Essay on the external communication strategies of the China Dream: Analysis and study of reports on the China Dream in The Washington Post and on CNN

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Abstract
As a value concept, a development goal and a spiritual drive, the proposal of the China Dream breathes new life into the international communication of China; it is a new opportunity for the external communication of China. In comparison with its recognition at home, the external communication of the China Dream still has great room for improvement. The study analysed the texts and content of related articles as found in The Washington Post and on CNN and uncovered the status quo and inadequacy of the current external communication of the China Dream, based on which corresponding strategies and recommendations were proposed from the following three macroscopic perspectives: theory and policy, media construction and support and think-tank resource construction. It is hoped that seizing the favourable trend of the currently continuously rising international status of China, the voice and image of China may be communicated to the world, and consequently, the soft power of China may be realistically enhanced.

Keywords
China Dream, content analysis, external communication, strategies and recommendations, text analysis

As a value concept, a development goal and a spiritual drive, the China Dream has received wide attention since its proposal. Countless discussions on the China Dream may be found in China, whose content continues to improve and develop following the advancement of time. In comparison with its recognition at home, the external communication of the China Dream still has great...
room for improvement. As the second largest economy in the world and a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, China has generated extensive interest around the globe. The proposal of China Dream breathes new life into the international communication of China; it is a new opportunity for the external communication of China. The channels of external communication to achieve the China Dream are therefore explored, which have profound significance on the construction of grand external communication strategies of China.

**The status quo of the external communication of China Dream – analysis and study of reports on China Dream in *The Washington Post* and on CNN¹**

Mainstream media of the United States have always been regarded as a pivotal platform for the external communication of the China Dream. It is therefore necessary to analyse and categorize the reports on the China Dream by mainstream US media. Considering the influence, representativeness and information accessibility of the media, the study has chosen *The Washington Post* and CNN as its research subjects. Text and qualitative content analyses were conducted on reports relating to the China Dream published by the two media between November 2012 and November 2013.

The samples of the study were selected by using the search feature of the media’s websites. Keywords ‘China dream’ and ‘Chinese dream’ were entered for the search, and the repeating or irrelevant content in which the keywords are merely referred to was eliminated. Following this method, the researcher found only 15 and 8 articles on the China Dream were published by *The Washington Post* and CNN, respectively, within the year after Chinese President Xi Jinping formally coined the term. As a concept extensively promoted by China, the number of reports on the China Dream is still relatively low. The trend shows that March, June and July, and October and November are three peak periods for the reports, which may be attributed to Xi’s elaboration of the concept in March, his visit to the United States in June and the 1-year anniversary of his office in November. To further understand the interpretation of the China Dream by Western media, we selected 15 and 8 articles on the China Dream from *The Washington Post* and CNN, respectively, and analysed the content.

**Research and analysis of reported themes**

The themes involved in the 23 selected articles have been organized and summarized in Table 1. To understand whether the interpretation of the China Dream concept by mainstream foreign media is accurate and exhaustive, the author has summarized and analysed sentences rendering and explaining the concept as found in the articles.

In the article *On China, Episode 10 transcript: The Chinese Dream* on CNN, a comparatively comprehensive interpretation of the China Dream is generated through dialogues with guests, which covered politics, economic, military, environment, livelihood and foreign relations. This is also the most detailed and all-embracing article that has been found to date. Such article plays a very important role in the external communication of the China Dream.

Among the articles from CNN and *The Washington Post*, some emphasize the embodiment of the China Dream in the economic and spiritual aspects. Some believe the China Dream is a vague concept of national renaissance (Qiang & Link, 2013), while others concentrate on individuals and the shift of focus to the enhancement of the living standard of the people in Xi Jinping’s subsequent
Table 1. Reported themes of selected articles in *The Washington Post* and CNN.

