

China's future and its visual strategic communication

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Abstract

This essay presents a brief descriptive analysis of part of the ongoing media campaign in P.R. China to publicize and educate the public about "Chinese core socialist values" in order to pave the way for better understanding of state strategic visual communication of China's future. The newly publicized core socialist values are considered by President Xi as fundamental to the realization of the Chinese dream. Visual Explanation of the core socialist values in Beibei Jingjing cartoons by the Beijing municipal government is included, described, and analyzed. The twenty-four characters which make up the core socialist core values per se are also explained and analyzed for an accurate understanding of these terms describing these core values.

Keywords: strategic communication, visual communication, rhetoric, Chinese Dream, Chinese culture

Introduction

Walking in the streets and parks of Beijing and other cities in China nowadays, one sees posters on newly set up signposts or murals on walls next to sidewalks of main streets relevant to Chinese "core socialist values." This campaign of publicity was started in early 2014, when President Xi Jinping urged for "deep understanding and comprehensive implementation of the moral doctrine nationwide" (cctv.com, 2014) According to CCTV, Xi required that authorities make use of various opportunities and occasions to facilitate cultivation of these values, and "make them all-pervasive, just like the air." I

These values were put forward in Hu Jintao's report at the 18th Party Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in late 2012. In a section titled Strengthen Core Socialist Values, core socialist values are compared to "the soul of the Chinese nation and serve as the guide for building socialism with Chinese characteristics. We should carry out thorough study of and education in these values and use them to guide social trends of thought and forge public consensus. ... We should vigorously foster China's national character and promote the underlying trend of the times, intensify education in patriotism, collectivism and socialism, and enrich people's cultural life and enhance their moral strength. We should promote prosperity, democracy, civility, and harmony, uphold freedom, equality, justice and the rule of law and advocate patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendship, so as to cultivate and observe core socialist values. We should maintain leadership and initiative in theoretical work, provide correct guidance, enhance our ability to guide public opinion, and strengthen the influence of the underlying trend of thought in our country" (ChinaDaily.com.cn, 2012).

Actually preceding Xi's call, in December 2013, The Communist Party of China issued guidelines "bolstering core socialist values and pooling positive energy to realize the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation" (Xinhua, 2013A) Issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee, these guidelines call for the inclusion of core socialist values in the overall national education plan.

In February 2014, addressing a meeting of ministerial-level officials, "Core socialist values are the soul of cultural soft power," Xi said. "Basically, the soft power of a nation depends on the vitality, cohesive force and charisma of its core values" (cctv.com, 2014) Therefore he urged that the principles should be introduced in textbooks, classes and schools and should be publicized in cultural and art works.

As the new leader for the nation, Xi has popularized the term the Chinese dream as a blueprint for China's rejuvenation (xinhuanet.com, 2012) and made an explicit connection between it and the core socialist values. By calling these values the soul of cultural soft power, he seems to consider these core values as a premise to the realization of the Chinese dream. This new term was met with different voices. According to a report released in 2013 based on information in the language database of the National Language Resource Monitoring and Research Center, which contained 1 billion words from 1.2 million pieces of writing from domestic media and websites, "Chinese dream" was one of the most frequently used terms in media reports and textbooks in Mainland China in 2012(Xinhua, 2013B). Scholars pointed out that Chinese dream is different from American dream, with the former being more collectivistic and the latter individualistic (Shi, 2013). As some voices suggested that the Chinese dream has a nationalist color, a Chinese government official wrote an article in response to argue that the Chinese dream is not a chauvinist goal because it enriches a universal dream of people all over the world with the core socialist values (Kong, 2013).

Probably to dispel misunderstanding of the concept of the Chinese Dream, the Chinese government has launched a nation-wide campaign to publicize and educate the public about Chinese socialist core values, which are fundamental to the realization of the Chinese dream. Due to the limited scope, this paper presents a brief descriptive analysis of part of the media campaign, Visual Explanation of the Core Socialist Values by Beibei and Jingjing, and explains the twenty-four characters in detail to pave the way for better understanding for state strategic visual communication of China's future.

Visual explanation of the core socialist values by Beibei and Jingjing

In the summer of 2014, the office in charge of publicity of civility, Beijing municipal government designed and released a series of cartoon pictures (Beijing Civility Net, 2014) promoting the core socialist values with youngsters as the target audience. What follows is an overview of these pictures with detailed description (when necessary) and brief analysis by the author. The pictures are numbered from left to right. The two-character core values appear on the right-hand corner of each of the pictures in white against a red background.



Picture 1 Prosperity: in the Chinese spaceship Tiangong 1, Beibei and Jingjing are conducting scientific experiments.

Descriptive analysis: The two kids are floating in the spaceship, with Jingjing holding the national flag and Beibei operating the scientific instruments, surrounded by other instruments in the spaceship. The spaceship symbolizes China's prosperity because it is a result of national wealth and power.

Picture 2 Democracy: Beibei and Jingjing are voting at the Great Hall of the People's Congress.

