Religion and China’s Public Diplomacy in the Era of Globalization

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Abstract: Since the end of the cold war, especially since the 9/11, religion’s importance has risen sharply in international relations. It has already become an inevitable and important factor in the strategic considerations of national security and foreign policy in various countries. Therefore, in their considerations for foreign and strategic relations, public diplomacy associated with national religious image, or the so-called religious public diplomacy (faith diplomacy), which depends on their own religions and religious groups as the chief carrier, connecting foreign religious organizations and believers as the main object, and largely concerning about religion and relevant issues, is also gradually rising. This article argues that currently religious groups, academia and the government together constitute the main framework of China’s religious public diplomacy, and gradually form a pattern of divisions in which religious groups can implement programs, academia offer recommendations and suggestions, and governments coordinate; and, that the three sectors share resources, work together and have positive interaction to significantly promote religious public diplomacy of the country.

Key Words: Globalization; Religion; Public Diplomacy; Religious

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Public Diplomacy; China’s Foreign Strategy

With the development of globalization, especially the expansion of Chinese national interests in the process of globalization, religion has become more and more important for China’s foreign relations and foreign strategy. As a result, public diplomacy in the field of religion has increasingly become an important way for China to disseminate its religious information, promote communication and dialogue with other peoples, shape its national religious image, and increase the national soft power and international voice. Since China’s reform and opening up in the late 1970s, China’s religious public diplomacy has enjoyed rapid development. Various religious exchange activities and institutional communication platforms such as the “World Buddhist Forum”, “International Taoism Forum”, “the Bible Ministry Exhibition of the Protestant Church in China”, and bilateral and international Islamic cultural festivals and so on, have appeared. All of these have a positive effect on exhibiting the religious policy and practice of China in the international community. However, because China’s religious public diplomacy started relatively late, religion as a resource for foreign relations as well as Chinese society has not been fully exploited, and there is still a long way for China to transfer from a country of rich religious resources to a religiously powerful country. The author points out that currently religious groups, academia, and government constitute the main body of Chinese religious public diplomacy, and a pattern of divisions has been gradually formed in which religious groups can implement programs, academia may offer advices, and governments could coordinate; and that the three sectors share resources, work together and have positive interaction which will significantly promote religious public diplomacy of the country.
Religion and China’s Public Diplomacy

In the past, public diplomacy usually refers to the diplomatic way that a government transmits its values and positive information to foreign public, closes the cognitive and emotional gap between its people and the foreign public, increases mutual understanding, and shapes public opinions of other countries through a variety of means, including cultural exchange programs and news media, in order to enhance the international image and influence of the country and promote its national interests. The most striking feature of public diplomacy is “direct contact with foreign publics rather than foreign government” (Seib, P., 2009: vii). Traditional public diplomacy in general comprises the following three elements: 1) government as the main subject; 2) foreign citizens as the main object; 3) for the purpose of influencing international public opinion and improving the image of the country. Public diplomacy in the current era of globalization pays more attention to the diversity of the subjects and the bilateral nature of communication, especially the dialogue and cooperation. It promotes “listening” rather than “monologue”, “contact” rather than “target”, civil society network pattern rather than state-centered hierarchical mode, as well as the popularization and computerization of transmission vehicles and networks. This is known as the new public diplomacy or the second generation of public diplomacy. Increasingly defined as “public diplomacy” carried out by the public, rather than just “public diplomacy” targeting the public (Hocking, B., 2005: 32), the new public diplomacy clearly can better reflect the universality, flexibility, diversity, participatory, and interactive features of public diplomacy, which has already become a part of foreign strategy of many countries.¹

¹ There are numerous works on public diplomacy and new public diplomacy. In addition to the above works, please also see Han Fangming, ed., Public Diplomacy, Beijing: Peking University Press, 2011. For religion and China’s
Since the end of the cold war, especially since the 9/11, religion’s importance has risen sharply in international relations. It has already become an inevitable and important factor in the strategic considerations of national security and foreign policy in various countries. Therefore, in their foreign relations and foreign strategic considerations, public diplomacy associated with national religious image, or the so-called religious public diplomacy (faith diplomacy), which depends on their own religions and religious groups as the chief carrier, connecting foreign religious organizations and believers as the main object, and largely concerning about religion and relevant issues, is also gradually rising.① Religious exchange, as the interaction of ideas, values, emotions and basic attitudes between different peoples, nations and regions, its influence is more profound and lasting than political alliances and economic exchanges based on realistic and material interests. In addition, the features of religion, such as community, grassroots, universal and continued existence, are totally compatible with the basic attributes of public diplomacy. Therefore, religion is a natural field for public diplomacy.

