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Published: 01/10/2007

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Cheng, H., & Chan, K. (2007). *Public service advertising in China: Case studies*. Paper presented at The Association of Chinese Professors of Social Sciences in the United States 13th International Conference, Ohio, United States.

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PUBLIC SERVICE ADVERTISING IN CHINA: CASE STUDIES

(Paper submitted to the ACPSS 13th International Conference, Athens, Ohio, October 26-28, 2007)

In the colorful landscape of advertising in China, there is an area that has been largely neglected by advertising researchers—that is, public service advertising (PSA). In fact, PSA has been quite dynamic soon after the revival of advertising industry in the country (Cheng & Chan, 2001). This paper addresses this gap through an examination of the roles that PSA plays in China and a semiotic analysis of some representative Chinese print public service advertisements (PSAs).

Public Service Advertising and Social Marketing

Regarded as a positive way of using advertising, PSA “communicates a message on behalf of some good cause such as stopping drunk driving . . . or preventing child abuse” (Wells, Moriarty, & Burnett, 2005, p. 8). Mainly used by companies, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations, PSAs are usually created for free by advertising professionals, with space and time largely donated by the media.

Since PSA is the most common and popular way of practicing social marketing, a good understanding of PSA would be impossible without a mention of the social marketing, which has actually constituted the major intellectual source of PSA. Social marketing has been in the literature since 1960s (Kotler & Andreasen, 1991). In a seminal article published in the *Journal of Marketing*, Kotler and Levy (1969) first raised the question, “whether traditional marketing principles are transferable to the marketing of organizations, persons, and ideas” (p. 10). Their answer to the question was positive

because they saw “a great opportunity for marketing people to expand their thinking and to apply their skills to an increasingly interesting range of social activity” (Kotler & Levy, 1969, p. 10). However, since its initiation, social marketing has been challenged with doubt and even criticism; some critics believe the broadening of marketing practice from the commercial domain to the social sphere is going “too far” (Luck, 1969, p.53). In spite of the criticism, social marketing soon turned into “an effective approach to planned social change” (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971, p. 3) and began to take shape in the early 1970s (Baren & Davis, 2003). The endeavors in social marketing have been centering on “adapting marketing mindsets, processes, and concepts to a wide range of nonprofit enterprises” (Andreasen, 1997, p. 3) like universities, performing arts organizations, and hospitals. It is often used as “a strategy for translating scientific findings . . . into education and action programs adopted from methodologies of commercial marketing” (Manoff, 1985, p. 36).

For the nearly three decades between the late 1960s and mid-1990s, the perception that “marketing constitutes a proven and potentially very powerful technology for bringing about socially desirable behaviors” was a major intellectual momentum for the growth of what is known today as “the social marketing movement.” This movement had helped establish “social marketing as a distinct subdiscipline within the general field of academic marketing” by mid-1990s (Andreasen, 1997, p. 3). Although once and again marketing researchers have attempted to make it clear that social marketing “is a much larger idea than social advertising” (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971, p. 5) and should involve more than the design and use of mass media campaigns (Kotler 1994; Sutton 1991; Young 1988-1989), social advertising as a major social marketing format has been

evident and dominant in practice (Stead & Hastings, 1997). In the meantime, marketing researchers have, at least, reached such a consensus: “Of course, good marketing would always look for advertising potential” (Smith, 1997, p. 26), and “social marketing is . . . about good advertising” (Smith, 1997, p. 24).

Over the years, various social marketing models have been formulated. The four below, for example, all have an implicit assumption about people:

- Regulators see people as evil, needing to be controlled, or as victims, needing to be protected from evil forces.
- Information folks see people as students who need to be motivated to go to class or lovers waiting to be seduced by emotion.
- Marketers see people as consumers, making choices between one brand and another.
- Counselors assume people are information managers, able to acquire wisdom and make reasoned, difficult judgments.

