

Public Diplomacy: A Preliminary Assessment

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การทูตสาธารณะ (Public Diplomacy) ได้ทวีความสำคัญมากขึ้นในยุคปัจจุบัน เป้าหมายของการทูตสาธารณะมิได้จำกัดอยู่ที่นักการทูตหรือเจ้าหน้าที่ของรัฐต่างประเทศเท่านั้น แต่ยังรวมถึงตัวแสดงที่ไม่ใช่รัฐอื่นๆ รวมทั้งประชาชนทั่วไปในต่างประเทศด้วย นอกจากนี้ การทูตสาธารณะยังเปิดโอกาสให้ตัวแสดงอื่นๆ เช่น ภาคประชาสังคม และประชาชนทั่วไปที่มีส่วนร่วมในการขับเคลื่อนด้วย หมายความว่า ทุกคนสามารถทำหน้าที่เป็นนักการทูต เป็นตัวแทนของประเทศของตนเองได้ทั้งสิ้น บทความนี้ยังเสนอว่า การทูตสาธารณะเป็นยุทธศาสตร์ที่เป็นประโยชน์อย่างน้อยสองด้านด้วยกัน ด้านแรก ในยุคที่ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างประเทศและนโยบายต่างประเทศมีลักษณะที่เป็นประชาธิปไตยมากขึ้น การที่รัฐสามารถโน้มน้าวให้ตัวแสดงอื่นๆ ในต่างประเทศหันมาสนับสนุนนโยบายต่างประเทศของตนได้จึงเป็นเรื่องที่สำคัญยิ่ง ด้านที่สอง รัฐต่างๆ ตั้งแต่มหาอำนาจ มหาอำนาจขนาดกลาง และรัฐขนาดเล็กสามารถใช้การทูตสาธารณะเป็นเครื่องมือในการเพิ่มพลังอ่อน (soft power) ของตนได้อย่างไรก็ตาม การทูตสาธารณะมีข้อจำกัดและความเสี่ยงที่พึงระมัดระวังเช่นเดียวกัน ข้อจำกัดแรก เนื่องจากการทูตสาธารณะเปิดโอกาสให้ตัวแสดงที่หลากหลายสามารถเข้ามามีส่วนร่วมในการดำเนินการได้ ซึ่งตัวแสดงเหล่านี้มิได้เป็นนักการทูตที่ถูกอบรมมาเป็นอย่างดี บางครั้งจึงอาจแสดงพฤติกรรมที่ไม่เหมาะสมออกไปโดยที่รัฐไม่สามารถควบคุมได้ เป็นเหตุให้ภาพลักษณ์และชื่อเสียงของรัฐถูกทำลายลง ข้อจำกัดที่สอง คือ การทูตสาธารณะไม่สามารถช่วยให้รัฐตั้งรับภัยคุกคามหรือประเด็นบางประเด็นได้ เช่น ไม่สามารถใช้รับมือการโจมตีทางการทหารจากภูมิภาคอื่นๆ หรือประเด็นที่ต้องอาศัยความรู้ทางประวัติศาสตร์และทางเทคนิคของนักการทูตอาชีพ เช่น ความขัดแย้งด้านดินแดน เป็นต้น

คำสำคัญ: การทูตสาธารณะ, พลังอ่อน, พลเมืองทั่วไป, นโยบายต่างประเทศ

Abstract

Public diplomacy has become increasingly significant in the contemporary era. The targets of public diplomacy are not constrained to only foreign diplomats and government officials but also non-state actors including the general public in foreign countries. Moreover, actors involved in conducting public diplomacy also include non-state actors such as civil society organisations and ordinary citizens, which means anybody can be a diplomat representing their countries. This article also argues that public diplomacy is a useful strategy in two perspectives. Firstly, as international relations and foreign policy has been more democratised, it has become more significant for a state to be able to convince the general public in foreign countries through executing public diplomacy to support its foreign policy. Secondly, states ranging from superpowers, middle powers to small powers, can conduct public diplomacy to enhance their “soft power”. However, public diplomacy also has some limitations which needed to be taken into account. The first limitation is that as public diplomacy involves numerous actors in societies who are not well-trained diplomats, their inappropriate behaviours are difficult to be controlled. If other actors behave inappropriately, the image and reputation could be undermined. The second limitation is that public diplomacy cannot deal with immediate threats such as military attacks by other states. Moreover, there are some issues such as territorial disputes which require historical and technical knowledge of professional diplomats of two or more states to resolve.