Although the concept of public diplomacy originated in the West, the promotional and cultural communication activities that shape the national image have a long history both at home and

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abroad. In ancient China, there are examples, such as Zhang Qian’s visit to the western regions in the Han dynasty and Zheng He’s expedition in Ming dynasty, among others. They can all be regarded as public diplomacy practice. In the history of China, Chinese religious organizations and believers also involved in foreign exchange, for example, Monk Xuanzang’s journey to the West and Monk Jianzhen’s eastward voyage to Japan. More recently, religious groups and believers in China also have played an active role in foreign exchange. In 1932, Yu Rizhang (David Yu), the President of the National Christian Council and Secretary-general of the Chinese YMCA, travelled to the US to campaign for the cause of resisting Japanese aggression against China. He suffered a stroke when meeting with the US Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson at the State Department and died 4 years later. To some extent, he became a martyr of public diplomacy of China (Yuan, F., 1948). After 1949, Chinese religious groups and people also carried out various forms of foreign exchange in the name of people’s diplomacy or people-to-people exchange. For example, from October 15, 1955 to June 6, 1956, during the first tour of Buddha Tooth in Myanmar, hundreds of thousands of Burmese Buddhists gathered and performed pilgrimage. This was the prelude to China’s “diplomacy of Buddhist relics” (Huang Y., 2012).

Since the reform and opening up, especially in recent years, China’s religious public diplomacy has witnessed faster development. Guided by government departments, especially with the coordination of the Chinese Religious Culture Communication Association (CRCCA), established at the end of 2005, China’s religious public diplomacy and cross-strait religious exchange have picked up speed. There also appeared various religious culture and foreign exchange activities and institutionalized exchange platforms,

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such as the “World Buddhist Forum”, “International Taoism Forum”, various cultural exchange programs of Chinese Taoist Association, “Sino-US Protestant Leaders Forum”, “The Bible Ministry Exhibition of the Protestant Church in China”, and series of bilateral and international Islamic cultural festivals. China’s religious leaders and religious groups have also presented themselves in a series of major international forums (such as the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders), and played an increasingly visible role in the various international religious organizations, such as the World Council of Churches. All of these have a positive effect on exhibiting the image of religious policy and practice of China in the international community.①

On May 28, 2013, when President Xi Jinping met with the Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, he made a very good interpretation of the nature of public diplomacy, its relationship with the traditional diplomacy, as well as its influence on the Sino-US relations. He pointed out during the meeting, that promoting the development of China-US relations not only needs to be top down, but also needs to come from the bottom to top, because “the basis of China-US relations is at the local, popular and grassroots level” (Guangming Daily, 2013: May 29). As one of the most local and grassroots factor, religion obviously has potential to promote further development of Sino-US relations. On September 7, 2013, during a speech at the Kazakhstan Nazarbayev University, President Xi Jinping again stressed the “simple truth” that “the relationship between two countries is based on the affection

between the two peoples”. He said that the ancient Silk Road provides a valuable lesson, that is, “on the basis of solidarity, mutual trust, equality, inclusiveness, mutual learning and win-win cooperation, countries of different races, beliefs and cultural backgrounds are fully capable of sharing peace and development” (Xi, J., 2013: September 8). Religion cannot only provide an important platform for China’s public diplomacy and serves in its forefront, but it can also show the international community the spiritual outlook of the Chinese people, and provide profound spiritual basis and resources for a “harmonious world” and the policy of good neighborliness and friendship. Religious public diplomacy is an important component of China’s public diplomacy.