(Smith, 1997, p. 27)

Under the influence of social marketing research, *social marketing theory*, a macroscopic theory¹ of media and society, began to take shape in the early 1970s. Mainly concerned with promoting socially valuable information, social marketing theory is deemed as a logical extension of the persuasion theories and diffusion theory in mass communication studies. However, social marketing theory is essentially a source-dominated, macroscopic theory of media and society (Baran & Davis, 2003). It assumes the existence of “a benign information provider who is seeing to bring about useful, beneficial social change” (Baran & Davis, 2003, p. 303). As a result, social marketing campaigns could be merely tailored to situations where elite sources in a given country

¹ Mass communication theory can be roughly divided, based on the levels of analysis, into microscopic and macroscopic theories. While the former "attempts to explain effects at the personal or individual level," the latter "attempts to explain effects at the cultural or societal level" (Baran & Davis, 2003, p. 19).

are able to dominate elements of the large social system. Nevertheless, it is noted that the social marketing theory, in its most recent forms, has paid “increasing attention to audience activity and the need to reach active audiences with information they are seeking” (Baran & Davis, 2003, p. 303). Target audiences are, therefore, “identified according to their information needs. Recommendations are made for stimulating audiences to seek information and for packaging and distributing information so that audiences will find it easy to get and use” (Baran & Davis, 2003, p. 303).

Public Service Advertising in China

Although public service advertising, in its ancient form, is believed to have been in existence in China for thousands of years, professionally produced PSAs did not occur until nine years after the revival of commercial advertising in the country in 1979 (Gao, 1999; Zhang, 2004). In 1986, a PSA spot was run by Guiyang Television Station in southwest China, advocating water conservation during a drinking water shortage season. This PSA spot is the first one produced by advertising professionals in China (Gao, 1999; PSA in China, 2006). On October 26, 1987, China Central Television (CCTV) launched “*Guang'er Gaozhi*” (meaning “Advertise Broadly”), the first exclusive PSA program on television in the Chinese advertising history. At the beginning, the program was aired only once (for one minute) or twice (for 30 seconds each time) a day during the primetime. But the cost for production and airtime for CCTV was already 6.3 million *yuan* (about US\$1.7 million, based on the 1987 currency exchange rate) that year. In 1996, only to the 60-second PSA spot on the daily primetime, CCTV donated an equivalent of 36 million *yuan* (about US\$4.3 million, based on the 1996 currency

exchange rate) (Gao, 1999; Zhang, 2004). Following a maxim of “reminding, persuading, and criticizing,” the program aired more than 1,000 PSA spots with a total of 20-minute airtime on 16 time slots daily between 1987 and 1998. Public awareness of the program was strong; the program’s rating was the third highest among all CCTV programs (Zhang, 2004). In recent years, the annual airtime CCTV has been donating to PSA is worth nearly 1 billion *yuan* (about US\$120.9 million, based on Chinese currency’s multiple-year pegged rate to U.S. dollars prior to its revaluation on July 21, 2005) (China scraps, 2005; PSA in China, 2006).

The impact of CCTV’s “Advertise Broadly” program was so significant that the top administration of Chinese advertising decided to launch a nationwide PSA campaign (Zhang, 2004). In 1996, the State Administration for Industry and Commerce (SAIC), the governmental body overseeing advertising practice in China, and the Office of Spiritual Civilization Construction directly under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, jointly launched a monthlong nationwide PSA campaign on the revival of traditional Chinese values (PSA in China, 2006; Su, 2000). The government ordered numerous PSAs on the media that year as the Party officials saw a slide in social values. September 1996 was even named a PSA Month (Gao, 1999; Zhang, 2004). The PSA campaign was also believed to have helped improve the image of the advertising industry in the nation as advertisers had been criticized for often making outlandish claims. During the campaign, a total of 16,860 PSAs was issued, including 4,582 on television, 2,749 on radio, 4,123 in newspapers and magazines, 5,406 on outdoor billboards, and more than half a million on posters. Of these PSAs, 241 were award winners (PSA Column, 2006).

Since 1996, the SAIC, often joined by other CPC or government bodies like the Office of Spiritual Civilization Construction, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television, and the General Administration of Press and Publishing, has hosted annual national PSA campaigns and gives awards to outstanding pieces. As shown in Table 1, the SAIC recommended a specific theme for the annual campaign most of the time, although occasionally, there was no such a specification.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

In 2006, the first China Television Public Service Advertising Competition was held. The theme for the competition was the good Chinese values and morals. Any PSA spot aired by a television station in China between January 1 and September 20, 2006 was eligible for the competition. As of the time the chapter was written, results of the competition were not available yet (Li, 2006).

