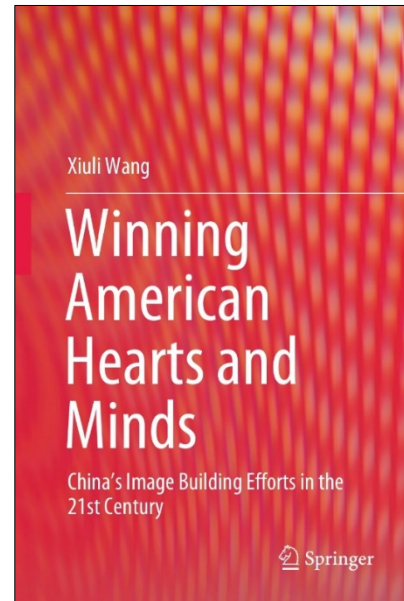


Xiuli Wang, **Winning American Hearts and Minds: China's Image Building Efforts in the 21st Century**, Singapore: Springer Nature, 2020, 152 pp., \$105.25 (hardcover), \$62.56 (eBook).¹

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A country's national image is its intangible asset, the core of its soft power, and its ability to win hearts and minds of foreign publics through attraction (Nye, 2004). Moreover, a country's national image is directly reflected in others' public opinion. The Pew Research Center has asked Americans about their attitudes toward China since 2005, and, by March 2021, approximately two-thirds of Americans held negative views toward China, the highest recorded since 2005 (Delvin, Silver, & Huang, 2020). According to the Center, Americans' sour stance toward China was due to the "China Threat Theory" (Huntington, 1993; Scott, 2007) caused by the country's rocket rise. Further, a country's national image in the eyes of foreign people is also highly related to its own image building efforts, which is key to foreign public opinion.



Winning American Hearts and Minds: China's Image Building Efforts in the 21st Century, by Xiuli Wang, offers insights from various lenses on how China builds its national image, presenting a panoramic view of China's multiple endeavors in improving its image in America through a communication viewpoint.

The book elaborates on China's image building framework from a Chinese scholar's point of view and its effectiveness and impact on Americans from Americans' points of view. Moreover, the book pays attention to the types of social media used by China in influencing its public image abroad, which, to some extent, is a novel perspective in the studies of national image building.

Through a comprehensive review of scholarship in this area, the author collects various elements that may affect foreign public views on China, dividing the book into 11 chapters. The introduction (chapter 1) addresses the backdrop and concept of China's image building, highlighting the significance of soft power in the international community and pointing out that China's soft power has not kept up with its economic power; it is perceived as a threat to many Western countries, with the United States being one of the most outstanding (Zhang, 2010). As a result, the Chinese government has devoted itself to image improvement to conquer the China threat theory. The author then draws a clear picture of China's efforts, including public diplomacy, promotion of Chinese culture and language, education exchange, international broadcasting, and China-hosted mega events, which are discussed in Part III as case studies. The chapter also presents the layout of the book and the research methodologies used, including semistructured interviews with Americans, content analysis (of Americans' media coverage of China and of data from social media sites, such as Twitter), and online surveys.

¹ To access this eBook, please visit: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-15-3184-2>.

The rest of the book is divided into two parts and a conclusion. Part I (chapters 2 and 3) expands on the national image theories. Chapter 2 aims to offer a plain overview of theories based on previous literatures of national image and public opinion. The author then illustrates the reasons foreign public opinions count. First, the author explains the country-of-origin effect, or when "the image of the country influences consumer choice and behavior" (p. 13). Second, public opinion and foreign policy are discussed, indicating that public policy may derive from public opinions (p. 14). Chapter 3 focuses on China's image in America in recent decades through data and observation, concluding that the level of difference between the two countries (i.e., "deviance,") influences whether and how a country is covered in American media (Shoemaker, 1996; Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006).

Part II (chapter 4 to chapter 10) covers seven case studies of China's public diplomacy activities in building a positive image abroad. Chapter 4 presents head-of-state visits and their effect on national image building, with a particular delineation on Chinese President Xi Jinping and First Lady Peng Liyuan's new foreign visit style. The author implicitly points out that the new style that emphasizes leadership personality is a lesson learned from China's failure in shaping foreign media's perceptions through visits in the 1990s. Chapter 5 explores international broadcasting, focusing on the Chinese government's expansion on its national media outreach overseas (including Xinhua News Agency, China Daily, etc.) since broadcasting enables a government's voice to be heard, and China needs it. However, according to the author, U.S. audiences tend to interpret it as another kind of propaganda, which they do not like. The jokes about the uninteresting content demonstrate that China's international broadcasting cannot cater to American audiences since Americans prefer criticism instead of positive political content (p. 71). Chapter 6 explores social media, discussing how the Chinese government boosts China's image around the world through social media platforms. The author takes the animated music video of "Shisanwu,"² posted on Xinhua News Agency's Twitter account³, as an example. Based on the responses of ordinary Twitter users and China researchers, the author claims that this video ushers in China's "Public Diplomacy 2.0" era for its creativity and modernity.

Chapter 7 discusses China's education diplomacy, examining the Chinese government's recent efforts to attract foreign students to study in China. It is inferred that despite the heavy investment in international student programs, China's potential return has not been the highest, because of poor collaboration with public and private parties. Chapter 8 discusses the development of Confucius Institutes and the promotion of Chinese languages worldwide. Interestingly, the Institute is seen as a "Trojan horse" (Mosher, 2012, para. 20), as it provides more institutional than material culture. Moreover, its role in improving China's national image is overestimated because many American learners in the Confucius Institute are predisposed to positive opinions on China.

Chapter 9 focuses on international mega events, especially on how the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2010 Shanghai World Expo influenced foreign opinion toward China. The author argues that mega events uplift a country's national image and infrastructure, as well as people's living standards domestically. Nonetheless, the display of a country's power may call for further unfavorable views, maybe because of its counterparts' fear and envy. Chapter 10 discusses Made-in-China products, elaborating on how the image of

² "Shisanwu" (i.e., 13-5) means China's 13th Five-Year Plan of national development.

³ Xinhua News Agency, the official state-run press agency of the People's Republic of China.

Chinese products may affect China's national image. The product-country image concept is introduced to explain the relationship between a country's product and its national image, with a diachronic review of U.S. media coverage of Chinese products, concluding that Chinese products are an indispensable variable to improving Americans' views of China. In the conclusion (chapter 11), the author summarizes the pros and cons of the above approaches, stating that China has altered its propaganda-style international communications strategy into a modern-style method.

Although the book is written by a Chinese scholar, it unfolds the arguments in a highly critical way based on multiple theories and past studies. However, the case study on mega events is not recent, as it uses the 2008 Beijing Olympics and 2010 Shanghai Expo as examples. Additionally, the author only conducted semistructured interviews with 16 participants, most of who were male, ranging in age from 30 to 40. The sample was a little small and gender- and age-limited, in that women and men of other age groups might have had different opinions on China.

The book provides a comprehensively detailed overview of the public diplomacies of China, providing novel perspectives on social media and the First Lady approach in a neutrally critical way, which may enlighten both Chinese and American scholars and politicians in working for the betterment of the two countries' relations. Through data-based discussions and a review of the literature, the merits and demerits of each element are objectively evaluated. Overall, the findings may have pragmatic effects on China and other countries in improving national image building strategies, enhancing mutual understanding between China and the United States, easing the tension between the two countries, and consequently fostering improved China-U.S. relations.

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