However, as the religious public diplomacy of China started late, the foundation remains relatively weak and is faced with a hard, if not impossible, mission. Religions, no matter as the social resources of Chinese society or resources of foreign relations, remain to be fully developed. At present, China’s international religious influence is quite limited, mainly confined to the overseas Chinese groups, that is, the so-called second section of “Believing China” ; China’s huge religious “export” is still processing industry basically, with quantity advantage rather than quality superiority; in addition to the rich heritage of traditional religions, contemporary religion export commodities, including the Bible, are mainly commercialization of spiritual products, lack of value-added products with core competitiveness. Various religious groups also

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1 “Believing China” is composed of the following three closely linked parts: the first one is the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan; the second is the traditional Chinese religious beliefs and various overseas Chinese believers of other eastern and western religions; the third is foreign believers of China’s traditional religion. Among them, the first part just covers the political landscape of contemporary China, while the second and the third parts are the overseas territory of the “Believing China”. See Xu Yihua, “Understanding Protestant Christianity in Contemporary China: A Concept of ‘Believing China’”, The Ecumenical Review, Vol.67, No.1, 2015, pp.17-26; Xu Yihua, Zou Lei, “Believing China”, China International Studies, No.1, 2012, pp.50-52;
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have serious institutional weaknesses, resulting in the gap between the willingness and ability to carry out public diplomacy. China’s current political pattern is “powerful state, weak religion”. Chinese religion and its development have caught attention from the world mainly because of the increasingly growing number of religious believers and the government’s policy toward them. Thus, there is still a long way to go for religion and religious policy to truly become an asset of China’s external relations and even to be understood by the international community.

The Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs & President of the CRCCA, Wang Zuoan recently pointed out that to tell the Chinese story to the international community, you must tell the story of Chinese religion well. “The story of Chinese religion” in general can be divided into two parts, namely traditional religious culture as well as the contemporary religious policy and practice. As a fundamental part of Chinese traditional culture, the former has already enjoyed a high international appeal and acceptance, and has all the basic elements of the so-called soft power, whereas the latter is a field of serious misunderstanding, large trust deficit and huge differences between China and the West. (Xu, Y., 2012: 3). Compared to “successful China stories” such as the extensive and profound traditional culture of China and over 30 years of reform and opening up as well as to China’s rapid economic rise, China’s contemporary religious policy is a much harder story to sell due to the political, ideological and religious differences between China and the West. Therefore, it is crucial for China to attach importance to the religious public diplomacy to bridge this trust gap caused by misunderstandings, suspicion, and misinterpretations, and to set up China’s positive international image in the field of religion. This article discusses the three principal participants and their respective functions in China’s

① Quoted from Wang Zuoan’s speech in the first council meeting of CRCCA, February 19, 2014, according to the author’s site notes.
religious public diplomacy. To tell good religious stories of contemporary China, we need resources integration and cooperation of Chinese society, overseas Chinese and international friends, especially our religious groups, academia and government agencies at various levels.

II. Religious Groups and Public Diplomacy

With the continuous development of religions in China, the role of religion in the country’s public diplomacy and people-to-people exchanges is also developing. The main task of China’s religious public diplomacy in the near future is to bridge the gap between the international religious image of China or the public impression on China’s religious policy abroad and the actual religious situation in China.

In terms of social environment of the religions’ going abroad, the religious groups in China are actively participating in national construction, trying to adapt to the Chinese society, and integrate themselves in the “mainstream” of the country’s social and political life. A marginalized religion or a religion that is persecuted in its own country, such as the Baha’i in Iran, is not only unhelpful to the country’s image, but also a negative equity of the country’s foreign relations. Thus, to become a carrier and resource of China’s foreign relations, religions and major religious groups in China must fulfill the following conditions: the religious belief and religious groups receive common respect and recognition in the society and among the public; the party and the government’s religious policy, especially that of religious freedom is implemented; religious leaders and believers fully play their roles in social and economic development; harmonious relationship exists between religions, religion and society, and religion and state, etc. To be credible to others, we shall first put our own house in order. Otherwise, religions’ going abroad can only be mere formality and hard to
sustain, not to mention being able to play any possible role in promoting China’s international image.