Keywords: public diplomacy, soft power, ordinary citizens, foreign policy

Introduction

Despite the fact that public diplomacy has increasingly attracted attention from both international relations scholars and practitioners in recent years, it can be traced back to ancient Greece, Rome and Byzantium. Jan Melissen (2007: 3) noted, “Image cultivation, propaganda and activities that we would now label as public diplomacy are nearly as old as diplomacy itself.” It is argued that in the contemporary world in which diplomacy is not confined only to the relationship between professional diplomats and state officials but includes other actors, in particular ordinary citizens. In this context it can be argued that public diplomacy plays more important roles in international relations. As Allan Gotlieb (Potter 2002/2003: 44), the former Canadian ambassador to the United States, summed up his experience: “The new diplomacy, as I call it, is, to a large extent, public diplomacy and requires different skills, techniques, and attitudes than those found in traditional diplomacy.” Peter van Ham (2010: 116) suggested that “Today’s public diplomacy fits well in a world where networks and fluid relationships among multiple actors with fuzzy roles abound.” Moreover, in the contemporary era in which more states become democratic, and ordinary citizens and other political institutions in those states engage more in foreign policy and diplomacy, public diplomacy can be used, as Joseph S. Nye Jr. (2008: 99) argued, “to garner favorable public opinion in countries like Mexico and Turkey, where parliaments can now affect decision making.” He went on to argue that even the United States - the sole superpower after the cold war - is also affected by public opinion in foreign countries (Nye 2008: 99-100).

Some other scholars, for example, David Hoffman (2002: 84) suggested that after the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 on the soil of the United States, the significance of public diplomacy has been increasingly realised; as he argued, “Once the stepchild of diplomats,

public diplomacy has only recently taken its rightful place at the table of national security.” Peter G. Peterson (2002: 74) asserted that the war on terrorism declared by the United States during the Bush administration required the reconfiguration and reinvigoration of public diplomacy in order to mobilise support from other countries. He explained:

A consensus is emerging, made urgent by the war on terrorism that U.S. public diplomacy requires a commitment to new foreign policy thinking and new structures. They are needed to make clear why the United States is fighting this war and why supporting it is in the interests of others, as well as of Americans (Peterson 2002: 74).

The increasing significance and benefits of public diplomacy, which is appropriate to undertake in the contemporary era, has been elaborated in detail by both international relations scholars and practitioners. However, this essay argues that public diplomacy *per se* has potential benefits for superpowers as well as small and medium-sized states if it is undertaken with prudence and caution to advance states’ national interests in the international arena. On the other hand, public diplomacy is not a solution for every problem. It has potential costs and risks which stakeholders who are engaged in public diplomacy need to recognise. This article firstly discusses the definitions of public diplomacy. The latter parts then propose the main argument of this essay, as mentioned earlier, by considering potential benefits as well as potential costs and risks of public diplomacy.

Definitions of Public Diplomacy

There is still no consensus on the definitions of public diplomacy. In the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, the term ‘public diplomacy’ was used to emphasise the significance of the transparency of diplomacy between states, especially when President

Woodrow Wilson of the United States proposed the fourteen points to achieve global peace after the First World War (Cull 2009: 19-20). The definition of public diplomacy began to shift in the 1950s towards the realm of “international information and propaganda” (Cull 2009: 21).

The traditional definition of public diplomacy focuses on the roles of state agencies. Hans Tuch described ‘public diplomacy’ as “a government’s process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and politics” (Melissen 2007: 11-12). His definition here emphasises that it is the role of only state or government to conduct public diplomacy.

