said, "How to improve the international influence of Chinese culture is a paramount topic for the Chinese Taoists." (Xinhua News Agency, 2011)

3. China's vulnerability in faith diplomacy

From the aforementioned faith diplomacy activities, we can see that the Chinese government prioritizes these religions as diplomatic resources. Confucianism and Buddhism have more "Chineseness" than Islam and Christianity, and the Chinese government actively promoted both domestically and internationally. China would have fully employed Taoism if it were an internationalized religion. At the same time, China was cautious with engaging in Christian and Islamic diplomacy, and international exchanges involving the two religions were either siloed within the church or left to local level. There is a firewall built in Christian diplomacy because information related to it is filtered and controlled at home.

China's faith diplomacy has inherent vulnerabilities. First, its Buddhist diplomacy has to compete with the Dalai Lama's international influence. Tibetan Buddhism is one of the three Buddhist schools along with the Theravada School in Southeast Asia and the Mahayana School that is spread among Han Chinese. But China's Tibetan policy has driven the Dalai Lama and several other spiritual leaders of the Tibetan Buddhism in exile. The Panchen Lama that the Chinese government selected and endorsed has yet to gain his credibility in the world. In addition, Tibetan Buddhism is inseparably entangled with the complex nationality and political issues involving Tibet, which will certainly undercut China's effort in Buddhist diplomacy. Second, China also has to battle the separatist movement in Xinjiang, where most of the Uygur people in the region are Muslims. Thus China has to strike a brittle balance between its Islamic diplomacy and its domestic problems associated with the Chinese-Muslim populations. Third, the same is true for China's Christian diplomacy, which is undercut by its policy banning House Churches. Although Chinese officials rely on faith diplomacy activities to demonstrate that there is religion freedom in China, the highly restrictive policies and actions toward the religion at home only serve to discredit such claims. This said, China's faith diplomacy is better than none, it at least provides a venue and opportunity for the followers of these religions in China to communicate to their counterparts in the world, which was unimaginable even three decades ago. And as the trend goes, genuine and unrestricted faith exchanges between China and the world are becoming more and more possible.

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**Enriching Post-Secular Discourse in Faith
Diplomacy**

by Darrell Ezell

Introduction

The once credible secularization thesis of the twentieth-century—anticipating the decline of religion’s role in society—is challenged by a new descriptive term, *post-secularism*.¹ Without notice, American foreign policy shifted over the last three decades due to an unsuspecting rise in political Islam. While the secular remains a fixed element in the field of international relations, its role is becoming less predominant in the world. According to Jürgen Habermas, the present shift toward a post-secular era “refers not only to the fact that religion is holding its own in an increasingly secular environment [but] that society must assume that religious fellowship will continue to exist for the foreseeable future.”² This article does not regard the present decline in Western secular influence in the world as the end of secularism. It accepts that while the secular is holding a principal position in international relations, the confidence of traditional realism and the rational actor model of decision-making are challenged by a world-wide resurgence in religion and the emerging role of non-state actors in shaping the international agenda. Essentially the binary worlds of the religious and secular must grasp that a well-established communication problem is present, creating a bifurcation in discourse between actors. A balance in communicative relations dictates we welcome a *post-secular discourse* that emerges from and is shaped by this new era. Repairing this long-standing problem is of particular interest to the current role of American public diplomacy (PD) and the principal objective of the Obama administration to restore trusted relations with global Islamic communities.³

Five months prior to 9/11, the U.S. Department of State introduced *The Shared Values Initiative*, morphing later into the iconic *Brand America* campaign, led by Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen P. Hughes to win the hearts and minds of global Islamic communities.⁴ Attempts to restore trusted U.S.-Islamic relations focused primarily on upgrading academic and professional exchange programs, increasing foreign aid to Middle Eastern countries through the Middle East Partnership Initiative,

and vaguely approaching the religious dimension of Islamic communities by relying on one-way communication symbols to market American values and U.S. foreign policy.⁵ Nevertheless, a decade later, perceptions toward America continue to decline.

As the world becomes more religious, American PD must project a non-secular tone in order to engage post-secular issues and non-state actors in traditional societies. Presently, Washington has no other alternative but to broaden its narrow bureaucratic framework beyond a reliance on one-way communication, which over the last decade succeeded only at pacifying Muslims. Stoked by unfulfilled promises and the reluctance of the current administration to strategically engage the core of Islamic society, this article surmises that an opportune period lies ahead to assess the role of faith diplomacy as a tool of international engagement to restore trusted relations with global Islamic communities.

