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Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee
“The Price of Public Diplomacy With China”
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the Subcommittee, for convening this hearing on the role of public diplomacy in U.S.-China relations. Thanks, too, to Congressman Carnahan for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today on issues that I have worked on since 1986, when I joined the United States Information Agency as a Foreign Service Officer. USIA, as many of you know, is the agency that was responsible for American public diplomacy until it was folded back into the State Department in 1999 as the Bureau of Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy.

You have invited me here to discuss recent developments in “the public diplomacy contest between the United States and China,” with emphasis on American universities’ growing involvement with China.

I would like to begin by pointing out that this topic touches on two related, but distinct, forms of bilateral interaction: formal public diplomacy on one hand, and the broader cultural and institutional channels of influence now collectively called *Soft Power* on the other.

Public diplomacy refers to the efforts of governments to influence the opinions and values of foreign publics. It is distinct from traditional diplomacy, which is conducted through government-to-government channels. U.S. public diplomacy is most important when a bilateral relationship is new or when conditions in a country make it impossible or unattractive for American non-governmental actors—including corporations, media, universities, and NGOs—to get involved there. When I served at the Beijing Embassy in the late 80s and early 90s, there were few American academic or media organizations in China. Our public diplomacy programs offered one of the few avenues Chinese had to learn about the United States. Today, however, people-to-people and corporate relations have long since eclipsed public diplomacy as transmitters of American culture to China. Our soft power has grown. Today’s Chinese cities are a cornucopia of American products, images, entertainment, fashion, and ideas. I will return to this point at the conclusion of my remarks.

Regarding **American public diplomacy in China**, the major recent development has been our government’s enhanced use of social media to reach Chinese opinion leaders and the general public. In addition to *Dipnote*, the State Department’s official blog, which is published in English, we have *Wild Geese from Foggy Bottom*, a Chinese-language blog about the United States, and an expanding slate of Chinese-language bloggers at the Voice of America. In January of this year, the State Department launched an occasional Chinese-language webcast called *Live at State*, which gives Chinese journalists an opportunity to interview American

diplomats, in Chinese, about U.S. policy. I was honored to participate as a guest commentator in the first of these webcasts, which focused on American universities and student visa policies. The American Embassy and Consulates in China, and the many American government agencies represented there, are continually expanding their Mandarin internet presence.

These efforts can bear fruit in unexpected ways. The Embassy in Beijing has long used Twitter to publish its own data on the city's level of Pm2.5 small particulate matter—dangerous pollutants that the Chinese government did not used to include in its public assessments of the capital's air quality. The Embassy's tweets were intended primarily for expatriate Americans, who needed to know whether it was safe to let their children go to soccer practice. The Embassy kept publishing its Pm2.5 data despite protests from the Chinese government. When Beijing citizens began to believe the American data, to complain about air pollution over the Internet, and then to buy their own monitors and publish their findings On-line, China changed its policy. In January of this year, Beijing began issuing hourly Pm2.5 reports. The Chinese government has announced that 30 cities will begin publishing PM2.5 levels in 2012, with 80 more to follow in 2013. This was not public diplomacy—not deliberate public diplomacy, anyway—but these events do indicate what well-designed and *unfettered* social media campaigns might achieve.

China's public diplomacy in America is well-funded and rapidly expanding. It takes two major forms.

1. The first is the **Confucius Institutes**. Confucius Institutes, or CIs, are Chinese government-funded centers for Chinese-language teaching and cultural programming modeled after initiatives like the British Council and Germany's Goethe Institutes. The first CI in America was established at the University of Maryland in 2004. There are now about 75 CIs in the U.S., most housed in universities or colleges. CIs typically do not offer credit-bearing courses to enrolled students; they focus on adult education for part-time learners and, through the Confucius Classrooms, on K through 12 programs in public and private schools. Confucius Classrooms offer textbooks, curriculum guides, technology, and teachers to students in a growing number of American schools who would not otherwise have an opportunity to study Mandarin.

The 350 CIs around the world are funded by a Chinese government agency called the Hanban, which is affiliated with the PRC's Ministry of Education. Hanban's mission is to build China's global soft power. To that end, Confucius Institutes conduct language classes and cultural programs that present China to foreign publics as an unthreatening, rapidly developing nation with a rich traditional culture. The Hanban has recently begun to fund professorships and research projects in American universities as well. Most CIs are run by American directors hired by the host university. Although American universities are paired with Chinese universities and sometimes have deputy directors dispatched to the U.S. by their Chinese partner, American directors manage their CIs with a high degree of autonomy in accordance with the needs and standards of the American host institutions.

The vast majority of CI cultural programs are apolitical by design. They focus on traditional Chinese visual and performing arts, aesthetics, uncontroversial aspects of the safely distant past, and the beauty of China's natural scenery. In an extensive but incomplete survey of CI cultural programming, I have found little that smacks of serious cultural criticism and no hints of political

indoctrination. I know of no CI programs that defend China's claims in the South China Sea, its currency policies, or its human rights practices. That isn't what the Hanban is about.

