

U.S. Public Diplomacy Towards China: Exercising Discretion in Educational and Exchange Programs, edited by Di Wu, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, 224 pp., \$109.00 (Hardcover), ISBN 978303095643-1

Nancy Snow

Distinguished Visiting Professor, Schwarzman Scholars Program, Tsinghua University

Di Wu is a Chinese-born scholar with graduate education degrees from two leading US institutions that emphasize a public diplomacy focus on communications and international relations. Wu earned a master's in public diplomacy from the University of Southern California (USC) followed by a doctorate in international relations from American University's School of International Service in Washington, D.C. This book is based on her dissertation, "Does Implementation Apply Meaning to Public Diplomacy? An Analysis of US Public Diplomacy Toward China." Increasingly in public diplomacy, biography and geography influence research directions. You study from where you stand or sit. Professor Wu's doctoral education in the US capital would naturally direct her to apply implementation theory to analyze how US public diplomacy policy and practice converge and diverge against the backdrop of ebbs and flows of US-China relations. Discretion, as her subtitle notes, is the key.

Meaning in public diplomacy is affected mostly by what happens on the ground in the real world, not via the policy objective. Success is determined by variability surrounding means/ends preferences (with the frontliners stressing means), organizational culture and resources, that also impact measurement of outcomes. In her case-study approach, she examines US Department of State (DoS) and Department of Defense (DoD) educational and exchange programs to China. How these programs are put into practice causes them to stray

*Corresponding author: nsnow@fullerton.edu

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from their original intentions. In other words, implementation is more determinative than policy goals.

Wu's book is driven by a need to fill in a gap in the public diplomacy literature that pays lip service to practical applications but does not pay enough attention to how programs impact, even change, foreign policy. Her particular focus is an understudied public diplomacy high point. The first Pacific President, Barack Obama, declared a foreign policy pivot to Asia that would take on a renewed and balanced leadership role in Asia. In 2012 he announced a regional "Pivot to East Asia" that included policy proposals designed to strengthen bilateral security alliances (US-Japan; US-ROK); deepen working relationships with emerging powers such as China; expand trade and investment; and advance democracy and human rights. This pivot would exercise Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic (DIME) strategies in building better relations across Greater Asia with special attention paid to China. I know the power of this pivot because it led to my return to East Asia after a decade and a half gap as a 2010 US Department of State Speaker and Specialist on Obama's New Public Diplomacy and 2012 Fulbright Scholar in Japan.

Di Wu explains that the concept of public diplomacy today is as fluid as identity. We have long abandoned the presumption that public diplomacy begins and ends with government institutions. While the DoS is a primary actor in the policy shaping and subcontractor, nongovernmental orgs are primary in the implementation, the DoD and Department of Education (DoE) are two primary actors that practice their own respective public diplomacy. Wu states in the preface that:

The Department of Defense and the Department of Education, also practice public diplomacy, but they are seldom recognized as public diplomacy actors. The Department of Defense even refuses to admit its active role in public diplomacy. I argue in this book that the Department of Defense practices public diplomacy because its communicative programs are consonant with the public diplomacy definition of the US government. Its refusal to be called a public diplomacy actor is something that this book tries to explain. (p. vi)

I agree with Wu's conclusion about DoD's starring role and suggest that this is a game of euphemistic semantics and legalese realities. As far back as the creation of the USC Center on Public Diplomacy in the mid-2000s we were bemoaning the fact that DoS's public diplomacy budget was dwarfed by DoD's dominance. It is true that we rarely made mention of DoE involvement, but we recognized that the Department of Defense, with its 750 bases in 80 countries, was the rainmaker in international influence and information attempts. Washington has nearly three times as many military bases as embassies and consulates, three times as many installations as all other countries combined. Further, DoD's choice to view its role in public diplomacy as supportive may be beyond legal purview constraints to perception. Public diplomacy is seen as operating in the foreign public information space, while DoD, with its information and psychological operations, operates in the realm of the beyond pertaining to

facts and information.

This book will appeal to all who care about the strategic importance of US-China bilateral relations. That alone should garner interest. But there's even more reason to read about Wu's case studies. She examines US public diplomacy programs in the context of an adversarial relationship where levels of trust, political rhetoric, and people-to-people engagement are changing like the seasons. At the time of this writing, I'm living in Beijing after three and a half years of an inability to enter China. When I left, the mood was different and the atmosphere of US-China relations has changed and not for the better. We cannot blame Covid-19 for everything. If we value more people-to-people interaction in an effort to build mutual understanding, then we will have to know what primary state actors like DoD and DoS are doing in our names and under our public investment. This desire to tell America's public diplomacy engagement to China serves a greater purpose and I congratulate Di Wu's dedication to filling in gaps that expand the landscape of what our field is and why it matters to international relations.

■ Nancy Snow

Nancy Snow is Distinguished Visiting Professor at Tsinghua University in Beijing, China where she is affiliated with the School of Journalism and Communication and Schwarzman College. Dr. Snow is a former Department of State official who specializes in strategic communications, gender diplomacy, and propaganda studies. She is editor/co-editor and author of fifteen books, including the first and second editions of the *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*.