Improving trusted relations suggests immediate attention be given specifically to the role of two-way dialogical engagement between U.S. diplomats and Muslim non-elite actors. Bridging this gap in religious and secular engagement practices occurs when aspects of the non-secular are embraced by both worlds in the discourse setting. This article accentuates the imperative of incorporating a post-secular discourse when practicing faith diplomacy by giving consideration to the roles of *dialogical creativity* and *complementary learning*.

Misreading the Religious Dimension

Meeting Washington's post-9/11 national security objectives includes relying on the traditional realist approach and the rational actor model of decision-making when drafting foreign policy to engage global Islamic communities. Douglas Johnston argues in *Faith-based Diplomacy* that it is Washington's overreliance on projecting a *Realpolitik* that makes certain Washington misreads critical international relations linked to religion when pursuing diplomacy. On its influence, he notes, "Typically, this concept has

not included a sophisticated understanding of the large religious and philosophical values that influence the actors, nor has it offered its disciples access to the kind of spiritual engagement that can sometimes be useful in the diplomatic search for solutions.”⁶ By relying primarily on traditional secular approaches, policy-makers are becoming more keen toward discounting religion and the use of religious actors as a tool to curb new wars linked to new religious movements.⁷ Thus, this ill-considered posture contributes to such agencies as the U.S. Department of State misreading the social terrain of the Islamic world, leading to the implementation of inappropriate communication strategies to engage Muslims.

When misreading both the religious dimension and social terrain, agencies are more prone to exercise a set of secular-based strategies very likely to run counter to restoring trusted relations with Muslims. The two most notable after 9/11 were the projection of an American foreign policy of exceptionalism and reliance on Track 1. Considering the religio-cultural dimensions of the Islamic world, it is only appropriate Washington calibrates its lens and recognizes that a more precise form of communication is essential to embrace religion.

According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies 2007 report, *Mixed Blessings: U.S. Government Engagement with Religion in Conflict-Prone Settings*, three obstacles often contribute to the U.S. government’s narrow vision toward engaging religion and religious communities.⁸ The first relates to the misreading by key officials of the U.S. Establishment Clause and the parameters identified within it. In clear terms, the clause states, “*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.*” Misunderstanding this significant clause contributes to creating a U.S. government culture apprehensive toward engaging religious issues. The second obstacle is linked to the U.S. government’s contemporary framework for “approaching” religious issues, which leads to its frequent misreading. For example, this narrow vision after 9/11 translated itself into a tone, thereby, declaring the violent aspects associated with the religion of Islam

as the problem, consequently creating an insular U.S. Department of State culture skeptical of both U.S. - Islamic relations and direct engagement with Islamic society. The final, but most important, obstacle identified acknowledges the typical stance taken by U.S. policymakers to reduce the concept of religion or religious affairs to a non-substantive topic or an international religious freedom issue. If and when the topic of religion is broached, it is often regarded as non-substantive or approached nonchalantly as a “broad cultural [issue] rather than religion specifically.”⁹ By stripping away the theological significance reduces these new religious movements confronting the United States to base cultural issues, which are often discounted or pushed to the fringe. America’s resistance toward religion is linked to Washington’s overt disregard toward direct engagement with non-state actors in traditional societies.

In this article, traditional society refers to socially constructed communities that require trusted two-way communication systems in order to reach its core audience. Mary and Kenneth Gergen acknowledge social constructionism as a way of looking at traditional societies as Islamic communities which share multiple roots deriving from many conversations that “span the humanities and the sciences. In this sense, social constructionism is not a singular and unified position. Rather, it is better seen as an unfolding dialogue among participants who vary considerably in their logics, values, and visions.”¹⁰ Traditional societies are multi-dimensional, not solely governed by secular-based ideals and are often linked to a *social reality* that resides at its core. Non-elites from traditional societies come to understand their social reality on the basis of the many events encountered through their positive or negative relationships with “other” groups or state actors. Acknowledging this fabric within global Islamic communities will support U.S. diplomats and foreign policymakers in recognizing America is confronted by a dialogical issue rooted in half a century of adverse U.S. foreign policymaking which today manifests itself into a U.S.-Islamic communication problem.