Since early 2003, media in the Chinese mainland—including newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the Internet—have been required to provide at least 3% of their space or airtime for PSAs. This requirement was stipulated in a regulation jointly issued early that year by the SAIC, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television, the General Administration of Press and Publishing, and the Propaganda Department of the CPC Central Committee (*Asia Image*, 2003; *PSA in China*, 2006).

Characteristics of Chinese PSA's Characteristics

First and foremost, PSA has emerged as an alternative means for the promotion of dominant ideology in China. It is not difficult to find a close link between what the central government emphasizes and what PSA campaigns promote. For example, former

Chinese President Jiang Zemin and former Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji called for major improvements in the nation's family planning, resources management, and environmental protection at the Third Session of the Ninth National People's Congress held in March 2000 (Xinhua News Agency, 2000). SAIC immediately responded by recommending such themes as optimistic outlook on life, environmental protection, and natural resources conservation for the national PSA campaigns in that year (Su 2000).

Early in 2006, to urge the whole nation to maintain socialist morality, current Chinese President Hu Jintao recommended a list of moral concepts officially called "the socialist concepts on honors and disgraces" (Hu Jintao's, 2006). Used as a new moral yardstick to measure an individual's work, conduct, and attitude, the list in Chinese reads like eight pairs of opposing moral values with each pair having a rhyming poetic lilt:

- Regard the love of the motherland as an honor; regard damaging the motherland as a shame.
- Regard serving the people as an honor; regard deviation from the people as a shame.
- Regard the advocacy of science as an honor; regard fatuity and ignorance as a shame.
- Regard diligence as an honor; regard indulgence as a shame.
- Regard unity and helping each other as an honor; regard selfishness as a shame.
- Regard honesty and trustworthiness as an honor; regard spending ethics for profits as a shame.
- Regard discipline and law-abidance as an honor; regard disorder and lawlessness as a shame.
- Regard plain living and hard working as an honor; regard wallowing in luxuries and pleasures as a shame.

Adapted from Eight Honors and Eight Shames, 2007; Hu Jintao's, 2006.

To support this government campaign and promote Hu's list of socialist morals, the SAIC determined the theme for the 2006 national PSA competition as "promoting socialist outlook on honors and disgraces" (Lu, 2006). As the time of this chapter's completion, the result of this competition was not available yet.

Compared with the simplistic and patriarchal political propaganda campaigns in the old days, PSAs in China tend to be much subtler and more symbolic. Creativity and artistry are called for in the transformation of familiar concepts into attention-catching and touching advertising campaigns often with vivid visuals, dramatic sounds, and artistic executions. For example, an electric saw's soaring noise and a "bleeding" tree trunk would convey a forest conservation message much more effectively than an abstract slogan (Song 1997).

Unlike the traditional government propaganda, usually dull and impersonal, PSAs also tend to gain the audience's empathy, especially when handling current thorny social issues. About 600,000 workers, for example, were laid off from state-owned enterprises in China between 1997 and 1998, as a result of a crucial move in tandem with the central government's strenuous efforts to invigorate those loss-ridden enterprises. Many in their late 40s and early 50s, the laid-off workers naturally had bitter feelings and experienced difficulties in their daily life. A PSA on television titled "My Father" portrayed a son's testimonial of his father's courage to face the difficult situation. The voice-over went, "My father, a down-to-earth good guy, is optimistic, full of wisdom and self-confidence. He has been laid off, but he is going to take a new path in life. In my heart, he is a real strong man." The ending left room for audience's imagination: The father might plan to learn a new skill, apply for a new job, or take an early retirement. "What really matters

here is not the final outcome but the positive attitude to accept what cannot be changed and the courage to try a new life" (Li & Qian, 1999, p. 86).

Another feature of Chinese PSA is seasonality. PSA campaigns in the country often tie in with national holidays and special events throughout a calendar year. Patriotic themes would occur for the National Day (October 1) and the Army Day (August 1). A 1996 award-winning PSA campaign was titled "Festivals." It featured a series of three television spots that tackled, respectively, three social phenomena during the Chinese New Year season: (a) giving children too much lucky money, (b) spending too much money on gift-buying, and (c) the danger of firecrackers. Other national holidays used for PSA campaigns include the Teachers Day, Seniors Day, Non-smoking Day, Anti-drug Day, Environmental Protection Day, Love-your-eyes Day, and AIDS Day (Yang, 1999).