The growth of CIs in the United States has been viewed warily by some Americans, including academics and China watchers in government and the media. Their caution is reasonable. We should not take every pronouncement which the Chinese side makes on CIs at face value. Our universities should remain self-critical regarding their motives for establishing CIs and alert to the possible implications of having Chinese government-funded offices on campus. But in advocating vigilance, I am not claiming that Confucius Institutes are nefarious. No matter how well-founded our skepticism may be, CIs now have a record in America, and it is by that record that they should be judged.

To date, the record is pretty good. There have been several reports of heavy-handedness. At Stanford, Hanban officials offering to fund a new professorship “expressed concern that (an) endowed professor might discuss ‘politically sensitive things, such as Tibet¹.’” North Carolina State may have declined to host a lecture by the Dalai Lama at the suggestion of its CI². But the Hanban, taking note of the objections of its American partners, the scrutiny of American media, and the attitudes of the American public, has backed off. It has adapted. It seems likely to me that the Hanban's prime directive is now *Do No Harm*—its charge is to cooperate, to be liked, to fill American demand for Chinese-language training in accordance with American standards.

CIs are primarily concerned with providing Mandarin training to American professionals and K-12 students. Students who study Chinese throughout primary and secondary school are likely to take Chinese in college, to live in China, to gain an understanding of its people and cultures, and to bring that knowledge and an ability to communicate with Chinese counterparts into their careers. Americans who begin Chinese studies in adulthood are likely to develop a nuanced understanding of the challenges in U.S.-China relations and to help us meet those challenges. In other words, Chinese-language training, which the CIs help provide, is profoundly in the American interest.

We have nothing to fear from CI Chinese-language programs.³ There is nothing about gaining fluency in Mandarin that inclines students to support the Chinese Communist Party. I had the privilege of working with about 250 of our top young Mandarin speakers when I was American Director of the Johns Hopkins University—Nanjing University Center for Chinese and American Studies in Nanjing, China, from 2001 to 2007. I can assure you that they are as patriotic and as aware of China's failings as any of us. In fact, America's Mandarin speakers are among our most effective and constructive critics of China. They are the Americans who have lived and worked in China, who have made friends and, in some cases, marriages, there. They see what China, with its talent, its work ethic, its unsurpassed cultural traditions, and its explosive

¹ *Confucius Says: Debate over Chinese-funded institutes at American universities*, Elizabeth Redden, Inside Higher Education, January 4, 2012: <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/01/04/debate-over-chinese-funded-institutes-american-universities#ixzz1qBcE0hjA>

² *China Says No Talking Tibet as Confucius Funds U.S. Universities*, Daniel Golden, Bloomberg, Nov 1, 2011 <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2011-11-08/china-says-no-talking-tibet-as-confucius-funds-u-s-universities.html>

³ Note that I am not making any claims here about the *quality* of the Chinese classes and curricula offered by Confucius Institutes. I suspect that it varies widely from program to program.

ambition could be if its people were free. Studying China's languages, history, and culture doesn't dull those insights; it deepens them.⁴ That is why Americans who see China only as a congenial partner *and* Americans who see China only a threat—and everyone between the two poles—can agree on the need for greatly enhanced Chinese-language study in the U.S. My own view is that Chinese should be offered beginning in the first grade and should be second only to Spanish in public schools, but that is a topic for another day.

Should the spread of CIs in the United States raise any questions? Yes, of two kinds.

The first question is one of balance. In setting up the American CIs, the Chinese government is taking advantage of conditions here that they do not allow to us in China. This imbalance—what we used to call a lack of reciprocity—is problematic, even in Chinese terms. A line from the Confucian Book of Rites that is still in popular use tells us that it is bad form to be a guest in someone's home and then not to extend to him the courtesies that you enjoyed when it is your turn to host. Our Bureau of Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy is prepared to set up American libraries and cultural centers throughout China, but the Government in Beijing forbids it. Such centers would be welcomed by the Chinese people. Were we given the freedom of action in China that China enjoys here, we might staff our cultural centers with young Americans who learned Chinese in Confucius Classrooms.

The second question, which has been raised repeatedly, is whether our universities' collaboration with the Chinese government on CIs and other programs presents a threat to academic freedom. The form this question often takes is: would a university that cooperates with or takes funds from the Chinese government be willing to host a visit by the Dalai Lama? There have already been test cases and, while the evidence is inconclusive, the answer seems to be "sometimes *Yes*, sometimes *No*." Our universities' receptivity to people not received in Beijing may be declining. In 1989, many U.S. universities held programs and protests on the Tiananmen Massacre. Many gave fellowship support to Chinese students and dissident writers who reached America. My sense—and this is purely anecdotal—is that enthusiasm for hosting Chinese exiles is fading in academia. How many public programs did American universities hold on the treatment of the disappeared artist Ai Weiwei or Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo?