| Time              | Headline                                                                 | Theme                                                                 |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5 December 2012   | China’s Xi Jinping to party officials: Simplify                           | The China Dream and the personal image of the new-generation Chinese leader, particularly Xi Jinping |
| 4 January 2013    | Chinese journalists mount rare protest over an alleged act of government censorship | The news censorship and constitutional reform of China in relation to the 2013 *Southern Weekly* incident |
| 16 February 2013  | Striving for freedom in the Chinese New Year                             | The news censorship and constitutional reform of China in relation to the 2013 *Southern Weekly* incident |
| 14 March 2013     | Xi’s election to presidency completes China’s leadership transition      | Related measures after Xi Jinping assumed office                      |
| 17 March 2013     | China’s new president promises ‘great renaissance’                       | Xi Jinping’s interpretation of the connotation of the China Dream begins to emphasize enhanced individual lives in addition to mass attention |
| 22 March 2013     | Chinese ration license plates in effort to curb traffic congestion, air pollution | Licence plates are hard to obtain in Shanghai in an effort to control road congestion and air pollution |
| 2 June 2013       | Xi Jinping’s ‘Chinese dream’ and the rule of law?                         | To realize the China Dream, China should achieve constitutional reform |
| 3 June 2013       | China’s constitution debate hits a sensitive nerve                       | Issues involving the China Dream and the constitution are discussed, and China should first achieve constitutional reform |
| 5 June 2013       | Getting China to talk about cyberespionage                               | China should face up to the problem of cyberespionage and stop such activity |
| 8 June 2013       | Obama says U.S. and China must arrive at ‘firm understanding’ on cybersecurity | Internet security between the United States and China                  |
| 8 June 2013       | At U.S.-China shirt-sleeves summit, formalities and suspicions abound    | The meeting between Xi Jinping and Barack Obama                       |
| 3 October 2013    | China’s leader, Xi Jinping, consolidates power with crackdowns on corruption, Internet | Xi Jinping’s performance after assuming the office                     |
| 19 October 2013   | Chinese university dismisses professor advocating free speech, democratic reforms | Freedom of speech in China from the firing of a Uyghur teacher        |
Table 1. (Continued)

| Time                | Headline                                                                 | Theme                                                                 |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 28 October 2013     | Chinese critic booted off university faculty                             | Continued exploration of freedom of speech from the firing of a Uyghur teacher |
| 3 November 2013     | The Chinese are anxious over the future                                   | Exploration of issues facing China in its future development         |
| CNN                 | Austerity is China’s new year resolution – by order                       | The issues of anti-corruption and the distribution of state-owned enterprises under Xi Jinping’s leadership |
| 16 April 2013       | Can China become a melting pot?                                          | Whether foreigners can really integrate into the Chinese society and the China Dream should include providing foreign experts and scholars with permanent residency |
| 25 May 2013         | Is Xi Jinping’s ‘Chinese dream’ a fantasy?                               | Multidimensional interpretation of Xi Jinping’s China Dream concept, including that of the public |
| 5 July 2013         | Living the American dream in Jackson Hole, China                         | Middle-class Chinese businessmen who built an American town in China and still harbour the American Dream |
| 17 July 2013        | On China, Episode 10 transcript: The Chinese Dream                       | Comprehensive interpretation of the China Dream concept from the economic, military and individual aspect |
| 4 September 2013    | Washington out in the cold as China-Russia relations flourish            | Sino-US impasse following tightened relations between Russia and China |
| 20 November 2013    | Opinion: From Japan to the U.S., China embarks on a bolder foreign policy | Analysis of the China Dream concept as represented by change in the ‘low profile’ diplomacy of China based on the relations of China and its neighbours |
| 20 November 2013    | China: President Xi Jinping’s one-year report card                        | Summary of the political leadership of Xi Jinping a year after his assumption of the office from the political, ecological and environmental and economic perspectives |

addresses (Wan, 2013b). Moreover, some articles provided more microscopic explanations of the China Dream and regard it as owning a house, a car and a licence plate (Wan, 2013a). Some articles simply stress the economic aspect of the China Dream, believing it hopes to maintain the speed of the current economic growth and, like its American counterpart, to elevate more people to middle
The transformation of China from an economically backward and diplomatically isolated country into a global economic superpower may thus be achieved. Some articles plainly summarize the China Dream as that of national renaissance of the Chinese people (Denyer, 2013; Editorial Board, 2013; Hiatt, 2013; Rucker & Nakashima, 2013). A few of the articles from CNN broadly interpreted the terms as wealth, sense of contentedness and the revival of the national culture (Khanna, 2013; Kleine-Ahlbrandt, 2013).