By not assigning the correct communication strategy to engage Islamic communities, Washington runs the risk of periodically inciting *moral conflict* (e.g. vexing disputes that traditional diplomacy cannot resolve). These disputes are culturally-based and value-defined, originating from the way traditional societies interpret the actions, beliefs, policy, and behavior of outside players and systems. According to communication theorists W. Barnett Pearce and Stephen Littlejohn:

The problem is all the more confusing because suppressing moral conflict can be just as damaging as finding it out. When important moral difference are left unexpressed, points of view and perspectives on the world go unheard, and the interests of entire groups become marginalized in the process. The difficulty, then, is managing moral disputes in a way that allows expression and without the violent, disrespectful, and demeaning outcomes of open clash.¹¹

Moral conflicts in context to religious-based terrorism whether in Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan or the United States are often ignited by political and social setbacks, which spark violent attacks by non-state actors. This is precisely the case with stateless extremists linked to former *Tehrik-i-Taliban* leader Baitullah Mehsud and present leader Hakimullah Mehsud in South Waziristan.¹² However, fellow PD practitioners may argue that this is the precise reason why public diplomacy and nation branding are essential to market the “American Story.” On the contrary, aspects of traditional PD communication are beneficial when engaging secular worlds, but a reliance on “branding” America is counter-productive in this era to changing the hearts and minds of Muslims. If Washington’s chosen communication approach is not sellable to significant Islamic communities at home, it is only wise that we recognize such an approach will inevitably fail abroad. In comprehending this problem further, we discover an exhibition of this failure prevailed at the State Department prior to and after the events of 9/11.

Branding America

U.S. engagement with traditional societies has suffered several setbacks since the Clinton Administration merged the public diplomacy apparatus, the United States Information Agency (USIA), into the U.S. Department of State in 1999. For nearly forty years, State's PD approach consisted of a political action-centered message that directly engaged European publics for shaping America's image behind the Iron Curtain.¹³ Neither a purse of \$1.7 billion by 2001 nor an ill-conceived plan which perpetuates Washington's Cold War nation branding campaign in Europe, could sway Muslims or have any bearing on global Islamic communities.¹⁴

Subsequently, carrying out the agenda of the Bush administration, ad-hoc communication approaches were employed at the State Department as a benchmark for engaging global Islamic communities prior to 9/11. A strategic program geared toward facilitating U.S.-Islamic world relations did not exist at the time, nor was there a separate department, agency, or office equipped with highly-trained U.S. officials to deal specifically with broad religious affairs. Thus, five months prior to September 11, Secretary of State Colin Powell implemented a robust PD campaign to raise U.S. favorability ratings throughout the Arab world.¹⁵ However, by neglecting the religious dimension in deliberating the opportune communication strategy to engage Arab communities, a continuation of American Cold War PD was incorporated into both Charlotte Beers' *Shared Values Initiative* and later through Karen P. Hughes' *Brand America* campaign.

Applying quick-fix solutions culminated over the last decade in poor communication leading to new diplomatic setbacks.¹⁶ Mindful of the impotence of nation branding when engaging traditional societies, Gyrogy Szondi affirms, "Branding is very much image-driven, with the aim of creating positive country images. It is largely one-way communication where the communicator has control over the message, which tends to be simple and concise and leaves little space for dialogue and interactions."¹⁷ While consumer marketing

approaches are customary within Western society and are routine for selling consumer goods, there is a certain sense of unease in Islamic communities toward “selling” American values and foreign policies to Muslims. Meanwhile, Nancy El-Girdy suggests in *Why U.S. Public Diplomacy Failed in the Arab World*, “If the U.S. intends to make another attempt at strengthening its public diplomacy efforts, possibly the best strategy would be to restructure the State Department’s efforts so they reach [non-elites] through the use of respected and trusted religious leaders and authority figures in small towns to spread moderate teachings of Islam and denounce the use of violence for political ends.”¹⁸

When intersecting both Szondi and El-Girdy, we grasp that human-to-human engagement accented by two-way communication toward traditional societies provides an alternative path to reaching a balance in relationship-making with religious and secular-political actors. Their perspectives point to the reality that Muslim voices matter in this era, which means valuing two-way dialogical opportunities in a non-secular framework is an imperative to reaching Washington’s national security objectives. Relearning aspects of communication is essential at this juncture. Both *dialogical creativity* and *complementary learning* offer a new way forward to facilitate traditional and new public diplomacy actors practicing faith diplomacy in traditional societies.