As carriers of public diplomacy, religious groups need to emphasize their autonomy and spontaneity. The new and upgraded public diplomacy gradually turns from government-led into civilian-led; it extends from one-way transmission to two-way dialogue, presenting a situation of multi-layered relationship, including government to people, people to people, and people to government, and all of these can improve the effectiveness of public diplomacy. In fact, multiple interactions of public diplomacy and people-to-people exchanges are compatible with the Government’s united front policy and the “mass line” theory at the international level (Zhuo, X. & Xu, Y. & Liu, J. & Zheng, X., 2012: 37). China’s social conditions have determined a crucial role of the government in public diplomacy and people-to-people exchanges, especially in sensitive areas, such as religion. However, if everything is arranged or controlled by the government, pushing the government to the front desk, religious groups will lose autonomy and spontaneity, and will even become only a tool of the government projects and plans. All these can neutralize the positive role of religion in international exchange, and make it harder to accomplish its original task. So, in foreign exchanges, we should establish a pattern in which religious groups play the main role and the government provides assistance, religions step on the stage and government retreat to the backstage, or “led by religion and monitored by the government”, based on specific circumstances of international exchange. In view of the practice of separation of church and state in most countries in the world, the government-led first-generation public diplomacy is not quite suitable for religion, and that might even backfire as evidence of government manipulation. Therefore, religious foreign exchange and public diplomacy in China need to realize the change from a hierarchical model to a flat model, exerting the principal role of religious groups in the exchange.
Chinese religions and religious groups should strengthen their capacity in conducting external exchanges, including theological construction, academic research, institutional development, and social services. Otherwise, they can hardly compete with others and exert any significant influence if they go abroad. Religion’s impact depends on certain material conditions. Without infrastructure, logistical and hardware support, religious soft power is impossible. In today’s world, the United States is the country which is most capable to project its religious influence around the world. When the United States “exports democracy” to the world, it also exports its religious ideas through its religious entrepreneurs, philanthropy, religious media, faith-based NGOs, and various missionary societies (Xu, Y., 2013; Micklethwait, J. & Wooldridge, A., 2011: 226-234). If China’s religion and religious groups want to achieve something in the field of foreign exchange, they must also increase their investment or be allowed to invest in their own institutions, theological seminaries, media, charities, NGOs and other religious infrastructure or hardware. When the religious groups on the mainland conduct external exchanges, they can refer to and learn from the religious groups in Taiwan, especially Buddhist social services, relief activities, volunteer system, internationalizing efforts, and other experience.

Chinese religions’ “going out” should be based on specific conditions and follow a gradual process, focusing on real effect, instead of conducting various “image” projects. The focus of the religious foreign exchange should be gradually turned from the courtesy visits to substantial cooperation, from the church hierarchy to the common believers at the grass-roots level, from overseas Chinese to foreign public, from providing religious goods to public to providing public goods in the field of religion, in order to level up Chinese religions’ international appeal from the “sacred articles” (e.g., “The Bible Ministry Exhibition of the Protestant Church in China”, “Tooth/finger Buddhist Relics Show Abroad”), the “Holy
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Land” (such as Mazu Temple on Meizhou Island, etc.) and religious practice and products (such as “Shaolin Kungfu”, “Bible Export”) to the level of system, paradigm and ideas.

Public diplomacy based on public relations is unlike traditional diplomacy based on government relations. The former emphasizes natural process and long-term efforts. Religious public diplomacy should pay attention to the direct communication with religious people abroad and treat it as a constant, meticulous and long time work. The Chinese has a national tradition of learning from others rather than proselytizing among others, and many outstanding achievements of the Chinese culture and art have also spread to the world quietly. As a polytheistic country, China has never advocated aggressive proselytizing or forced others to convert, and therefore has the potential to promote harmony of world religions. Religious public diplomacy is to publicize the idea and practices of harmonious coexistence of Chinese religions, making it available as an alternative and a reference to the religious environment or ecology in the international society.