In 1938, the Department of State of the United States established the Division of Cultural Relations, and in 1940 the Office of Inter-American Affairs in order to promote American culture to Latin America (Nye 2008: 98). During the Second World War, in 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Office of Wartime Information (OWI) to deal with propaganda in foreign countries, especially by suggesting additions and deletions to many Hollywood films (Nye 2008: 98). During the Cold War, the United States’ government agencies, such as the United States Information Agency (USIA), the Voice of America (VOA), played important roles in disseminating American values and dreams to people in the Soviet Union. Victoria V. Orlova (2009: 69) noted that “U.S. radio gave the Soviets, who lived in an informational vacuum, a critical and truthful view of Soviet reality and kept their hopes alive, reporting about ‘another’ life, promising great opportunities for everyone, freedom of expression, equal rights, and the free market.”

Some other definitions do not directly mention the roles of state or government in public diplomacy on the one hand. On the other hand, these definitions do not represent the significant roles of other actors in

public diplomacy activities either. Such definitions focus mainly on the activities of public diplomacy. Paul Sharp (2007: 106) defines public diplomacy as “the process by which direct relations are pursued with a country’s people to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented”.

However, Nancy Snow (2009: 6) argued that actors involved in public diplomacy have shifted in recent years, as she pointed out:

traditional public diplomacy has been about governments talking to global publics (G2P), and includes those efforts to inform, influence, and engage those publics in support of national objectives and foreign policies. More recently, public diplomacy involves the way in which both government and private individuals and groups influence directly and indirectly those public attitudes and opinions that bear directly on another government’s foreign policy decisions (P2P).”

The most comprehensive and the most useful definitions of public diplomacy for the purposes of this article are presented by Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Canada. The main point is that public diplomacy is not necessarily conducted by only government or state but also other actors in each society. One of the earlier brochures of the Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy described public diplomacy as:

Public diplomacy deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and

interests in one country with those of another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as between diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the processes of inter-cultural communications (The Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy).

Moreover, according the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development of Canada, the definition of public diplomacy is as follows:

Public diplomacy is about projecting a coherent and influential voice to all those who have influence within a society - not just within its government. Canada's credibility and influence abroad will be built not only by Government action but by Canadians themselves - artists, teachers, students, travellers, researchers, experts and young people - interacting with people abroad. Public diplomacy includes cultural events, conferences, trade shows, youth travel, foreign students in Canada, Canadian studies abroad and visits of opinion leaders. All this cultivates long-term relationships, dialogue and understanding abroad, underpins our advocacy and increases our influence.

Public diplomacy is also crucial to achieving our foreign policy goals. By persuading others as to the value of our proposals and strategies, or by engaging in cross-cultural dialogue, we can take important steps in furthering shared objectives of importance to Canadians (Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Canada).

Nye (2008: 101-102) summarised that public diplomacy has three dimensions. The first dimension is daily communication between politicians or government officials to a foreign public through foreign press. The second

dimension is strategic communication. The third dimension is creating long-lasting relationships with foreign ordinary citizens through scholarships, academic and cultural exchange programmes, trainings, seminars. Not only did great powers such as the United States, the UK, Japan and China provide scholarships for foreign students to go to study in their countries, a middle power such as Australia under the Abbott Government also provided financial support for Australian students undertake studies and internships in Asian countries and vice versa in order to strengthen people-to-people relationship with Asian countries (Mason, 2014).

However, as Nye (2008: 103) observed, public diplomacy needs to focus on two-way communication as foreign public should be enabled to express their views and opinions. In recent years, social media such as Facebook has been used as a channel for two-way communication between embassies and people in their host countries, for instance, the Australian and the US embassies in Bangkok have created the Facebook pages to communicate with Thai people, and the pages have enabled ordinary people to post their comments (Australian Embassy Thailand; Embassy of the United States Bangkok). To what extent the embassies take the comments into account is beyond the scope of this article. However, it obviously shows that it is more likely for public diplomacy to embrace two-way communication.