Descriptive analysis: Both kids, each holding a red envelope, are taking their turns in putting their votes in the voting box. Other kids sitting in the chairs in the hall are raising one of their hands, seemingly voting or cheering. Everyone in the picture is enjoying their rights to have a say in national affairs, exemplifying the practice of democracy.

Picture 3 Civility: At the zebra crossing, Beibei and Jingjing are crossing the road with their classmates in an orderly manner.

Descriptive analysis: Every child in the picture epitomizes good etiquette, hence promoting the value of civility.

Picture 4 Harmony: Beibei and Jingjing are dancing and singing with children of nationalities in China.

Descriptive analysis: Beibei and Jingjing, presumably kids of Han nationality, have fun with children wearing costumes of minority groups in China, with the background featuring Temple of Heaven, Bird's Nest and the water cube (The Beijing National Aquatics Center) (the latter two are the most important buildings at 2008 Beijing Olympics). This picture epitomizes a relationship of a harmonious nature.



Picture 5 Freedom: on the Great Wall, led by their teacher, Beibei and Jingjing are letting free of wild birds.

Descriptive analysis: By having the kids set birds free, the picture advocates freedom as an important value.

Picture 6 Equality : Beibei and Jingjing are getting the awards for a piano playing contest with a disabled child.

Analysis: Since the disabled child receives awards on the same stage as the two kids, the picture sends the message that kids, despite their physical health, are equally treated.

Picture 7 Justice: On a football playground, the player Beibei is sweating and playing wholeheartedly while the judge Jingjing is carrying out her duties seriously.

Analysis: The picture demonstrates that in a game, justice is ensured by the judge.

Picture 8 The rule of law: Beibei and Jingjing are listening attentively to a police officer who is talking about values and knowledge relevant to the rule of law.

Analysis: This value is quite abstract, so the idea is repeated on the sign in the picture says "community publicity campaign on the rule of law".



Picture 9 Patriotism: Beibei and Jingjing are painting the Chinese national flag with other children at Tian'anmen Square.

Analysis: Painting the national flag shows the children's patriotism.

Picture 10 dedication: Beibei and Jingjing interview workers who work hard repairing subway trains.

Analysis: Words such as "work hard" suggests the workers dedication to his job.

Picture 11 Integrity: In a self-service newspaper stand, Beibei, Jingjing, and their neighbors take away a newspaper and leave the money in the money box as usual.

Analysis: Those who buy the news papers are quite honest and pay for the newspapers even if nobody is monitoring the cash box.

Picture 12 Friendship: At the school gate, Beibei and Jingjing smile at each other saying good morning.

Analysis: This picture advocates friendship because these two kids are friends greeting each other.

The characters themselves as visual strategic communication

Although the Beibei and Jingjing cartoon pictures are the most detailed visual communication of the core values, what appears most are the twenty-four characters per se which make up the core values. These twenty-four Chinese characters, as part of the oldest language system still in use today, stand for a kind of Chinese uniqueness and work well for promoting "Chinese core socialist values". Below is a brief descriptive analysis of these characters, which are mostly ideograms and pictograms.

In all the visual presentations, the characters are most likely to appear in a hierarchy, with the top four values for the state, the middle four for the society, and the lowest layer of values for individuals. The following explanation also presents these characters in such an order.

Four values for the state: 富强, 民主, 文明, 和谐

富强 prosperity



富 The cover on the top means home and the lower part means a container full of things. Hence the Character means a home with a lot of things, meaning rich. (Dou & Dou, 2005, p.215)



强 A kind of insect which can bite into rice. A small insect which can get into the hard-textured rice is considered to be powerful. (Dou & Dou, 2005, p. 61).

民主 democracy



民 means people. In the old form of the this word, the upper part means a roof made of hay, and the lower part means a pole, hence the character means thatched cottage, with the people who live in the cottage as the extended meaning. (Dou & Dou, 2005,p. 263)



主 is like the fire in a lamp with a stand, which is the center. A lamp is the important thing (main) at night. So the extended meaning of this word is host, being a host. (Dou & Dou, 2005, p. 90)

文明 civility



文 is strokes which cross each other. The old form of the word had a cross in the middle, like a cross-shaped tattoo on a person's chest. Since the tattoo is added to the human body by human beings themselves, it symbolizes culture. (Dou & Dou, 2005, p. 454)



明 is composed of the sun on the left and the moon on the right, meaning light. (Dou & Dou, 2005, p. 277)

和谐 harmony



和, to echo, with the radical meaning "mouth" on the left and "禾" (meaning grains) on the right. Having grains and mouth enables human beings to function well, hence the meaning of harmony and peace. (Dou & Dou, 2005, p. 121)

谐 with the



radical meaning language on the left and right radical means soldiers who live and have meals together. The character as a whole means the words between soldiers who live and eat together, hence meaning

harmony. (Dou & Dou, 2005, p.42)

Four Values for the Society: 自由, 平等, 公正, 法治

自由 freedom



自, self, when one refers to oneself, one points to one's nose 鼻子. (Dou & Dou, 2005, p.20)

由 is the sign form for the old form 胤. In the old form of the word, the two hands

hold the flesh (the lower part in the middle) which is the descendent of ancestors (the upper part in the middle). Hence the character means to own and to follow. (Dou & Dou, 2005, p. 456)