The third characteristic of PSA in China is its limited geographic reach. As most of the campaigns are merely focused on issues and problems in urban areas, particularly major cities, rural areas of the country have received little attention. In fact, it is sometimes this less affluent segment of the audience who has a greater need for such information as AIDS prevention and family planning.

PSA's Functions in China

While commercial advertising is supposed to contribute to the material civilization in China, PSA is intended to help with the "socialist spiritual civilization" (Z. Wang, 1999). It is even called "the highest form of advertising" by the SAIC, the advertising regulating body in the country (Korsk, 1997, p. 8). First mentioned by the late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in 1980, "socialist spiritual civilization" is a political

jargon seriously taken up by the former Chinese President Jiang Zemin with renewed enthusiasm in the mid-1990s (Elegant, 1997; Landsberger, 2004). “Broadly speaking, it should be a framework for a new social structure that reflects the ‘New Age’ that started with the [economic] reforms. This should be brought about by raising the people's political consciousness and morality, and by fostering revolutionary ideals, morality, and discipline, all with communist ideology at its core” (Landsberger, 2004, p. 1). Having promoted for two decades in China, this ideological framework includes such morals as love for the motherland, loyalty to the Party, care for fellow citizens, diligence and honesty at work, and concern for the environment (Poole, 1996). Articles on PSA published in *China Advertising* and *Modern Advertising*, two leading monthly trade magazines for advertising industry in China, from 1997 to 2006 mentioned the following functions of PSA in the country:

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Case Studies: A Semiotic Analysis of Chinese PSAs

In this section, a semiotic analysis is conducted in the examination of two selected Chinese print PSAs from 1997 and 2005. First, let us give a brief review of semiotic analysis. Originated from linguistics and from literary and cultural analysis, semiotics is a qualitative research method for examining textual material by focusing on signs—more accurately, on a "system of signs." Studies of signs can be traced back to such thinkers from early antiquity as Plato, Socratic, and Aristotle, not to mention British philosopher John Locke, whose designation of Greek word *semeiotiké* led to the modern usage of the term *semiotics*, and Swiss linguist Ferdinand De Saussure, who contributed significantly to "the science of signs" (Barnouw, 1989). Nevertheless, French theorist Roland Barthes

is one of the first who studied advertising from a semiotic perspective (Leiss, Kline, Jhally, & Botterill, 2005). Barthes (1972) is particularly well known for his examination of the ideologies that go into the process of "fixing" meanings.

Williamson (1978) made great strides in "oppositional decoding" advertising. She simply defines a sign as "a thing—whether object, word, or picture—which has a particular meaning to a person or group of people" (p. 17). A sign within a system of meaning may be divided into two components: "the signifier" and "the signified." The signifier is the material vehicle of meaning; the signified is its meaning. The signifier is its concrete dimension; the signified is its abstract side. While we can separate the two for analytical purposes, in reality they are inseparable.

The most enlightening part in Williamson's (1978) writing is her discussion on the notions of denotation and connotation. According to her, denotation is "the work of signification performed within a sign as it were: it is the process whereby a signifier 'means'—denotes—a specific signified." By connotation, she refers to "a similar process but one where the signifier is itself the denoting sign: the sign in its totality points to something else." She termed that "something else" a "Referent System" (p. 99).

To illustrate her notions, Williamson (1978) took Catherine Deneuve, a French actress and fashion model, for example. As she put it, "Catherine Deneuve is signified by a photography, but 'she' in turn becomes a signifier: for wealthy—chic-Frenchness" (p. 100). This process of analysis can be diagrammed as in Figure 1.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

In her explanation of the above diagram, Williamson (1978) put it,

(t)he signifiers of connotation . . . are made up of signs (signifiers and signifieds united) of the denoted system . . . As for the signified of connotation, its character is at once global and diffuse; it is . . . a fragment of ideology . . . These signifieds have a very close communication with culture, knowledge, history, and it is through them . . . that the environmental world invades the system. (p. 101)

It is apparent that the major strength of semiotic analysis lies in its sensitivity to the layered levels of meaning in advertisements designed for people in specific historical and cultural contexts (Leiss et al., 2005). However, "the meaning of an advertisement does not flow on the surface just waiting to be internalized by the viewer, but is built up out of the ways the different signs are organized and related to each other, both within the advertisement and through external references to wider belief systems" (Leiss et al., 2005, p. 201). Leaving room for individual and impressionistic interpretations, semiotic analysis may enable researchers to "dissect and closely examine a cultural code, and its sensitivity to the nuances and oblique references in cultural systems" (Leiss et al., 2005, p. 214). In the following, Williamson's formula will be applied in our semiotic analysis of Chinese PSA samples.

