

"National Security, Public and Cultural Diplomacy, Smart Power: Future Directions for Smart Nations," isn't that a mouthful. Yet that was the long and unusual title for the conference on October 29, 2009, a conference sponsored by Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). Four of the six featured speakers came from the University of Southern California's (USC) Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism. So what did they have to say about smart power for smart nations especially small but smart nations? Below is a summary.

As we move into the 21st Century, with all of its technological changes and advances, a beleaguered nation like Taiwan will need all the help it can get especially against the large hegemonic nation across the Taiwan Strait. The conference was opened by Shen Lyu-shun, Ph.D., Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and longtime diplomat in the service of Taiwan. Shen pointed out from personal experience ways that he and other diplomats had served to keep Taiwan in the world's spotlight such as overcoming obstacles to get Lee Teng-hui, a visa to visit Cornell his alma mater despite protests from the People's Republic of China (PRC) or gaining recognition in the World Health Assembly. Though not intended, but certainly significant with the spirit of the discussions to come, Shen's remarks would be slightly tarnished for those keeping up with outside media, but let me comment on that at the end.

Ernest Wilson III, the Dean of the Annenberg School, followed with trends for soft power that were global and the USA, as well as its core of unresolved issues. The need for recognition of and investment in public diplomacy (PD) in human rights as well as showing social groups are making alliances in this is important. Likewise Wilson gave comparisons between Bush and Obama in their uses of PD, but the real problem lay in the unresolved issues. Internally how will citizens exchange work and externally how soft power can be intelligently integrated with hard power, how public diplomacy faces off with trade diplomacy etc.? These remained challenges for the future.

Adam Clayton Powell III, USC Vice Provost for Globalization spoke about innovations in global PD and their implications. He pointed out how the ability of international broadcasting, internet radio and video can reach hundreds of millions and how competitive and comparative advantages must be leveraged, how NGOs must be used and how relationships with diasporas must be maintained. Powell emphasized how nations must not fight the last war but must anticipate the latest technologies from facebook, twitter etc. to the upcoming experiential media. But as the conference went on, it was not about fighting the last war, but rather fighting with the technology of the last war that was the difference. More of that at the end of Part II.

Written by Jerome F. Keating Ph.D.  
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Frank Yee Wang, Deputy Director of the International Information Department of the Government Information Office (GIO) spoke on the key tools of PD as Cultural Diplomacy, Global Education and International Broadcasting. But while Wang's topic was on how Taiwan should tell its story and its uniqueness, his lackluster presentation missed a clear opportunity to exemplify just that. Instead of demonstrating how the latest technologies can give visual impact to what he meant, he left the audience with the feeling that he was there simply to provide GIO some representation on the program.

The Q&A section brought up the matter of financial and political resources are involved, how the nation's leadership must be convinced and tie PD into the national interest to make the message more effective. University think-tanks should aid in convincing leadership. The irony of how the People's Republic of China (PRC) uses Confucian Centers (a name that was anathema in the Cultural Revolution) to spread its PD.

Taiwan needs an agency for PD, like Great Britain has a British Council to coordinate and govern its PD. In Taiwan, the question was raised as to whether such an agency should be under the GIO or MOFA in Taiwan? In my view, MOFA is a much stronger agency to govern Taiwan's PD. The GIO as of late has more or less become a public relations firm for Taiwan's image conscious President and not up to the national task.

A further issue for Taiwan is that it still needs to resolve its own identity crisis and its outmoded Constitution before it can think of presenting a united front to the world. That is for the future, however, and was not a part of this conference.

I had mentioned there was another irony in the tarnished selection of Shen Lyu-shun for the opening remarks. Shen is a career diplomat and a long time friend of Taiwan's current president Ma Ying-jeou, whose influence may have helped in his gaining his current position. Though throughout the conference, the role of newspapers was almost likened to that of dinosaurs, nevertheless on the day of the conference and following days, it was the dinosaur newspapers that ironically revealed how Shen was under investigation and reprimand for turning in and collecting inflated rental receipts for when he lived in Switzerland. Shen claimed he had later helped in following up the investigation, but Shen is a career diplomat and when one sees which way the axe will fall, you know what side to run to. Shen was probably safe however. Most conference participants were probably too busy checking twitter and facebook to read the newspapers. Part II will follow.

Source: [Jerome F. Keating's writings](#)