I do not mean to suggest that such events aren't held due to lobbying efforts by CIs. I know of no cases of CIs interfering in American university administration. My concern is that American universities may be tempted to self-censor because they now view themselves, correctly, as having *interests* in China. This is a recent development. U.S. universities not only conduct research and offer courses related to China, they now have relationships with the Chinese government. They are paid to train Chinese officials, they send their undergraduates to study abroad programs in China, and they conduct joint research and offer joint degrees with Chinese universities, all of which are managed by the Chinese government. Duke and NYU are investing tens of millions to build entire campuses in China, to pick but two examples from a vast pool of American university China programs. Do such collaborations have the potential to compromise

⁴ The same is true, of course, of the many Chinese who study in the United States. Living in another country and speaking its language doesn't blind you to that country's shortcomings, but it does tend to inoculate students against *simplistic* criticism of the host nation.

the standards of academic freedom, integrity, and rigor that make American universities the finest in the world? I hope that more American academics will study the question.

American universities, it must be remembered, have ample experience in working with donors of various kinds—nations, corporations, individuals—who wish to shape higher education through their giving. Hanban’s willingness to fund professorships and research does not present us with an unfamiliar set of challenges. And it is not just American universities that have interests in China. Our states, cities, counties, elementary schools, businesses, professional associations, etc., all have China interests—China *policies*, if you will. And properly so. China has an impact on nearly every academic field, every profession, every business, every individual, and that impact is likely to grow. To manage U.S.-China interaction to our benefit, and to China’s, we need to engage as many American institutions and train as many Americans as we possibly can.

2. The second major development in China’s public diplomacy toward the United States has been the **expansion of Chinese television and print media in America**. As you know, in 2009 the Chinese government committed at least 6 billion USD to the establishment of the state-run Xinhua News Agency’s North American headquarters in Times Square (it opened in May, 2011) and the China Central Television (CCTV) studio complex on New York Avenue here in Washington. Both Xinhua and CCTV have begun broadcasts. CCTV is building toward a 24-hour, worldwide, English-language news presence. The China Daily, the Chinese government’s flagship English-language newspaper, now appears as an advertising supplement in the Washington Post and New York Times. China’s English-language magazines have begun to appear on news racks across America.

The efforts of China’s state-run media pose little threat to the United States. American readers and viewers are accustomed to free and varied news sources and they know that China’s government controls its media. Most will approach CCTV, Xinhua, and China Daily reports skeptically, if they approach them at all. I suspect that most will ignore them.

As with the Confucius Institutes, the issue is not that Chinese state media harm America. The issue is a lack of balance in our public diplomacy. As you know, in 2010, 650 Chinese were given visas to work in the United States as government journalists. In the same year, only two journalists working for the American Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) were given visas to work in China. Chinese broadcasters in the U.S., moreover, have access to as much American airtime as they can purchase. BBG’s broadcasts to China are jammed and its webpages, along with those of Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube, to name but three of thousands, are blocked by the “Great Firewall of China,” which is run by the same Xinhua agency that has hung out its shingle on Times Square. Nor is any American commercial news network permitted to broadcast directly to Chinese viewers.

In its language, culture, and media initiatives, China is taking advantage of opportunities here that they will not grant to us there. They do so at a time when their determination to fund public diplomacy ventures is strong, and ours is weak.

Does this imbalance mean that the United States is losing a public diplomacy contest with China? Not really. America’s public diplomacy deficit with China is more than offset by the influence

exerted in China by our culture, our corporations, our people-to-people exchanges, and the work of American universities and NGOs. We may have a public diplomacy *deficit* with China, but we have a vast soft power *surplus*. The Chinese people's interest in—and access to—American products, entertainment, and thought overwhelms first-time American visitors to Chinese cities. China's bookstores feature translated works by our Founding Fathers, best-selling biographies of our statesmen and entrepreneurs, works on world religion, art, and philosophy, and Chinese-language versions of the Harvard Business Review, Sports Illustrated, and Cosmopolitan. Perhaps more importantly, an increasing number of Chinese hospitals, universities, corporations, NGOs, media outlets, and even some government agencies are adopting and adapting American professional practices. Tens of thousands of Chinese matriculate at American universities each year. Most will work in the U.S. for several years before either becoming American citizens or returning to China with American educations and professional experience. It has long been true that there are more people learning English in China than speaking it in the U.S. China's contemporary culture, meanwhile, offers little that is attractive to the American public.

This does not mean that China is Americanizing. The Chinese are proud of their ancient glory and recent rapid development. Most are determined to be true to what is best in the Chinese tradition even as they continue to modernize. It *does* mean that our culture, our values, and our behavior at home and abroad exert influence in China.

It has been said that China in the 1990s achieved the greatest increase in human happiness in any decade in human history (as measured by the number of people escaping poverty, gains in public health, etc.). I don't expect everyone here to agree with that view. Still, I would like to propose a twist on the formulation: In the 1990s, the United States had a greater influence on China than any large nation has had on another through peaceful means in any decade in human history. Americans can take pride in that influence, even if they believe it has not gone far enough. We would do well to remember, however, that we have had an impact on China primarily as a *catalyst*, rather than through targeted policies.

The catalysts have been American universities and colleges, corporations, NGOs, local governments, publishers and producers, and individual travelers, including our Chinese-language students. I thank the Committee for its continued support of their work.

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