In conclusion, from the definitions elaborated earlier, public diplomacy consists of three major aspects. First, the most important target of public diplomacy goes beyond the foreign governments or the elites in foreign countries; it focuses mainly on communicating with ordinary people in other states who at the moment have more influence on their own governments' foreign policy. The main objective is to advance the national interests of states undertaking public diplomacy, in particular through the promotion of positive images, credibility and international

reputation, all of which lay the strong foundations for bolstering other national interests abroad. The Australian federal government recognised the significance of positive images, credibility and international reputation by stating in 1997 that “In its multilateral strategies, as in its regional and bilateral efforts, Australia’s international reputation is itself a factor in our capacity to advance Australian interests. An international reputation as a responsible, constructive and practical country is an important foreign policy asset” (Commonwealth of Australia, 1997: iii).

Second, apart from professional diplomats and government agencies, all other actors in each state can be ambassadors to promote public diplomacy. Students who go to study abroad with appropriate manners or tourists who travel to other countries with desirable behaviours all assist in promoting positive images of states represented by these people. On the other side of the pendulum, any host states which welcome and treat foreign visitors no matter whether they are students, tourists or business persons, with generous hospitality will definitely enhance an opportunity of those states to a considerable degree to win hearts and minds of foreign audiences.

Lastly, what indirectly flows from the definitions is that, as Rome was not built in one day, public diplomacy to win hearts and minds of foreign public must be a long-term process to cultivate positive long-standing relationships with foreign public, therefore, the continuity of public diplomacy is of great significance in this regards.

Preliminary Assessment of Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy has potential benefits in numerous different ways. Primarily, it is in accordance with a more democratic world. In recent years international relations has been increasingly democratised, by which it means legitimacy of foreign policy relies more heavily than ever on public opinion and public support. In many democratic states, the provisions

of their constitutions authorise their elected legislatures to participate in considering and approving international treaties which the governments signed before such treaties come into effect or even in formulating foreign policy. It means that ordinary citizens could to some extent put pressure on their representatives concerning foreign policy. If public opinions hold negative attitudes towards foreign countries, it would be more difficult for leaders to strengthen foreign relations, as Nye (2008: 99) observed the significance of public opinions towards foreign policies in democratic states, “Even when foreign leaders are friendly, their leeway may be limited if their publics and parliaments have a negative image of the United States. In such circumstances, diplomacy aimed at public opinion can become as important to outcomes as the traditional classified diplomatic communications among leaders”.

In the United States, the constitution entitled the Senate, which is composed of 100 members - two members from each of the 50 states of the United States, all of whom are democratically-elected by the US citizens, to approve the international treaties made by the executive branch (United States Senate). Article II, Section 2 of the Constitution stipulates that the president “shall have Power by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, to make Treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur” (Legal Information Institute, Cornell University Law School).

In Thailand, the 2007 Constitution abolished by the military junta on 22 May 2014 entitled the National Legislative Assembly to ratify some kinds of international treaties. According to the 2007 Constitution, Paragraph Two of Section 190 provides that:

A treaty which provides for a change in the Thai territories or extraterritorial areas over which Thailand has sovereign rights or has jurisdiction in accordance therewith or in accordance with

international law or requires the enactment of an Act for the implementation thereof or has extensive impacts on national economic or social security or generates material commitments in trade, investment or budgets of the country, must be approved by the National Assembly. For this purpose, the National Assembly shall complete its consideration within sixty days as from the receipt of such matter (Nanakorn 2007: 105).

Moreover, Paragraph Three of this Section also encouraged public opinion to be taken into account when the government negotiates these treaties with other states by stipulating that

Prior to taking steps in concluding a treaty with other countries or international organisations under paragraph two, the Council of Ministers shall provide information and cause to be conducted public hearings and shall give the National Assembly explanations on such treaty (Nanakorn 2007: 106).

As the legislatures in many democratic states are now authorised to approve international treaties, and most of the members are elected by the people of each state, it indicates that ordinary people can more or less influence the decision of the legislatures through elections and their opinion cannot be neglected anymore. Consequently, if any state is able to shape public opinions in other states in favour of its own interests through effective public diplomacy, it is more likely that the legislatures in those states will vote and make decisions in accordance with their constituencies, and the state with effective public diplomacy will benefit more than expected.