The Foreign Nail vs. Chinese-made Rocket PSA

In 1997, following SAIC's recommendation, a PSA campaign titled "Our Unremitting Efforts for Miracles" was carried out nationwide. This campaign was by no means accidental because 1997 was a special year to China. Among other things, the return of Hong Kong to its motherland in that year was a historic event that received worldwide attention. It became a golden opportunity for Beijing to eulogize its

achievements and promote such ideas as "self-esteem," "self-confidence," "self-strengthening," and "self-reliance" (He & Tian, 1998, p. 8). For years, the slide of such values among some Chinese citizens was believed by the central leadership to be an ultimate cause for many social problems in the country after its reopening to the rest of the world in the late 1970s.

This PSA campaign was also an active response to a call with increased voice in the country over the years for an extensive use of PSA in national or regional image building (He & Tian, 1998). Such an effort coincided with a PSA trend in some Western countries in 1990s—it often moved away from the social marketing of specific health or environmental behavior toward public consensus building (Smith, 1997).

During this monthlong national campaign, a total of 430 PSAs—including 223 in print media, 125 on television, and 72 on radio—was submitted to the SAIC for 110 awards it gave (He & Tian, 1998). Larger in quantity and higher in quality as it were when compared with a similar nationwide PSA campaign in the previous year, the 1997 campaign was still regarded as "far behind commercial advertising in terms of creativity" (He & Tian, 1998, p. 7). Nevertheless, we believe the print PSA sample selected from the 1997 campaign will give us, at least, a rough idea of Chinese PSA in the late 1990s in general and this campaign in particular.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

In this PSA, a drawing on the left signifies a nail standing on its head while a picture on the right shows a rocket standing in a space center ready for a launch into the sky. The text in the PSA explains, "A century ago, the old civilization in the East had to call this simple object a 'foreign nail' because she was unable to produce it." Another line

in this PSA goes, “Today, we make unremitting efforts to make our nation stronger, striding toward the modernization of tomorrow.”

Resorting to comparison and contrast, the “foreign nail” and the “Chinese-made rocket” signify the significant changes in China’s overall strength between the early and late 20th century. On the one hand, the nail indicates how remotely the Chinese industry was behind the Western world early last century—it was even unable to manufacture something as simple as nails. Even today, many Chinese elders still hold vivid but painful memories of the days when the names of so many simple daily necessities had to add a "prefix" pronounced "*yang*" in Chinese, meaning "foreign." Other common examples included candles and matches, called “*yang la*” (meaning “foreign candles” and “*yang huo*” (meaning “foreign matches”).

On the contrary, the rocket symbolizes how strong China has become nowadays, which is often able to compete with the world's most advanced countries in space technology. This fact is always used by the Chinese government as a "selling point" for its modernization drive and as a stimulus for a sense of national pride among average Chinese citizens.

The School Desk PSA

On September 27, 2004, the SAIC issued a circular to all advertising agencies and media outlets in China on an annual national PSA competition. Like in the prior years, the competition would feature four categories of awards—gold, silver, bronze, and honorary mentions. Unlike most of the previous years, however, no particular theme was determined for this competition; the diversity of entries in terms of issues they could

address was permitted and possible. The submission deadline for all entries was December 31, 2004 (SAIC, 2004). Many of the award-winning entries were later collected into the *2005 Chinese Advertising Works Yearbook*, which features a PSA category. It is from the PSA section of this yearbook that the PSA as shown in Figure 3 was selected for a semiotic analysis.

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

The signifiers in this PSA are a bare-footed teenage boy, a garbage heap, and a delineated school desk. The garbage heap is made of discarded newspapers and magazines; the boy is reading a pictorial that he probably found in the trash. An imaged school table highlighted in a white frame right above the boy's knees signifies a cozy classroom, where the boy is, imaginatively, immersed in his attentive reading. Wearing a white T-shirt, he looks clean, which is in sharp contrast with the dark, messy background of the garbage heap. The Chinese tagline of the PSA can be translated into English like, "Ahead of you is hardship, as well as hope."

