WHAT IT’S ABOUT:

The China Dream initiative, founded in 2007 by the Joint US-China Collaboration on Clean Energy (JUCCCE), seeks to accelerate the shift to sustainable living in China. At its core, China Dream is about reimagining prosperity and reshaping the desires of the emerging Chinese middle class, a segment of Chinese society on track to exceed 800 million people by 2025. The goal of China Dream is to catalyze sustainable behaviours in this consuming class by encouraging social norms around a new personal prosperity and national identity. It also aims to shape policies targeting consumer behaviour such as those supporting textile recycling.

China Dream brings together partners from government, private business, and civil society in workshops with artists and sustainable production and consumption experts to develop storytelling and communication approaches. This workshop series has resulted in the creation of the Harmonious and Happy (和悦) Dream – a vision designed to challenge western depictions of “the good life” and the myth of the “citizen consumer.” China Dream presents a compelling alternative and in so doing, challenges foreign advertising and western-influenced imagery that is increasingly dominant in Chinese culture.

JUCCCE integrates the China Dream core values into mainstream marketing. For example, China Dream partnered with Unilever’s Dove Brand and AS Watsons, the world’s largest health and beauty retailer. In this project, China Dream used its methodology – Dream in a Box - to influence the development of the Dove marketing campaign “赞美真美” - translated as “Praise is Beautiful.” Similar to other Dove corporate-led campaigns, women were the audience. The campaign partners gathered in a workshop with ten women from the target demographic. Collectively, they developed tactics such as women using social media to share compliments. These compliment exchanges also took place in the Watsons store by customers and trained staff and these actions were linked to Dove discounts. The intention was to change participants’ mentality about sustainable consumption by increasing consumers’ sense of self-worth.
It won an award for the best corporate social responsibility campaign for its efforts to advance respect for women, social sustainability, community connectivity, and better living.

One of China Dream’s most powerful initiatives focuses on changing the way people talk about sustainability – moving from jargon to accessible language which speaks to people’s hearts using “the human and irresistible language of personal prosperity and national identity.” China Dream has found that while the issues at the core of sustainable lifestyles remain the same – safe food, air, water; thriving communities, livelihoods – the ways in which people express themselves around these issues differs from place to place. The team behind China Dream believes that changing the language of sustainability is critical for engaging people in sustainability and leading them to take action. Shifting perceptions of sustainable living is a core outcome promoted by China Dream through its policy, corporate marketing, and engagement work.

**PRINCIPLES IN ACTION**

**STAKEHOLDER-FOCUSED**

The China Dream initiative engages its stakeholders in a few important ways. Stakeholders have direct input in shaping “the dream” and in the creation of messaging, images, and other communications tools to be used by the China Dream campaign. The initiative engages a broad range of high-level stakeholders, from thought leaders to consumer product companies and government agencies. These stakeholders are drawn to the China Dream because of the way in which the campaign translates an ambitious vision into concrete, actionable steps. Examples of concrete outcomes include poster guides for use by sustainable restaurants, revitalizing China’s food pyramid model, and school curricula on sustainability and healthy nutrition.

China Dream institutes training and initiatives for Mayors aimed at improving cities through “constructive citizenship.” This includes the stakeholder engagement application used in Heyue City, where citizens can share ideas and take action (see link below).

**BETTER LIVING**

To develop the definition of China Dream, JUCCCE spent a year researching, curating images, and running workshops with groups of people from across China. The goal was to explore the question: what does “a better quality of life” mean for people from different regions, income brackets, and cultural backgrounds? The topics addressed were “Our City,” “Health & Wellness,” and “Culture and Style.” The resulting information was taken forward into further stakeholder workshops and consultations and became the core of the present China Dream.

China Dream shifts the sustainability dialogue away from sacrifice to highlight common values and desires as well as sustainable pathways to achieving these aspirations. Artists and storytellers produce simple messaging and imagery that speak to core Chinese cultural and traditional values (community, family, happiness, and prosperity) and that challenge Western models of consumerism. A key feature of China Dream’s presentation of better living is that it does not focus primarily on environmental outcomes; rather, it focuses on how its vision impacts on people’s lives in terms of these core values.