Another potential benefit of public diplomacy is that public diplomacy helps promote a state's soft power. According to Nye (2004a: x), soft power is:

the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals and policies...When you can get others to admire your ideals and to want what you want, you do not have to spend much on sticks and carrots to move them in your direction.

For the world's only superpower after the cold war, namely the United States, promoting soft power through effective public diplomacy, can help the US to confront the new threats such as terrorism at lower cost because other countries are willing to cooperate and make helpful concessions, which is one of the most important factors in successfully countering terrorism. As Nye (2004b: 17) pointed out:

The United States cannot confront the new threat of terrorism without the cooperation of other countries. Of course, other governments will often cooperate out of self-interest. But the extent of their cooperation often depends on the attractiveness of the United States...When the United States becomes so unpopular that being pro-American is a kiss of death in other countries' domestic politics, foreign political leaders are unlikely to make helpful concession.

In the case of the rising power, China also conducts its public diplomacy to promote its soft power. One of China's aims is to promote its positive images and culture overseas. One of its public diplomacy strategies is the establishment of the Confucius Institutes around the world in collaboration with the academic institutes in foreign countries (Paradise 2009: 648-649).

James F. Paradise (2009: 662) summarised the roles of the Confucius Institute:

Maybe the best way to think of the Confucius Institute project is as a type of impression management, an effort by China to craft a positive image of itself in a world fraught with danger. Faced with tremendous anxiety about China in the U.S. and other major trading partners, Confucius Institutes help create the impression of a kinder and gentler China. In this respect, the Confucius Institute project fits in well with the notion of China's peaceful development. It may also be part of a grand strategy to increase the country's attractiveness as a major power.

For small and medium-sized states, projecting soft power through public diplomacy benefits those countries in a different way. The main purpose of public diplomacy conducted by these states is, as Józef Bátora noted, to capture attention (Bátora 2005: 7). Take Norway, a country with approximately 5 million people and only about 320,000 square kilometres (Central Intelligence Agency 2015), as an example, it faces a problem of isolation and invisibility on the world stage. Mark Leonard and Andrew Small (2003: 2) explained:

There are a number of factors that perpetuate Norway's invisibility: it is small – in population, economy and presence; it is isolated – politically, geographically and culturally; it lacks linguistic attraction – many Norwegians speak English but not vice versa; it lacks brands or icons – there are no emissaries for the Norwegian identity; it is similar to Scandinavia – its shared culture does not help to distinguish it from the rest.

One public diplomacy strategy Norway uses to solve the problem of being isolated and ignored is positioning itself as a humanitarian superpower (Leonard and Small 2003: 16). Norway has been actively engaged in peace keeping operations in many regions around the world.

Since 1945, Norway has been actively participated in more than 25 peacekeeping operations around the world and approximately 50,000 Norwegian troops have served in those operations (Norway Mission to the UN 2014). In recent years, Norway has been engaged in peacekeeping operations in many countries, for example, Mali, South Sudan, the Middle East, Cyprus, Afghanistan, Liberia, Haiti, the Central African Republic, and Chad (Norway Mission to the UN 2014). In 2014, a female Norwegian Major-General, Kristin Lund, is the first woman in appointed as the Force Commander of the UN peacekeeping mission in Cyprus (UN News Center 2014). When Surin Pitsuwan, Thailand's Minister of Foreign Affairs, negotiated the deployment of international force to East Timor to resolve the humanitarian crisis in that territory with President Habibie of Indonesia in 1999, Habibie expressed his preference for one Nordic country to take the command of the international force (Pitsuwan, 2002). Even though Norway refused to assume the leading role in the international force, it clearly showed the extent other countries such as Thailand believed in Norway's roles in peacekeeping operations. Its involvement in peacekeeping operations positioned Norway as "a force for peace in the world" (Leonard, 2002: 53).

For Thailand, one of its public diplomacy strategies is to always hold annual Thai food and cultural festival to promote Thailand's soft power among people in foreign countries. The Royal Thai Embassy in Canberra, Australia, holds the festival in every September with a large amount of Thai food stalls and numerous activities including the demonstration of Thai cooking, boxing, singing, performances, free photo taking with Thai dresses etc. Each year, this festival attracts a large amount of Canberrans and people from other cities nearby such as Queanbeyan to attend (Phaktanakul and Chieocharnphphan, 2014).

