Guest Editorial

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Asia looms large in the global imagination. Today, it is home to the world's second largest economy, and the world's two most populous nations. It has diverse political and cultural traditions, and varying levels of economic development. In light of their growing role and influence in global politics and economy, countries and territories in Asia are increasingly aware of the importance of their image and reputation as an integral part of their development and diplomatic strategies. Their efforts to forge distinct identities on the global stage are capturing attention, both domestically and internationally.

This special issue of *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* seeks to put a spotlight on this region to advance our understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing countries in Asia as they engage in image management and communication. A related goal is to use this platform to broaden the scope of research on place branding and public diplomacy, both conceptually and methodologically.

During the editorial process, we came to realise that there was certainly no shortage of interest in the topic, but research on Asia by and large remains nascent. This special issue represents our modest attempt to stimulate study in this area of inquiry and to open new vistas for future research.

The first paper in this issue, by Suman Lee, Elizabeth Toth and Hochang Shin,

aims to identify factors contributing to the image of South Korea among US opinion leaders and the routes through which these perceptions were formed. It is noteworthy that the television series, *M*A*S*H*, has played an instrumental role in defining the public discourse concerning South (and North) Korea in the United States. A parallel example would be Pearl S. Buck's 1931 novel *The Good Earth* and its later Hollywood film adaptation that shaped the American imagination of China for decades.

Among the countries in Asia, Singapore always presents an interesting case for debate and discussion on the role of the government in a country's development and, more poignantly, the relationship between political democracy and economic development. How does Singapore, often labelled as a 'soft authoritarian' state, manage to re-invent (or re-brand) itself to become a force in the global creative economy? This is the question Can-Seng Ooi tries to address in the second paper in this issue. Ooi's study focuses on the role of the Singapore government in navigating the cross-currents of social control and the needs for political liberalisation in its pursuit of a vision of a creative city.

Juyan Zhang's paper traces the evolution of Chinese public diplomacy over the last several decades. Although plenty has been written about this topic in academic papers and commentaries, Zhang approaches the discussion by using

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the models developed by public relations scholar James Grunig. His central argument is that China's external communication has moved away from pure one-way propaganda and public information models to a mixed-motive model or a complex blend of one-way and two-way communication.

Bridging the study of national image management with other disciplines is essential to furthering our research endeavours. The next piece by Vidhi Chaudhri and Jeremy Fyke makes a strong case for using rhetorical analysis in the study of public diplomacy. As a case in point, they examined the rhetorical strategies employed by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in his public communication on his visit to the United States in 2007.

In the Case Notes section, we have selected an essay by Smitha Vasudevan, a communications manager in Kerala, India. Her observations, based on the experience of the Kerala tourism brand, highlight the importance of internal

audiences in developing, delivering and managing a destination brand.

Over the past several years, US public diplomacy has focused on addressing anti-American sentiments in the Arab and Muslim world, perhaps to the neglect of developing a coherent vision and plan for public diplomacy in other regions. As pointed out in a recent report by the Asia Foundation titled *America's Role in Asia: Asian and American Views*, the incoming president of the United States will face enormous challenges in managing America's crucial relationship with Asia. We conclude the special issue with a timely contribution by Sarah Graham on the need for a discussion among scholars and policy makers on the goals and contours of America's public diplomacy in Asia Pacific.

In short, this collection of papers and essays probably raises more questions than providing answers, but it is our hope that it serves as an invitation for further exploration.