Yuan Xikun, artist - Happy and Harmonious Dream calligraphy
IMPACT

China Dream adopts a holistic approach to advancing sustainable lifestyles and seeks social, economic, and environmental benefits. This integrated strategy is a core part of China Dream’s Action Plan, known as the “Dream in a Box” process. The central goal for JUCCCE, the convening organization, is to have China Dream widely adopted by consumers, producers, and government so that JUCCCE is no longer needed over time. The campaign outlines a series of indicators that mark its success, including:

- Pickup rate in social media for the term “中国梦” (China Dream) reaching over 50 million people
- Number of cities that are piloting China Dream policies is more than ten (e.g., policies supporting bike sharing and clothing recycling)
- Number of mass media features and ads (branded content)
- Number of China Dream workshops is more than ten
- Impact of individual China Dream projects

Beyond China Dream’s core strategy, the team designs and measures the impact of spin-off projects in integrated ways. A New Way to Eat (www.juccce.org/eat), for example, seeks both personal health and climate change outcomes by encouraging low-carbon and healthy dietary choices through play-based school activities and affordable lunch recipes. China Dream is influencing mobility through popular government-supported bike share programs (e.g., Mobike) and reducing textile waste through government action and private companies (e.g., clothing recycling by clothing retailer H&M). Sustainable lifestyle domain impacts (food, mobility, goods) are woven together in China Dream communications materials such as the policy video produced in partnership with Ogilvy APAC for the China Dream Mayors training (http://vimeo.com/51734216).

SYSTEMIC

The China Dream initiative takes a whole system approach to sustainable living. Rather than break sustainable lifestyles into component parts (e.g., housing, food, mobility), it maintains its framing solidly on a holistic aspirational lifestyle and encourages integrated action across the system – attitudes, behaviours, cultural expression, institutional policies and infrastructure, business models, and marketing – to accelerate the adoption of sustainable lifestyles. Even though China Dream develops programs focused on “Safe food, air and water”, “Vibrant Living”, and “Livable Communities”, each of these programs integrates traditionally siloed sustainability topics such as food, transport and housing. The multi-stakeholder engagement approach undertaken by China Dream encourages dialogue across public, private, civil society, academic, media and artistic communities. The resulting actions are not just focused on education and raising awareness, but also include policy and corporate solutions.

COLLECTIVE ACTION

Part of what makes China Dream such a powerful and compelling initiative is that the ‘ask’ to the core audience is to make changes in their behaviours and desires for personal prosperity as well as national identity. Individual actions are not separate but are embedded within a national movement, supported by government and business action. JUCCCE recognized early on in China Dream’s development that concern for environmental consequences is not a sufficient motivator for most people to make radical and impactful changes. As a result, reimagining personal prosperity builds on the collectivist culture and a desire for belonging.
China Dream has adapted over time and the team changed its framing to better resonate with target audiences, including through its regular multi-stakeholder workshops. One of the most significant changes has been in the Chinese name for the campaign. Originally, the China Dream was called 和悦 (the Happy and Harmonious Dream), a term which is still used in campaign messaging. Yet when Chinese magazines translated the campaign into English they used the literal term “China Dream”. JUCCCE decided to embrace this term in political dialogue and changed the official Chinese name of the campaign to 中国梦 (China Dream) in both English and Chinese. This had the dual advantages of harmonizing communications between the two languages and attaching the campaign to a well-known political push for home-grown sustainable development in China.

COMMUNICATIONS TAKEAWAYS

Connecting with Audiences:
Tie personal values to societal values

Speak to identity and deep desires for belonging and prosperity. National identity or attachment to a local place can be a powerful motivator, often more effective than direct appeals to environmental concerns.

Framing:
Work with culture, not against it

Take time to understand stakeholder cultural values and collaborate with partners including artists, business and government who understand how to tap into these values. Mine old sayings and stories for messages and examples that resonate on a deep level.

Tactics:
Change the language of sustainability

Change the way people engage with sustainability by shifting the language away from negative framing such as sacrifice. Instead, present a hopeful, holistic vision of sustainable lifestyles in accessible language that broadens the appeal of sustainable lifestyle choices.

MORE INFORMATION

http://www.juccce.org/chinadream
http://en.huyuecity.com/
http://climatecolab.org/plans/-/plans/contests/2012/reducing-consumption/c/proposal/1304131
http://www.sustainablebrands.com/digital_learning/white-paper/china-dream-initiative
China Dream policy video for Chinese Mayor training (produced with Ogilvy APAC):
http://vimeo.com/51734216
Peggy Liu – TED Talks:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NqMP7IzgFg