However, every sword has a double edge. Public diplomacy has some potential costs and risks which should always be realised. Firstly, public diplomacy involves other actors ranging from business people, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to ordinary people. Unlike professional diplomats who are highly trained to perform properly when they have to deal with foreign government officials or even with foreign public in order to enhance the positive image of their country, the state cannot control the behaviours of this wide range of people engaged in public diplomacy. It is dangerous when only one single person can ruin the reputation and credibility of state quickly.

It is true that when students go to study abroad, they can be ambassadors to promote their states' positive images in case their behaviours are decent and acceptable. The result, however, can be the polar opposite if their behaviours are disgusting. For example, if one Cambodian student in Australia spat on the road, Australian people would inevitably have a negative image of Cambodia in their minds that Cambodia is a dirty country no matter how hard the Cambodian diplomats try to persuade them of the hygienic condition of their country. On the other hand, if foreign students came to study in Australia and were treated with discrimination by only one teacher in a small private school, the image that Australia is a country with discrimination would still be instilled deeply into their minds. From these two scenarios mentioned, it can be concluded that the more actors involved in public diplomacy, the higher risk that the reputation and credibility of the state are undermined.

The other point is that in reality of international politics, some problems cannot be solved through public diplomacy. As public diplomacy is a long-term process, it cannot help tackle every immediate threat that a state confronts, especially the military attack by other states. On 23 November, 2010, when North Korea launched an artillery attack on

South Korea's water near Yeonpyeong Island, which led to the death of at least two South Korean marines and injuries to 16 other marines along with three civilians ('South Korea vows 'enormous retaliation' against North's attack' 2010), South Korea immediately retaliated by returning fire and lifted the country's military alert to the highest non-wartime level (Wallace, 2010). The Air Force of South Korea also deployed its F-16 fighter jets to Yeonpyeong Island to protect its territory and its people. In addition, South Korea's new Defence Minister Kim Kwan-jin strongly announced that "If North Korea carries out a military provocation on our territory and people again, we must retaliate immediately and strongly until they completely surrender" ("South Korea again vows retaliation against Nkorea' 2010). In this case, public diplomacy was automatically marginalised in dealing with this crisis. It is only military capability of South Korea that can retaliate against North Korea's assault and can deter North Korea's future attacks on South Korean territories.

Another example would be the territorial conflict between Thailand and Cambodia. Public diplomacy is not a solution to this problem. The demarcation process requires historical and technical knowledge of the professional diplomats of both countries. In 2010-2011, both countries accuse each other of invading lands and violating sovereignty. In Thailand some local villagers in Sakaeo Province near the border between Thailand and Cambodia have lodged complaints that they cannot enter their own lands even though they possess land ownership documents issued by the Royal Thai Government because their lands were seized by the Cambodian soldiers. The situation deteriorated when military border clashes erupted on 4 February 2011 (Launey, 2011). The solutions to this problem could be negotiations by professional diplomats, arbitration by third-party - the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or even the United Nations. If all of the peaceful means fail, military clash or even

war, of which the determining factor is military capability of each country, could also be the solution. This issue is about sovereignty, territorial integrity as well as national pride and glory in international politics, which are beyond the capacity of public diplomacy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, public diplomacy can be a useful tool for statecraft because it is appropriate in the era in which international relations has been increasingly democratised, and it makes a significant contribution in promoting soft power of states which have benefits in many ways. Nevertheless, as public diplomacy involves more actors rather than professional diplomats, their behaviours can be hardly controlled. The risk of the inappropriate or even disgusting behaviours which can undermine the reputation and credibility of the state becomes higher. Moreover, public diplomacy cannot be used to resolve some problems such as territorial conflicts between states. There are other institutions to solve this kind of international conflicts better than public diplomacy. Therefore, public diplomacy is not a magical solution for every problem and needs to be conducted with caution.



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