III. Religious Public Diplomacy and Academia

Religious public diplomacy should also become a stage for the Chinese academic community. For a long time, due to various reasons, religious studies have been regarded as the “forbidden area” or an ignored research subject in colleges and universities in China. Since the reform and opening, religious studies began to “desensitize”, and hold an increasingly visible position in an academic community which formerly explained religion as an epiphenomenal, insignificant, incidental factor of social existence waiting to die out (Xu, Y., 2013: 402-405).

However, for academic circles to truly become the “think tank”, and “talent pool” of China’s religious public diplomacy, this think-tank will need to develop the following abilities (Xu, Y., 2013:
First, the ability to analyze the long-term trends, inner momentum and development of world religions. In the recent decade, the capacity of Chinese academic circles on the study of international religious development has considerably improved. The relevant institutes, meetings, classes, lectures, training programs, publications, etc., have had a significant increase and made religion a hot subject in academic studies. But on the whole, other than some China-related issues, the research of Chinese scholars on international religious issues is still in the infant stage, lacking original theories, global and large scale field surveys, comprehensive data collection and database. These defects and shortcomings have become the bottleneck of religious studies in China, and they do not catch up with China’s status as a country of deep religious tradition, vast religious resources and a fast growing religious population.

Second, the ability to effectively convey true messages of the real situation of religion in the country, including religious policy and practice, to the international community and set the agenda for religious dialogues. Due to institutional as well as traditional factors, China often speaks less but does more in its relations with the outside world and often keeps silent on important issues. As a result, the international community knows little about the present situation of China’s development and there is a big gap between the true situation of China and its international image, especially in the religious field, so that personal contact, namely “eye-witnessing”, becomes the major channel for the international community to understand the real religious situation of China. Therefore, “enhancing international voice, properly responding to external concerns” (People’s Daily, 2011: October 26), fully demonstrating the Chinese people’s spiritual world, illustrating the significant progress of religions in China, and facing up to the existing problems and the insufficiency, as well as being unafraid to speak and being good at
arguing and debating, becoming the inevitable duty of China’s religious as well as academic communities.

Third, the ability to build China’s international religious image and participate in public diplomacy. The current China’s international participation is no longer confined to the field of politics and economics, but increasingly involved in culture and religion. With the further development of reform and opening up, to establish China’s image as a responsible member of international community should be considered as China’s fundamental national interest. International image is an important source of a country’s soft power, and the international religious image is an essential part of this image. Managing the religious affairs both at home and abroad well is one of the hurdles for China to establish its good image in the international community (Xu, Y., 2011: 18-19). Public diplomacy and people-to-people exchange in the past and now is the main channel for religions and religious groups to participate in China’s foreign relations. Over the past decade, as China’s national strength has extended externally, more Chinese scholars have been traveling abroad, involved in religious public diplomacy. In the above activities, such as “World Buddhist Forum”, “International Taoism Forum”, “The Bible Ministry Exhibition of the Protestant Church in China”, and “The China-Arab Silk Road Cultural Tour”, Chinese scholars on religious studies participated in various degrees and capacities. The new public diplomacy is providing more opportunities for Chinese scholars of religious studies to take part in China’s foreign exchange and diplomacy.

