

"Culture, Communication, and the Construction of China's National Image"

May 28, 2013

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China is becoming an increasingly important player in the global community. What is China's image in the domestic and international realms? How does China build its national image? Does the image represent reality? To investigate China's image across intellectual, political and media domains, the panelists conducted comparative discourse analysis using data from the international media, China's local media, and large-scale surveys. The analyses yielded four different findings.

First, the panelists discovered that within political and economic circles, the "China Threat Theory" serves as a tool for gaining political and economic interests. Within intellectual circles, the theory serves the need of establishing "the cultural self." In their review of foreign attitudes toward China, the panelists point out that the American view of the "China Threat" is relatively favorable. Although a large number of Americans (47% in 2011) believe that China will replace the U.S. as the world leader, only a minority (12% in 2011) feel that China has done so at present. Thus, the Americans have not panicked yet. The concern amongst Western European countries is primarily ideological. Western Europe is worried that it will lose its status as the "superior civilization." Japan's fears, on the other hand, are more substantial. Japan is worried about China becoming an economic superpower. Lastly, India is concerned about always being compared against China and lagging behind in the comparison.

Secondly, the panelists argue that following the 1990s, the "China Threat" propaganda, present among foreign intellectual, political, and economic circles, became a unitary voice. This was the result of foreign media selection and filtering. As a result, the "China Threat" became a worldwide discourse among many countries, while China's voice was left out throughout the process.

Third, through analysis of China's mainstream media, the panelists found that older Chinese citizens with lower income tend to be more hostile toward the U.S., while younger urban Chinese citizens with more education and income are friendlier. The collective imagination of China, the U.S., and other western countries is no longer the embodiment of "enemy," but rather a new image of "Utopia" – playing the roles of "competitor," "teacher," and "the ideal other." Sino-Japanese relations remain hostile, however, as 41% of Chinese believe that Japan is China's enemy.

On the whole, the panelists emphasize that the construction of China's national image is a complicated research topic and that overly simplified analyses would lead to misunderstandings. China's rapid development has brought about complicated reactions and a variety of different images of China's within the global arena. Continuous research is needed to delineate these changes. The goal of this project is to reduce prejudice and estrangement and to promote good will and understanding between different countries.