The above summary and analysis demonstrate the interpretations of the China Dream by articles that are primarily focused on the following aspects: first is the economic aspect. Many articles believe the achievement of the grand revival of the Chinese nation as stated in the China Dream essentially refers to economic development, while others simply replace the China Dream with the possession of materialistic items such as a house or a car or compare the China Dream with the American Dream, believing both are essentially identical. Second is the emphasis that, based on national renaissance, the China Dream is still a dream of individuals in China to enhance personal living standard. Third is the insistence that the China Dream is unrelated to the execution of constitutional politics, and it is interpreted from the angles of freedom of speech and news censorship. Fourth is the exploration of the China Dream from the perspective of China’s foreign relations, believing the China Dream signals more Chinese activities in the international community. Furthermore, some articles simply mention the China Dream without further elaboration and consider it to be expansive but vague.

The articles have interpreted the China Dream from different aspects and have altogether covered quite an extensive ground. However, as individual articles, their interpretations tend to be slanted and incomprehensive, and some clearly misunderstood the term. China therefore needs to more actively provide a detailed and comprehensive interpretation to the media to achieve better communication results. Moreover, in terms of article size, apart from articles specifically exploring the concept, the rest articles occupy little space. The generalized summary of the China Dream concept is unfavourable in facilitating audience understanding and acceptance of it.

**Analysis of news sources**

The sources of information from the selected articles have been summarized in Table 2. Among the 23 articles, 19 quoted Chinese official content, including reports by Chinese leaders and the state media, while others referred primarily to experts and scholars, of which 3 and 4 referred to Chinese and foreign scholars. Although the articles concern China, the number of Chinese scholars acting as the source of information is still relatively low. It is telling that the number of Chinese scholars able to access mainstream Western media and speak for the country is rather limited. Moreover, among the 23 articles, only 5 take the public as an information source, and only 1 directly addresses the China Dream concept. This demonstrates the articles lack a public perspective and have turned the term into a political jargon that is not accessible by the public.

**Strategies and recommendations for the external communication of the China Dream**

To achieve effective external communication of the China Dream, efforts may be made from the following three major areas based on macroscopic strategies.
Table 2. News sources of selected articles in *The Washington Post* and CNN.

| Headline                                                                 | Source of information                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| China’s Xi Jinping to party officials: Simplify                           | Official media including CCTV                                                          |
| Chinese journalists mount rare protest over an alleged act of government  | Chinese government, members of Chinese NGOs, foreign reporters and *Southern Weekly* reporters |
| censorship                                                               | Chinese official reports                                                               |
| Striving for freedom in the Chinese New Year                              | Official reports by Chinese scholars and the government                                |
| Xi’s election to presidency completes                                     | Chinese official reports                                                               |
| China’s leadership transition                                             | Chinese official reports                                                               |
| China’s new president promises ‘great renaissance’                        | Chinese official reports                                                               |
| Chinese ration license plates in effort to curb traffic congestion, air  | Foreign distributors and Chinese consumers                                             |
| pollution                                                                | Chinese official reports                                                               |
| Xi Jinping’s ‘Chinese dream’ and the rule of law?                          | Chinese official reports                                                               |
| China’s constitution debate hits a sensitive nerve                        | Related scholars from China                                                             |
| Getting China to talk about cyberespionage                                | Foreign scholars                                                                       |
| Obama says U.S. and China must arrive at ‘firm understanding’ on cybersecurity | Chinese and foreign authorities                                                       |
| At U.S.-China shirt-sleeves summit, formalities and suspicions around     | Chinese and foreign authorities                                                       |
| China’s leader, Xi Jinping, consolidates power with crackdowns on corruption, Internet | Chinese and foreign scholars                                                        |
| Chinese university dismisses professor advocating free speech, democratic reforms | None                                                                                   |
| Chinese critic booted off university faculty                              | Foreign scholars                                                                       |
| The Chinese are anxious over the future                                   | None                                                                                  |
| Austerity is China’s new year resolution – by order                       | Chinese official reports                                                               |
| Can China become a melting pot?                                          | Chinese authorities                                                                    |
| Is Xi Jinping’s ‘Chinese dream’ a fantasy?                                | Chinese public                                                                         |
| Living the American dream in Jackson Hole, China                          | Chinese authorities, public and foreigners residing in China                           |
| On China, Episode 10 transcript: The Chinese Dream                        | Chinese authorities                                                                    |
| Washington out in the cold as China-Russia relations flourish             | Chinese authorities, and foreign journalists and enterprises based in China           |
| Opinion: From Japan to the U.S., China embarks on a bolder foreign policy | Chinese public and foreign scholars                                                   |
| China: President Xi Jinping’s one-year report card                        | None                                                                                  |

