

# Public Relations in China

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## Part 1: Background information

**Official Name:** People's Republic of China

**Capital City:** Beijing

**Major Cities:** Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Tianjin, Chongqing

**Official Language:** Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua); other major languages include Cantonese, Shanghaiese, Fuzhou, and Hokkien-Taiwanese

**Type of Government:** Communist State

**Location:** Eastern Asia, bordering the East China Sea, Korea Bay, Yellow Sea, and South China Sea, between North Korea and Vietnam

**Currency:** Renminbi (RMB)

### **Culture:**

China's infrastructure is highly developed, with its major cities containing skyscrapers and subways. Wide economic disparities exist between the country's urban and rural areas. In response to effects of rapid population growth, the Chinese government instituted an internationally controversial law limiting most couples to one child in 1979, which it plans to continue through at least 2010. As a result, almost all Chinese people born since 1979 date have no siblings in a society that values family and heritage.

Chinese people pride themselves in their long history and cultural heritage, which is extremely diverse in aspects such as clothing, food and language. Ethnically, a little more than 90 percent of Chinese are Han, with the remaining 10 percent divided among 55 minority groups officially designated by the central government. These minorities face hardships similar to minorities in other countries and receive preferential treatment similar to affirmative action in aspects such as university admissions and the right to have more than one child.

In 1995, China peacefully acquired the British colony of Hong Kong. Hong Kong's culture therefore significantly differs from that of what locals call Mainland China; for example, Hong Kong uses traditional Chinese characters instead of the simplified ones the Mainland adopted after 1949. China considers Taiwan a rebellious province and includes it on all its national maps. Taiwan considers itself its own country and has its



own government structure. China hosted the 2008 Summer Olympics, in Beijing, for the first time in the nation's history.

Geert Hofstede analysis for China has Long-term Orientation (LTO) the highest-ranking factor (118), which is true for all Asian cultures. This Dimension indicates a society's time perspective and an attitude of persevering; that is, overcoming obstacles with time, if not with will and strength.

The society fosters strong relationships where everyone takes responsibility for fellow members of their group. China's religion is officially designated as Atheist by the State, although the concepts and teachings of the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius (500 B.C.) are woven into the society at large. Some religious practice is acceptable in China; however, the government sets rigid limits.

## **Part 2: Overview of the public relations industry**

According to the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, public relations is among the top five professions in China, and it is said to be the easiest, or at least very easy, profession in which to get a job. According to a poll released in September 2004 by the China International Public Relations Association, there were more than 15,000 practitioners in China in 2003—an increase of 10 percent over the previous year. The survey looked at 14 foreign-funded agencies and 31 domestic ones. An interesting statistic was that foreign-based firms experienced an average 15 percent growth rate, while domestic firms doubled that amount. Associations for public relations professionals include the China International Public Relations Association (CPRA) and the Shanghai Public Relations Association (SPRA).

According to the Shanghai Public Relations Association (SPRA), monthly salaries for entry level public relations practitioners range from 3,000 (roughly \$440 in August 2008) to 5,000 RMB (approximately \$730), depending on whether the job is at a foreign or a domestic agency.

Domestic firms have found ways to compete with global agencies by emphasizing service and knowledge of the political and social environment. They also try to specialize in a particular area of expertise or industry. Domestic manufacturing companies are going global in order to compete in the marketplace. Likewise, they are providing more opportunities for public relations because they are beginning to take seriously such concerns as employee and customer relations. Investor relations also is key for companies going global.

About 20 years ago public relations activities in China primarily focused on gaining media publicity for a product or company. With the changing and growing economy in China public relations has evolved into practices such as crisis management, investment relations, employee relations and corporate citizenship.

The leading areas for public relations activity in China are: Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou. Beijing is the central area for public affairs, government relations, including lobbying, and corporate reputation management, while Shanghai and Shenzhen are more focused on financial relations as China's two stock exchanges are located in these cities. While Shanghai and Guangzhou have long been the two leading centers for consumer marketing, many consumer PR programs today have a national focus, even taking in some second tier cities.