Fourth, the ability to guide public opinion and to make recommendations to the government. Due to the abundance of information and spread of religions, there is the so-called “detailed ignorance” phenomenon, namely, the relevant figures, including scholars and officials who are familiar with religious events at home and abroad, especially the details of the violent events, but they lack the framework to understand and interpret these events under the
overall context (Kimball, C., 2011: 7-8). Professor John F. Wilson of Princeton University also warns with respect to the situation in the United States: “Approaching religion as if it did not require technical knowledge and specialized study entails very unfortunate consequences. For it means that religions -- or more technically speaking, religious views -- enter into public discourse without the critical review or vetting that most opinions receive. If everyone claims to be an expert, anyone can assert final insight into the truth or falsity of the subject.” (Wilson, J., 2013: 5). Currently China is launching a campaign to construct the so-called think tanks, and the think tanks devoted to religious affairs have also emerged. About the functions of think-tank as well as its definition, there are various opinions both at home and abroad (Li, W., 2014: February 16; Li, Y., 2014: February 16). This author believes that the so-called think-tanks should play the role of “bridge” of at least three types: the first one is that the think tanks should link the academic community and government, bringing fresh ideas, thoughts and suggestions to the decision-making system of government, in order to promote the original thinking, good governance and social progress. The second is to connect the government and the people, to promote the interaction and mutual understanding between the two, and to guide public opinion through the release of authoritative information and timely advice, in order to make sure that there is effective communication between government and common people. The third is to associate China with the international society, especially to strengthen the relationship with foreign counterparts, making academic exchange more effective and institutionalized. In addition to the above three functions, think tanks in the field of religion should also serve as an open forum and education center for religious affairs in the society. It should be noted that academia especially think tanks in colleges and universities still do not have enough autonomy to conduct independent research. Instead they are often confused by academic research and policy research, more
interested in interpreting government policy than proposing their own, and their theories and views often do not reflect the actual state of affairs. Due to the lack of contacts, scholars of religious studies are not quite familiar with religious institutions of their own country, especially those institutions of “foreign religions”, including Christianity. This kind of situation has not changed until recently. In terms of relations between the academic community and the government, the constant improvement of the government’s consulting system and the formation of the “revolving door” mechanism will effectively strengthen the role of academic think-tanks in China’s religious public diplomacy.

IV. Government and Religious Public Diplomacy

In China’s public diplomacy, the role of government is indispensable, and this is especially true in the field of religion. At present, many countries in the world treat religion as an important resource of their foreign policy and external relations; for example, the United States in recent decades has witnessed a trend of religionization of its foreign policy (Xu, Y., 2009: 33-35). Since the end of the Cold War, especially since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, American foreign and security establishments have started to look at religion from the national security and strategic perspective and this security consideration is also reflected in relations with China (Xu, Y., 2013: 29-30). During the national prayer breakfast on February 6, 2014, President Barack Obama reemphasized criticism in some countries’ religious policy (including China). He said that religious freedom “is a matter of national security” of the United States, and to preserve the freedom “is a key goal of American foreign policy” (Jackson, D., 2014: February 6).

At present, with globalization of China’s national interests and energy demand, especially in the Middle East region and at the moment of global religious resurgence in developing countries, the
importance of religions in China’s foreign strategy is growing. In China’s current foreign policy goals, especially in the “Belt & Road Initiative”, they do not only have economic and political dimensions, but contain the cultural and religious contents as well. In recent years, international terrorism, including “extremist terrorism under religious banner or driven by religions”, has moved to the East, and the surrounding areas of the northwestern part of China have become the antiterrorist frontier. Developing countries, including China, are facing serious antiterrorism situation; their task and responsibility in the international fight against terrorism are on the rise. Driven by the international political situation and religious forces, religious extremism, ethnic separatism and violent terrorism have formed the most direct and violent threat to China’s national security. In the context of international counterterrorism and implementation of the “Belt & Road Initiative”, the religious engagement between China and the world will become more complex and unfold in the multilateral arena. Therefore, we must regard religious issues from the nation’s international strategy perspective, and fully realize that religion is an important component of China’s comprehensive national strength, an important way to realize China’s strategic goals, an important means to promote the international image of China, and an important force in promoting global governance. Religious public diplomacy is an effective vehicle to achieve these goals.

Chinese government agencies, especially various functional institutions, such as the religious affairs bureaus, should fully play the coordinative role in the field of religious public diplomacy. As mentioned earlier, the major operators of China’s public diplomacy are diverse. In the field of public diplomacy research, in addition to the National Chahar Association and China Association of Public Diplomacy, there is also a group of local public diplomacy institutions. Besides, courses and research projects on public diplomacy in the colleges and universities have emerged. Public
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diplomacy has become a hotspot in the current academic and policy research; in the field of the practice of public diplomacy, participating institutions and units are also increasing, including both government and nongovernmental agencies and various overseas projects of multinational companies and enterprises.