CCTV: China Central Television; NGO: non-governmental organization.
**Persevere in the ‘three confidences’ of the China Dream**

President Xi emphasizes that people from all ethnicities across China must reinforce the theoretical confidence, road confidence and system confidence of socialism with Chinese characteristics while progressing unwaveringly and fearlessly along the correct Chinese path. Road confidence refers to the path achieving the China Dream, while theoretical confidence and system confidence refer, respectively, to the action guide and the basic guarantee for achieving the China Dream. The results of materialistic development and the core values of socialism brought about by China’s economic reform in turn lead to a spiritual guarantee, which is the source of the ‘three confidences’.

**Strengthen the support for building key media for external communication**

In an era of information globalization, whoever controls the media may be said to have controlled the international discourse power. Hachten and Scotton (2011) once remarked that powerful countries generally also have influential control over news. Now that China has advanced to the second largest world economy, the country is fundamentally equipped with the material basis to intensify its investment in media construction. The external communication of the China Dream certainly depends on the main force, that is, the media.

*Cultivate key media for external communication.* Currently, nearly 90% of the extensively reported international news around the world comes from major news agencies in the West as represented by the United States, including the Associated Press, Reuters and Agence France-Presse. The volume of information released by Western media as represented by the United States, including CBS, NBC, ABB and CNN, is 100 times that of the total of other countries and regions in the world. All in all, this demonstrates that all major events or topics of discussions – be it politics, economic, military and culture – happening around the globe are eventually defined within the news framework of the US media, which will certainly influence the decision-making agenda and media agenda of other countries (Zhao, 2004). In contrast, a great gap exists between Chinese state media such as Xinhua News Agency, China Central Television (CCTV), China Radio International and People’s Daily and its Western counterparts, be it in influence or operations, as they launch the external communication of China. The top priority at the moment remains in the step up of investment in media to provide sufficient funds and policy preferences while building a modernized media platform for the external communication of the China Dream. It is recommended that media are encouraged to adopt market-based operations, within the limits as permitted by policies, to achieve economic independence. The strategy of ‘starting from within’ of CCTV has contributed positively to the exploration to alleviate the shortage of funds for external communication. Since the inception of CCTV-4, a Chinese international channel, in 1992, CCTV has increased its investment in external communication relying on its domestic advertisement income. Currently, domestic communication-aided investment occupies an absolute majority in the annual fund for external communication (Duan, 2007).

*Drive the strategy to localize media.* External communication involves the communication and exchange between two information systems with different cultural backgrounds, and localization is the basis and premise for effective external communication. For China’s external communication, globalization will be the scope and the standard of action, while localization emphasizes the
operation technique and management approach adopted by external communication to acclimatize to specific social and cultural environments. Dialectical relations exist between globalization and localization, that is, globalized thinking and localized action. Jamie Davis, former China president of Star Group Ltd., once described the specific model of its localization as follows: to distinguish the group from other local television channels, they referred to the successful experience of the group’s programmes in other countries and regions (Duan, 2007). They recreated the ideas and applied to the programmes targeting the Chinese market to produce new programmes matching the local taste. During the external communication of the China Dream, media must also adopt localization strategies (Huang & Zou, 2004). To overcome the challenge facing trans-cultural communication and avoid self-assumption, the planning, production and marketing of the communication should be tailored based on the political, economic and cultural characteristics of the target region. Meanwhile, collaboration with local media may be intensified through means such as joint event hosting and programme production. Moreover, local media may be commissioned to undertake the encoding during the communication and local media staff hired to support the localization of media for external communication of China.