Few PR agencies have truly national operations. The market leaders tend to be based in Beijing and Shanghai. Some have operations in Guangzhou and Chengdu to cover the south and central regions. Most second and third tier cities are covered by affiliates that provide small, localized operations, usually managed by more capable agencies based in Beijing or Shanghai.

China is considered one of the world's fastest emerging markets, along with Brazil, Russia, and India. Its economy is growing at double-digit rates, creating rapidly increasing public relations opportunities with Chinese publics from within and outside its borders. All major global public relations firms including Edelman, Hill and Knowlton, and Weber Shandwick have offices in China.

Many public relations professionals in China do not view a highly centralized Communist government as having a large effect on their jobs. However, public relations scholars say that this kind of government creates a need for especially sophisticated government relations.

Public relations in China relies heavily on interpersonal relationships, a value reflected throughout mainstream society, partially due to the need to navigate the bureaucracy. Often business and social relationships in China blur. Bribing journalists both directly and indirectly, through either paying media outlets cash or trading paid advertising for positive editorials, is both common and considered ethical in China.

Major domestic public relations firms:

- Ad Hoc Concepts [<http://www3.comms4.com/>]
- Ghost-Writer Dot.Com Developments
- Guangming Public Relations, Beijing, China
- H-Line Ogilvy [<http://www.h-line.com/index.htm>]
- Orb International
- Tafnit Communications Ltd. [<http://www.tafnit.com/>]
- Taiwan Products News Bureau

Every major public relations firm has at least one office in China, for example, Burson-Marsteller.

Professional Associations:

- China International Public Relations Association [<http://www.cipra.org.cn/>]
- Shanghai Public Relations Association [<http://www.chspra.com/>]

### **Part 3: Overview of public relations as it relates to students**

China's rapid industry growth has created a shortage of qualified public relations practitioners. According to a recent CIPRA poll, training is seen as a major need in China, with most employees of the top public relations agencies spending an average of 50 hours a year in training. Multinational and local companies need practitioners with experience in research, issues management, project management and integrated marketing campaign development. Public relations professionals looking to practice communications in China will need a solid academic base as well as an in-depth understanding of Chinese markets to keep up with the constant change and learning required to be competitive in China.

Students interested in public relations careers related to China should look into relevant internships both in their home countries and in China. Both formal public relations education and English language fluency are highly valuable in the Chinese job market. Most publicly traded companies offer opportunities for their public relations employees and interns to travel to China to work, have fully operational offices in China, or both. Many non-Chinese employees and interns in China study Mandarin before or during their employment in China.

CIPRA sets the standards for public relations education, not the national Ministry of Education. CIPRA and SPRA both encourage and support academic research and theory development. According to SPRA, there are two approaches to defining public relations: the image style and the management-function style. SPRA uses Grunig's definition of public relations.

Universities that offer an undergraduate public relations degree:

- Donghua University [<http://www.dhu.edu.cn/>]
- Zhongshan University [<http://www.sysu.edu.cn/>]
- Communication University of China [<http://www.cuc.edu.cn/>]

Universities that offer a Master's in public relations:

- Fudan University [<http://www.fudan.edu.cn/>]
- Zhongshan University [<http://www.sysu.edu.cn/>]

### **Resources:**

100 Largest Cities In China by urban population

[http://www.geocities.com/tiwang80/100\\_largest\\_cities\\_in\\_china.htm](http://www.geocities.com/tiwang80/100_largest_cities_in_china.htm)

Chinese Geert Hofstede Cultural Dimensions Explained [http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede\\_china.shtml](http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_china.shtml)

CIA World Factbook: China <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html>

“Doing Business in...The People’s Republic of China.” Public Relations Organisation International [http://www.proi.org/resources/doing\\_business\\_in/china.htm](http://www.proi.org/resources/doing_business_in/china.htm)

“Profile: China.” Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communications Management <http://www.globalpr.org/knowledge/landscapes.asp>

“Public Relations in China Pursues the Middle Way.” Communications Monthly [www.national.ca/china/Interview.pdf](http://www.national.ca/china/Interview.pdf)