This PSA makes us heartrending. What is going on with this boy? Why is he reading in the garbage heap? Why does not he go to school? Created by a local Chinese advertising agency for China Children and Teenagers' Fund, this PSA signifies, in a painful but attention-catching manner, a prevailing social problem in today's China—increasing school dropouts of migrant children in major cities. They are unable to attend school properly; many of them, although hungry of knowledge, have to learn in some poor conditions like a garbage heap, which is beyond most people's imagination.

The economic reform since the end of the 1970s has made it possible for millions of farmers in China to leave their underdeveloped villages and enter the booming

markets, especially those in the more developed coastal cities. On the one hand, this internal migration has constituted “an efficient, disciplined, subservient and disposable workforce out immigrants; this, in turn, that has facilitated the transformation of the labor regime from the tenure system to the labor contract system” (Wong, 1998, p. ii). On the other hand, this mammoth internal worker migration movement, estimated at a total of 150 million to date (Rousmaniere, 2007; Some 10%, 2004), has imposed many challenges to the migrant workers, especially to their children following them in the cities. Those challenges include problems and constraints in obtaining equal access to basic services such as education and health care in their new communities (Inside China, 2001; Some 10%, 2004).

As of 2004, migrant children in China who had never been to school represented 6.85% of the total migrant children; 2.45% were dropouts. These two groups together put the rate of school dropouts as high as 9.3% for China’s migrant children (Some 10%, 2004). Only in Beijing alone, the national capital city with a population estimated at 15 million and one of most prosperous metropolises in China, there are about 3 million migrants today, part of what is called the “floating population” of rural Chinese flocking to cities for work (Wade, 2007). The causes for this high dropout rate are multifaceted, cited in a UNESCO’s report as those children’s weariness of studying, poor familial conditions, traditional gender prejudice against girls’ education, and some migrant parents’ negligence of their obligation to observe the national compulsory education law for children (Country report, 2000). If the school dropouts in the rural China are included, around 27 million children nationwide were unable to attend school in 2003, representing about 10% of China’s school-age children (Radio Free Asia, 2004).

Without saying, this PSA is a snapshot that has highlighted part of this severe and widespread problem in China. As the slogan of the PSA urged, those unprivileged children should take the boy in the ad as a role model and seize any opportunities they could for their education. The garbage heap, typically seen in an urban setting, indicates that the PSA is geared more toward those unprivileged children in the urban areas, probably those following their migrant parents to cities. Apart from the tagline, the clean T-shirt the teenage boy in the PSA wears may suggest the self-respect and a self-made spirit that the ad is trying to convey to those children. Also through the use of a positive message, this PSA tries to evoke readers' sympathy while encouraging the unprivileged children not to give up their effort to go to school.

Nevertheless, the ad has neglected—if not ignored—at least, a more important issue related to the numerous school dropouts by merely targeting those already troubled children. What is the major reason for those school dropouts? Should only the children and their parents be blamed? Who can really help those children?

The problem is mainly “rooted in a failure to make education a top priority in government spending plans” (Radio Free Asia, 2004, p. 1). Some educational experts criticized the Chinese government for being shortsighted when it comes to investing education as follows (Radio Free Asia, 2004):

Look at Shanghai. It is a very modern metropolis with many high-rise buildings and expressways. How could you believe that China does not have the money for education?

[T]he problem lay with the political system, under which officials are encouraged to pursue quick return to demonstrate their accomplishments. They won't

consider investing in education as the returns won't show in 10 years, or even 100 years. (pp.1-2)

Of course, it may not be fair either to blame the government solely for insufficient investment in education. Since successful education calls for efforts from the entire nation and society, attention and sympathy from many sectors—successful businesses and average citizens alike—are indispensable for meeting those unprivileged children's needs for educational opportunities. Our point here is that this PSA, unfortunately, did not choose to address the government's lack of attention to those migrant children and investment in their education, which we believe is a more critical issue.

Funded in 1981 as one of the first charitable foundations in China, CCTF is aimed to “keep children from dropping out of school and keeping them safe from crime, illnesses and injury.” It has been striving for “the education and welfare of Chinese children, especially those in rural and ethnic minority areas” (CCTF, 2007a, p. 1).

PSAs like the one analyzed above have exerted positive impact on the society. According to CCTF's report, many companies and individuals, both from China and overseas, have kindly given their helping hands to these children. CCTF collaborated, for example, with China Mobile and launched the “8858” SMS program, the first attempt in China for cellular phone fundraising. The four numbers, “8858,” when pronounced in Chinese, sounds homophonously like “*bangbang wo ba*” meaning “help me, please” in English. The program was reported as very successful; more than 20 million Chinese *yuan* (nearly \$2.5 million) was raised in just one year (CCTF, 2007b).

Conclusion

The two PSAs analyzed in this paper represent two sides of today's China. On the one hand, it is improving fast in its overall national strength and technology development; on the other, there are many people, especially children in low-income families, who desperately need the help from the entire society. Besides addressing some important and unique issues in the economically booming China, the two PSAs collected from seven years apart have also indicated two distinct changes in Chinese PSA practice.

First, the foreign nail vs. Chinese-made rocket PSA, selected from the 1997 national competition—one of the earliest competitions in China, suggests a strong inclination of using the public service advertising as an alternative communication tool to carry out the government agenda, although in a much more implicit manner when compared with the imposing strategy and techniques employed in the communist propaganda campaigns in the prior decades. On the other hand, the school desk PSA, selected from the *2005 Chinese Advertising Works Yearbook*—the latest database possible as of the time of the paper was written, has almost freed itself from the ideological and political flavor carried seven years earlier in the foreign nail vs. Chinese-made rocket PSA. The different issues the PSAs chose to address at the ends of this seven-year time span have, at least, suggest a possible swift in PSA communication strategy in China, which deserves more close attention and calls for adequate empirical examination.

Second, while the foreign nail vs. Chinese-made rocket ad is typical of Chinese PSAs a decade ago, which tended to focus merely on the “positive side” of the country, the school desk PSA is courageous enough to touch a sensitive issue—“the education

gulf that has opened up between rich and poor students since the start of the country's market reforms" (Watts, 2006, p. 1). The "school desk" ad may represent a trend in today's PSAs in China—to expose the "dark side" of the country. This change indicates that PSA in China has become more liberal and the Chinese government has become more "relaxed" about the media exposure of the problems and issues in the nation.

Nevertheless, direct criticism of the government seems still not an acceptable and realistic mentality and practice for Chinese media today; PSA is no exception. This limitation could be part of the reason for the school desk PSA's only choosing to encourage the school dropouts not to lose hope in spite of the hardship they have to go through in their daily life, without touching the more sensitive aspect of the problem—the lack of government attention to and investment in education for these unprivileged children. Without saying, the widening gap between the rich and the poor and the lack of due attention, creative strategies, and effective solutions in China—especially on the part of its government, longterm harmony and sustained development in the nation could be seriously challenged.

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Table 1. Themes of National PSA Campaigns in China (1996-2006)

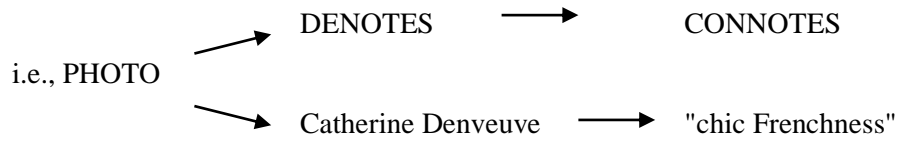
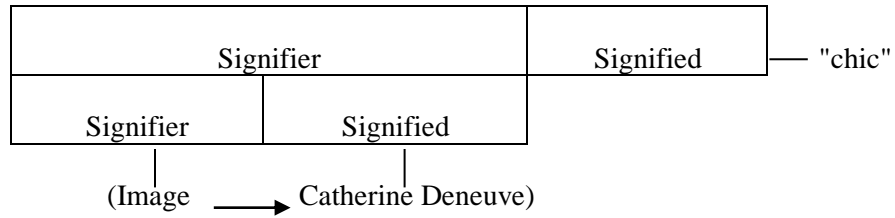
Years	Themes
1996	Reviving good traditional Chinese values
1997	Eulogizing the Chinese nation's unremitting efforts to make itself stronger
1998	Encouraging laid-off workers from state-owned enterprises to start afresh and glorifying the heroic spirits demonstrated in anti-flood campaigns
1999	Celebrating the 50 th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and the return of Macao to its motherland
2000	Establishing a new vogue in society while striding forward towards the new century (including promoting an optimistic outlook on life and advocating environmental protection and natural resources conservation)
2001	Promoting the theme of "governing the state with integrity"
2002	(No clear theme available)
2003	Educating the public on the importance of national defense
2004	(No clear theme available)
2005	Promoting good morals and ethnics
2006	Promoting "socialist outlook on honors and disgraces"

(Hui, 1999; Su, 1999; Su, 2000; PSA Column, 1999-2006; PSA in China, 2006)

Table 2. Functions of PSA in China

Functions	Sources
Offering correct courses for actions or solutions to current social problems and issues of public concerns	(Song, 1997)
Advocating actions that serve the welfare of the majority or the longterm benefits of the society	(Song, 1997; Z. Wang, 1999)
Raising the moral standard by establishing an optimistic outlook on life	(Song, 1997; Su, 2000)
Educating the public on health and hygiene issues such as population control and AIDS prevention	(J. Wang, 1999)
Eulogizing the Party's achievements, facilitating political stability, and promoting social development	(Z. Wang, 1999)
Raising funds for combating natural catastrophes	(J. Wang, 1999)
Increasing advertisers, advertising agencies, and media practitioners' sense of social responsibility and their willingness to contribute to public services, and improving the advertising industry's public image	(Z. Wang, 1999; PSA, 2006)
Being a “booster” for ethnic and moral constructions in the nation	(PSA in China, 2006)
Being a “hallmark” of the civilization of the society and symbolizing the nation’s prosperity and social progress	(PSA in China, 2006)
Promoting the history and cultural heritage of the nation	(PSA, 2006)
Functioning an effective tool for social management	(PSA, 2006)
Being an effective way for self-education in the society	(PSA, 2006)
Being a “power regulator” in dealing with social crises and a “lubricant” for social harmony	(PSA, 2006)
Improving the image of the nation or regions	(PSA, 2006)
Meeting audience’s needs for spiritual joys	(PSA, 2006)

Figure 1. Williamson's Semiotic Analysis Formula



(Williamson, 1978, p. 100)

Figure 2. Foreign Nail vs. Chinese-made Rocket PSA

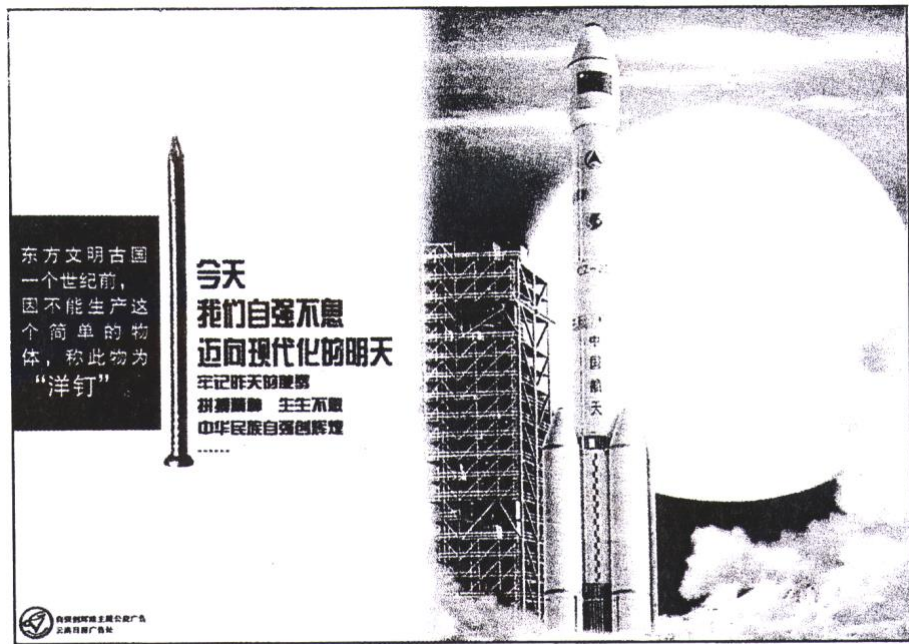


Figure 3. School Desk PSA



篇名：课桌篇 广告语：摆在面前的，是苦难，也是希望