Advance with time to improve the approach cultivating media workers. Media are a key fortress in external communication, and the critical role played by media workers in introducing the China Dream to the world speaks for itself. In an era of media convergence, the barriers standing between different media types are gradually removed. Conventional media such as newspaper, radio and television no longer produce a single type of news items, while news-carrying terminals also diversify. The transformation of news media certainly brings along new sets of requirements for news workers. Individuals involved in omni-media news must possess a complex set of skills, including that of modern communication, profound cultural knowledge and a solid foundation for communication theory. Moreover, such individuals must be able to think outside the box of conventional media and adapt to the circulation and interaction among different media posts; they should be able to adjust accordingly based on the specific situations and requirements. They are also experts who are specialized in a certain field, which, compared to conventional media, is more technology and planning oriented. These specialized individuals understand the characteristics and use of different new technologies and equipment and are able to fully capitalize on their communicative property to optimize the communication effect. As data journalism is fast rising, the professional skills such as data extraction, statistics analysis and data processing are necessary.

For media workers engaged in external communication, in addition to the skills and competences mentioned above, they still need a solid political stance and an acute political sense to unaffectedly perform the external communication of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Furthermore, proficiency in foreign languages and understanding of the cultural characteristics of the target countries are among some of the basic requirements. Deviation as a result of language translation and potential misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication should be minimized during the encoding of communication. The effect of external communication of the China Dream may be enhanced from the source.

Step up efforts to build think tanks for external communication of the China Dream

Broadly defined, external communication comprises not only the media but also any other activities that may facilitate the external communication of the China Dream. Similarly, external
communication involves not only individuals from the domain of news and communications but also those from the national think tanks and academic elites. The reinforcement of the external communication of the China Dream requires input from different subjects to constitute a joint communication force to achieve the best communication results.

**Support the building of high-quality national think tanks.** To quicken the process of building new think tanks of high quality and high standard with Chinese characteristics, the connotation of the China Dream needs to be continuously and scientifically enriched to provide valuable and influential ideological products. A language system should be gradually developed instead of blindly following and always passively echoing with that of the US think tanks, which would in turn elevate China’s influence while encouraging more accurate and in-depth understanding of the China Dream during the process of external communication. Meanwhile, the development of public think tanks should be encouraged to echo with those of the state. New ideologies should be sought as the two interact and the sparks fly to jointly promote scientific decisions.

**Support the cultivation of academic elites.** Unlike individuals involved in think tanks, scholars often publish research results in professional academic journals and place academic influence instead of political influence in the first place. The power of academic discourse is a key factor influencing that of international discourse. Many noted scholars in the United States have become the creators of academic discourse, thanks to its abundant educational resources and comparatively liberal academic environment. For example, the term ‘soft power’ is proposed by professor Joseph Nye of Harvard University, which has become an academic term that persists among discussions of external communication and international relations. China, in comparison, lags far behind, and the habitual reference to existing Western theories and the shortage of independent academic creativity are dominating problems. The cultivation of academic elites to actively build a Chinese academic discourse system means fighting for the power of academic discourse to eventually partake in the international struggle. For the external communication of the China Dream, its understanding may be facilitated through the multidimensional interpretation of academic elites on its connotation and extension. Attractive and influential communication materials for the external communication of the China Dream may arise through theory innovation. For China, to elevate global recognition of the China Dream through the spread of the profound values as represented by the China Dream, academic freedom must be safeguarded when cultivating academic elites. Interference in the academic circles should be kept at minimal, thus allowing students to create freely. Furthermore, a reasonable appraisal mechanism should be built to evaluate quality instead of quantity. Scholars should be encouraged to innovate theories and awarded accordingly.

**Note**

1. The paper is the theoretical research results of the social-science research project at the ministerial level of the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People’s Republic of China *The Study of Public Credibility Building of Radio and Television Communications against the Background of Media Convergence* (Project No. GD1522) and of the key construction project of Beijing Base of Philosophy and Social Science *The Study of the Development Strategies of Conventional Media in Beijing* (Project No. BJJDGJ1501).

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