Two-way Post-secular Discourse

Turning our attention to the advantage of embracing multiple communicative frameworks when practicing faith diplomacy, Troy Dostert presents four general qualities which secular-political institutions should consider if they wish to progressively improve their relations with traditional societies in a post-secular era: *sincerity*, *discipline*, *forbearance* and, above all, *dialogical creativity*. The last of these qualities is of great importance to faith diplomacy in which actors might improve communicative relations at home and abroad to formulate effective relationships across socio-cultural lines. This entails rethinking how to position sacred-secular voices together to

ensure a productive interchange. What is likely to develop when there is dialogical quality is a conversion of multiple communicative frameworks to create an inclusive context conducive to engagement between religious and secular-political actors. “The practice of dialogical creativity presupposes an ongoing need for scrutinizing our political ideals and adapting them so as to respond to changing social, cultural and political realities,”¹⁹ Dostert adds,

We must always seek to measure the adequacy of our political understandings and use whatever normative resources at our disposal to critique and refashion them when they fall short. This is a process that requires imagination and discovery, as well as flexibility and a desire to experiment with diverse political approaches.²⁰

By broadening the communicative framework to ensure multiple discourse opportunities, actors practicing faith diplomacy will discover new spaces available to relearn aspects of constructive communication. This dictates actors be adept at comprehending both secular and non-secular visions in order to balance and embrace both the aspirations and perspectives of either the religious or secular.

As long as the secular citizens perceive religious traditions and religious communities as archaic relics of pre-modern societies which continue to exist in the present, they will understand freedom of religion as the natural preservation of an endangered species. From their viewpoint, religion no longer has any intrinsic justification to exist in the present, and thus they will understand freedom of religion in this way. From their viewpoint, religion no longer has any intrinsic justification to exist. And the principle of the separation of state and church can for them only have the laicist meaning of sparing indifference. Citizens who adopt such an epistemic stance toward religion can obviously no longer be expected to take religious contributions to contentious political issues seriously or even to help to assess them as a substance which can in any way be expressed in a secular language and justified by secular arguments.²¹

Whilst broadening discourse opportunities in faith diplomacy, a behavioral shift must occur between both diplomats and non-state actors. Jürgen Habermas regards this cognitive behavioral shift in the post-secular setting as the *complementary learning process* (CLP). The aim of the CLP is to establish that a cognitive level of respect is necessary between the sacred and secular in society by emphasizing that neither should consider itself a social burden to the other. The process emphasizes that differences between them will be apparent, but the good gained by joining them derives from their very diversity. The aim is to ensure that both voices understand that they each have qualities from which other actors can learn. Taking a complementary learning approach to faith diplomacy ensures that in making this primary step, religious actors will not denounce their sacred beliefs when engaging the secular, and secular political actors, in return, will maintain their traditional beliefs when addressing religious actors. However, the focus turns to embracing tolerance, mutual understanding, and common ground to build communicative relations. “In view of what an ethic of democratic citizenship requires in terms of mentalities, we come up against the very limits of a normative political theory that can justify only rights and duties. Learning processes can be fostered, but not morally or legally stipulated.”²² Thus, actors practicing faith diplomacy must willingly embrace this learning process to advance two-way communication that hinges on respect and tolerance within the dialogical setting.

Making this shift toward a more engaged response, a broadening of the space for discussion will develop, thereby allowing for more direct yet peaceful public debates and deliberations between both traditional and new public diplomacy actors. Additionally, a diminution of political apprehensiveness will follow, since both citizens will have an idea of the other’s current objectives. Even with these progressive aims presented, it would be naive to assume that the process will not throw out great cognitive challenges. The problem often identified between both mentalities is that both worlds struggle with considering the other a “complementary equal”— a problem persisting in Western society since the eighteenth century at the nation-state level. With the *complementary learning process*,

a reflexive convocation of learning develops and is imbued with respect in order to encourage the primary adjustment of attitude needed to ensure a more engaged response between religious and secular actors.

Conclusion

This article promotes faith diplomacy as an effective tool and engagement model to communicate with global religious publics. As religion and religious-based issues become more pronounced in U.S. foreign affairs, the need for traditional and new public diplomacy actors to practice an innovative type of diplomacy will increase. This assessment is an introduction to an extensive conversation public diplomacy practitioners, communication theorists, academics, and diplomats must begin in order to enrich future dialogical opportunities with traditional societies. Two immediate suggestions are presented: a) Actors practicing faith diplomacy will benefit by adopting aspects of non-secular models to aid in projecting two-way communication; and b) Two-way communication training will accent dialogical opportunities between religious and secular-political actors. Both *dialogical creativity* and the *complementary learning process* offer a realistic starting point.

The act of reaching beyond the secular and into a more engaged response when addressing global Islamic communities will repair the current U.S.-Islamic world communication problem. Embracing two-way communication ensures both religious and secular-political actors within the dialogical setting will move from the aspirational to the practical in communication by accepting their social duty to practice mutual understanding. If American public diplomacy accepts this shift in conversational posture when engaging with global Islamic communities, a growth in shared values between diplomats and non-elite Muslims will inevitably result.

Endnotes

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