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A classic statements contrasting hard power with soft power would be that of Joseph Stalin who asked, "The Pope, how many divisions does he have?" If ever there was a man of hard power, it was Stalin, and if ever there was a man of soft power it would be the Pope. Taiwan cannot liken itself to the Pope but facing the hard power of the People's Republic of China (PRC) it knows it cannot match the PRC plane for plane, missile for missile, ship for ship etc. What then must it do? This was the question raised and the direction suggested in the conference mentioned in Parts I & II previously posted on November 6 and 8. Taiwan needs soft power.

Taiwan needs soft power, and it needs to know how to make the most of the latest technologies in wielding that soft power. This was the apparent purpose of the conference as well as pointing to how Taiwan's Public Diplomacy (PD) needs a strategic vision and plan. The conference could not give that vision and plan nor should it have been expected to. Yet while the conference raised this awareness, it also left a residue of shallow emptiness.

When one hears the latest technologies touted as the wave of the future in reaching and winning over the masses, one feels one is witnessing a rebirth of sophistry with its specialization in elaborate but specious techniques and arguments. Facebook, twitter, plurk etc. are all techniques of the future, but anyone acquainted with them knows there is a lack of quality control and judgment. Too often the past adage still holds, "Garbage in, garbage out." Schools for communication can teach the technique; they can show how to create the sizzle, but they cannot give the steak or the substance. Therein is the challenge.

Further, these techniques are available to all sides. While Taiwan needs to make the most of soft power, it has no monopoly on it. The PRC is also developing and putting effort into its soft power as well. The struggle will be in who best can frame the story of the Taiwan Strait and the two nations that face each other across it.

The PRC (China) has an edge in that it can use its economic might to entice other nations to its side; China has many more resources to dedicate to its cause, but in soft power, it is not just a matter of how many divisions one can marshal and how many resources one has. The failure of China to demonize and isolate the "splittist" Dalai Lama is ample proof that in soft power, the message, and the life style of the framer of the message is still key. Taiwan, the ball is in your court.

USC's Annenberg School, Soft Power and Taiwan: Part III Responses

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