

The Exercise and Role of China's Public Diplomacy in Europe within the Context of the 'Belt and Road Initiative'*

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Within the context of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to connect China and Europe, the role and exercise of public diplomacy in China-Europe relations is becoming increasingly significant, in particular China's public diplomacy in Europe. China has had some success in exercising its public diplomacy in Europe, but the means of improving its relationship with Europe through public diplomacy strategy within the context of BRI have been discussed less. China has been investing heavily in its charm offensive, and it does have an increasingly positive influence on developing countries, especially in Africa and Latin America. However, its image in Europe is still predominantly negative. Due to the differences in cultural norms and values between China and Europe, it is not enough for China to use its traditional culture and history to create soft power; instead, it needs to unleash the talents of its civil society and make its attractiveness conform to domestic realities. This article aims to tackle problems with the exercise of China's public diplomacy in Europe and provide practical suggestions on how to enhance it in the future, particularly through the use of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). To this end, working within the theory of constructivism, it proposes that China and Europe must go beyond the emotional entanglements of history and culture, cultivate innovative thinking and initiate a new paradigm in China-Europe relations.

Keywords: public diplomacy, China-Europe relations, Belt and Road Initiative.

Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), derived from the original name, One Belt One Road Initiative (OBOR), and later the Belt and Road, was unveiled by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, marking a new era in international cooperation. It links China and Europe via Central Asia, West Asia, the Middle East and Africa, focusing

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on connectivity and fostering cooperation between Eurasian countries, primarily the People's Republic of China (PRC), the land-based Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the ocean-going Maritime Silk Road (MSR). On 7 September 2013, President Xi delivered a speech in Kazakhstan in which he presented the idea of building the SREB together. On 3 September that same year, during a speech in the Indonesian Parliament, he had proposed the idea of building the 'Maritime Silk Road of the 21st century' hand in hand.¹

In the 21st century, a new era marked by the themes of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit, it is ever more important for us to reappropriate and carry forward the spirit of the Silk Road, in the face of a weak recovery of the global economy and complex international and regional issues. The BRI is a systematic project which should be built together, through consultation, to meet the interests of all, and efforts should be made to integrate the development strategies of the countries along the Belt and Road. The BRI connects Asian, European and African countries more closely and promotes mutually-beneficial cooperation attaining new historical heights, breathing vigour and vitality into the ancient Silk Road.²

The Belt and Road runs through the continents of Asia, Europe and Africa, connecting the dynamic East Asian economic zone at one end and the highly developed European economic zone at the other, encompassing countries with a huge potential for economic development.³ The SREB focuses on bringing China and Europe together via Central Asia and Russia, linking China with the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea through Central Asia and West Asia, and connecting China with Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Indian Ocean. The 21st-century Maritime Silk Road is designed to go mainly from the coast of China to Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean as one route, and from China's coast to the South Pacific through the South China Sea as the other. The BRI is a means for mutually-beneficent cooperation, promoting common development and prosperity and a road towards peace and friendship, enhancing mutual understanding and trust and strengthening exchange in general. The Chinese government strives to promote practical cooperation in various fields and to build a community of shared interests, destiny and responsibility based on mutual political trust, economic integration and cultural inclusiveness, the ideas of peace and cooperation, openness, mutual learning and benefit. Obviously, such a global initiative will boost the development of the world and mutually-beneficial cooperation between China and Europe, and raise the China–EU relationship to a new level.

¹ The original source in Chinese is from the document titled 'Tuidong Gongjian Sichou Zhilu Jingjida he Ershiyi Shiji Haishang Sichou Zhilu de Yuanjing yu Xindong' (Vision and Action on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road), issued by the National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China with the authorisation of the State Council in March 2015.

² *Ibidem*.

³ https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d63444e33637a4d/share_p.html (accessed on 26 June 2017).

In recent years, China’s economic growth has slowed down, but it is still able to maintain an average annual growth rate of 7 per cent (see bar graph below).⁴ The EU still faces the consequences of the 2008 debt crisis, leading to a very low or even negative economic growth rate. Alongside China’s sustained economic growth and its rise, a theory of a ