Book Review

Ying Jiang, *Social Media and e-Diplomacy in China. Scrutinizing the Power of Weibo,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, doi:10.1057/978-1-137-59358-0, 2017, 147 p.

Once the advances in technology evolved into being recorded, and awareness regarding globalization processes strengthened, it became facile to observe the rhythm and the series of changes produced in societies, political systems or economic and cultural life, as well as the transversal effects that resurface. And unequivocally these effects become implied in most areas of activity. Thus, an example of this could be the appointment of the first Digital Ambassador, namely that of Denmark, "based out in Silicon Valley, in order to create a line of communication between the US tech companies and the Danish government"[1].

In short, the action of the Danish government does not entirely resemble e-governance, but rather devotes itself to an exponent of adaptability and the desire to assert, to abandon anonymity, while seeking visibility and digital success. On the other hand, it becomes a conclusive exponent of the importance of technology within a community. That is why nowadays the specialized literature extends, enhancing interdisciplinary vectors, as is natural, and focuses on those unconventional developments that were, at least in the past few decades, nonexistent.

In the light of this disclosure, Ying Jiang, Senior Lecturer at the Department of Media, University of Adelaide, Australia, introduces a "systematic research of Weibo usage by embassies in China from September 2015 to March 2016"[2], being "*the first in the academia* to explore the challenges that the use of Chinese Weibo (and Chinese social media in general) posed for foreign embassies"[3].

---

[1] Derek du Preez, "Why Denmark appointed the world's first Digital Ambassador" in *Diginomica*, 19.09.2017, https://government.diginomica.com/2017/09/19/denmark-appointed-worlds-first-digital-ambassador/, accessed 26 June 2018.

[2] Ying Jiang, *Social Media and e-Diplomacy in China. Scrutinizing the Power of Weibo*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. xi.

[3] *Ibidem.*

From an inclusive viewpoint, it is puzzling to determine how the author exhibits digital innovation and its reproduction procedure, and creativity, comparing examples of embassies, mostly generic, based in the Chinese capital. Along these lines, it can be identified that these degrees differ according to the emitter establishment (polished according to a particular culture, and different diplomatic practices, opinions and ideals) and the receiver (in this case a segment of the Chinese society). An eloquent example is presented in this regard, *i.e.* a reference that points out both "Weibo entries of the Korean embassy" *vs* "Weibo entires of the US embassy"[4]. On this account, the Embassy of the Republic of Korea seems to be more keen on promoting aspects that pertain to Korean-Chinese cooperation as in comparison to American-Chinese cooperation, while the diametric-opposite ascertainment is related to the spread of American news against Korean ones[5].

The key to success, therefore - through analytical derivations -, might be in those models that understand the fundamental importance of PR, communication (including here strategic communication), and marketing strategies. Indeed, the blend of these sciences with public diplomacy and their connection to public diplomacy as an emerging discipline, under the auspices of the larger study of international relations, remains undetermined.

In a more concrete way, this review takes note of the fact that the projection of Chinese digital diplomacy does not represent the main narrative of Ying Jiang's book, yet one that exclusively concerns the use of Weibo by foreign diplomatic representations in Beijing. In the absence of other social media platforms, it has been observed how foreign diplomatic establishments accept and desire to satisfy, even in an eccentric way, the expectations of the Chinese public; an increasingly sophisticated public, as yet very radical in its expression of (cyber-) nationalism and patriotism.

From a definite viewpoint, the structure of the book - an ardent pyramid that begins with debates of some basic concepts - shows balance, because through the analogies between those Western models described (see here the examples of the United States, Canada, Korea, or Norway6), the narrative is heading towards a relative versatile and even holistic resolution which, for example, does not lose sight of those cases pertaining to censorship. Accordingly, the book is divided into three distinct parts, namely: The first part, entitled *Social Media Landscape Differences Between China and the West*, highlights whether "China's cyber-nationalism brings any challenges to foreign embassies' practice of e-diplomacy [and] what sort of challenges is cyber-

---

[4] See *Ibid.,* p. 113
[5] See *Ibid.*
[6] See *Ibid.,* pp. 79-83.

nationalism bringing to e-diplomacy"[7]. This part comprises two chapters, each of which are, to a degree, problem-introductory sections that also state the main directions of the research conducted. What remains of undetermined interest throughout this section is the relation created between the usage of Weibo and public diplomacy[8]. Hence, Jiang questions whether Weibo behavior improves the practical paradigm of public diplomacy, and tries to determine exactly the nature of this - a paradigm that reaches its crest barely in the third part of the book.

Analyzing the Embassies' Use of Weibo is the second part that altogether contains another three different chapters which further advance the study. As endorsed by the author himself, it sketches "an overall picture of foreign use of Weibo… [and classifies] the top five embassies that use Weibo frequently. It seeks to address three gaps in existing knowledge by empirical research…"[9] What is of current interest throughout this second part predominantly revolves around *cross continental* examples. Jiang brings into light the success of Obama's 2008 campaign, for example, that has significantly been sustained by social media (Twitter, to be precise), or the social media experience of US Embassy in Venezuela. Both of these instances provided, although analogical, seek to outline a conceptual framework for Weibo[10].

Indeed the last part of the book is dedicated to both public diplomacy and Weibo, although similar contentions were clearly indicated in the previous parts of the book. Debates are linked *inter alia* to the Global PR Theory[11], for instance, and examines the limitations that Weibo imposes for public diplomacy. As a result, "in analyzing the practice of using social media as a public diplomacy tool"[12], Jiang concludes that there are two major challenges imposed by Weibo, that are indeed cultivating innovation. It is important to assess the fact that the author created thus this innovation to the extent that he applies various theories, conceptions, and principles gathered from a welter of disciplines, a multidisciplinary basket, and projects them on Weibo[13].

This review does not deny the idea that further debates indeed need to be cultivated and answers sought, yet it argues that more accountability within this study should have been present. For this reason, the resolution of the book remains cramped and unclear, as it does not incites clearly the sustainability of Jiang's research. Nonetheless, the aesthetic rhetoric remains questionable: symbolically

---

[7] *Ibid.,* p. 3.
[8] See *Ibid.,* pp. 2-43.
[9] *Ibid.,* p. 45.
[10] See *Ibid.,* pp. 49-50.
[11] See *Ibid.,* pp. 125-139.
[12] *Ibid.,* p. 119.
[13] See *Ibid.,* pp. 104-146.

easy to observe, on the cover, since the content of the book is exclusively dedicated to e-Diplomacy and China, why has the author decided to adopt a 19th century Indian illustration? What is the message he seeks to convey?

Furthermore, it is important to point that there is an approval of the fact that "the power of Weibo might have been overestimated"[14], a reason that could also argue the ascertainment according to which Weibo users are not mature, nor friendly internet users. Samples of comments and reactions posed by Weibo users are provided throughout the study, all of which expedite a rhetoric: Could such agressive Weibo behaviors be an expression of the constant growing rights consciouness? Is this cyber-nationalism a fundamental characteristic of developing nations? Or could it be a pure reversal of both the conscious supression and the historical conscious of the Chinese?

Radu SAVA,

MA candidate in Chinese Politics and Foreign Policy at Tsinghua University in Beijing, and in Compared European Political Studies at the Faculty of European Studies of Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, radussava@gmail.com

---

[14] *Ibid.,* p. 146.