平等 equality



平 meaning level. The original old form of the word is made up of 八 and 于, 于 means circle, 八 means to separate. To separate a circle results in the inner part and outer part of it, which are both on a surface, hence the meaning of being level. (Dou & Dou, 2005, p. 224)




等 means having layers. the upper part means bamboo, with the lower part 寺 meaning places where government officials work, with the extended meaning of standards, hence the whole character means to cut bamboo into pieces of the same length. (Dou & Dou, 2005, p. 308)

公正 justice



公 The upper 八 means to get separated, the lower part is like a basket made from willow wigs, which means to use natural materials to achieve one's purpose, hence to do something according to one's own will. with the whole character meaning the opposite of one's own, hence meaning the antonym of private, which is public. (Dou & Dou, 2005, p. 160)



正 The word form is  a circle on the top meaning the destination and the lower part is foot meaning to go to the destination, hence right. (Dou & Dou, 2005, p.210)

法治 the rule by the law

法, whose old form is 灋. 灋 is a kind of deer which eats a certain kind of grass only, meaning to behave according to rules, the left radical means water, meaning all water goes down (to lower

places), and the lowest part 去 means to leave home and engage in activities in the society, hence the whole character means social rules which apply to everyone.(Dou &



Dou, 2005, p. 342)

治 The left radical means water, and the right part means a place where one can make arrangements on one's own. The character as a whole means to manage water with one's own will, hence the meaning of rule. (Dou & Dou, 2005,

p. 162)

Four Values for Citizens: 爱国，敬业，诚信，友善

爱国 patriotism



爱 The top and bottom is each the image of a foot, meaning to walk and move. The middle is a heart which is surrounded meaning inner heart, meaning the moves one wants to take in one's heart. Hence the character means to like and love. (Dou & Dou, 2005, p.10)



国 meaning country.口 refer to an area. As to the middle part, 戈 means to guard, and the 口 is like the walls of an ancient Chinese city, the middle part 或, means to take a weapon and patrol around a city wall. Hence the character as a whole means an area which requires armies to guard, a country. (Dou & Dou, 2005,

p.326)

敬业 devotion



敬 means to respect the left radical means to listen to what someone says earnestly (the ears of the person prop up, meaning all ears), the character means to urge someone to listen earnestly to what others say, hence meaning being respectful. (Dou & Dou, 2005, p. 348)



业 The upper part is like poles for building houses, a big tree, and the word 巾, which is like a mace, symbolizing power, The character means the authorities order to cut trees to build a house, hence the sense of industry and cause. (Dou & Dou, 2005, p.246)

诚信 integrity



诚 to tell the truth. The left radical meaning words, the right radical, with the image like a big ax going down word means to get blood to say oaths, hence the character means the words one says when making oaths. (Dou & Dou, 2005, p.395)

信 The left radical means people, the right means words, the character means what a person says, emphasizing that what a person says should count and one should do what he/she promises (Dou & Dou, 2005, p.2)



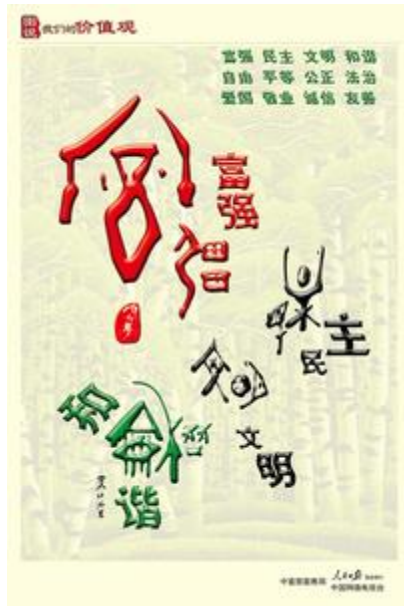
友善 friendship



友 Two hands coordinate, meaning being friends (Dou & Dou, 2005, p.5).

善 the word is made up of 羊(mutton) in a hand (the part immediately under 羊) and 口 (mouth) below. The character therefore means words one says when one is handed mutton, as mutton is valued in ancient China, the words are supposed to be good. (Dou & Dou, 2005, p. 270)

Today these twenty-four characters appear in various forms, some with more traditional forms with traditional Chinese images as the background. Contrary to the Beibei Jingjing cartoon pictures where they serve as topics for each picture, in other pictures such as the one below used nationwide retrieved from news.xxnet.com.cn, which is one of the many websites using it. These characters are foregrounded. It is perhaps the aesthetic nature of Chinese characters which lends to this popular design because they work well as both text and images.



Conclusion

With China's national campaign to promote Chinese socialist core values in full swing, state visual communication strategies are just starting to unfold. The Beibei Jingjing pictures are among the first batch of instructional materials to educate the young about these core values, but these abstract values requires probably multi-media supporting instructional materials. Because many of the twenty-four Chinese characters stand for images/ideas themselves, they have also been utilized creatively in the publicity campaign. Understanding these characters in their original sense, helpfully, will contribute to better understanding of the values and strategic communication displaying these characters in their different aesthetic forms.

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