The research and practice of all these organizations and institutions has some connections with religion and religious organizations. They, together with the religious organizations and the academic world, constitute the major carrier of China’s religious public diplomacy, and also on its forefront. However, with the diversity of public diplomacy and complicated interest structure, one also faces a situation of conflicting or overlapping policies and interests from different departments. Therefore, how to balance the interests of different government departments, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, religious groups and non-religious organizations, the central and local, and the relationship between the domestic and overseas groups, and how to allocate international and domestic resources of religion, are problems faced by the Chinese government in promoting its religious public diplomacy.

Because of this, the Chinese government should adapt to the rapid development of religious public diplomacy needs through strengthening policy, system and personnel supply and establishing crisis management mechanism in the area of religion. In the aspect of policy supply, the government departments need to strengthen the functions of policy design and raise the level of policy advice; in the fields of faith-based NGOs, religious charities, religious studies and teaching, folk beliefs/organizations, religious media, and a series of public diplomacy related religious institutions, government should adjust the policy to cultivate and develop these institutions, and implement the new policy, in order to strengthen the construction of the foundation of religious public diplomacy, and to provide it with policy support and legal protection.

With regard to the supply system, the Chinese government
departments should overcome the situation where the Foreign Ministry does not manage religion, the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) does not manage diplomacy, and none of the government agencies manages religious public diplomacy, through system reform, namely, through the establishment of standing cross-sector coordination mechanisms and policy advice mechanisms. Founded in early 2014, the SARA established experts of religious affairs database, and convened for the first time the Council of China Religious Culture Communication Association, which was an effort to set up and improve coordination and policy consultation mechanism. Needless to say, the higher level of inter-departmental coordination mechanism and policy consulting mechanism, the higher status of the religious public diplomacy would become in China’s diplomacy and foreign strategy.

In terms of personnel supply, the Chinese government functional departments have carried out a series of coordinating work. With the general improvement of education and younger age of believers, in addition to the progress of religious institutions themselves, selecting representatives of various religions to study in well-known universities, such as Renmin University, Fudan University in China and Fuller Theological Seminary in the US, has received government approval and support as an institutional arrangement. The study of religion and theology outside the religious circles is much more mature and fruitful, and that is one of the features of religious studies in China. This does not only improve the status of religious studies in the academic research and provides the various religions in China with ideas and education.

The database was established on January 21, 2014. The first group includes 29 distinguished experts from domestic universities, academy of social sciences, party school, etc. In the first council meeting of Chinese religious culture communication association held on February 19, 2014, 136 people are elected as members, and a total of 33 people are elected as advisers, special advisers and overseas and honorary members of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. Almost all of them are from the government, religious groups, and academic community.
resources, but also begin to provide academic support and counseling for the making of religious policy in the country, including the policy on religious public diplomacy. The dynamic interaction of government, academia, and religions in the field of religious studies has showed a feasible prospect of resource integration and cooperation in the field of religious public diplomacy.

With respect to setting up crisis management mechanisms, the Chinese government's role is more prominent. In the information age of globalization, all kinds of unexpected events in the field of religion will be immediately amplified due to the spread of a variety of traditional and emerging media, causing the negative international public opinion which is sufficient to destroy the international image and public diplomacy purposefully built by a government. The modern information transmission will lead to the simple and one-sided but strong visual effect, which is enough to blur official statements. One of the biggest tests of public diplomacy in the information age is whether it can quickly provide immediate and effective responses to the related events, especially during emergencies. Therefore, the Chinese government departments should establish a crisis management mechanism in the field of religion to form effective and early crisis alert, information disclosure and public opinion guidance system, and mobilize all social forces, including academic institutions and emerging media to participate in the handling of public events, and to improve the efficiency of religious public crisis management by normalization and lifting up the level of specialization.

To sum up, with the rapid growth of national strength and the government’s comprehensive promotion on official diplomacy, economic exchanges, people-to-people exchanges and cultural exchanges, a basic pattern of divisions for Chinese religious public diplomacy is being formed in which religious groups can implement programs, academia may offer recommendations and suggestions,
and government could coordinate, and that the three sectors share resources, work together and have positive interaction which will significantly promote religious public diplomacy of the country, as well as having a positive influence on China’s overall diplomacy.

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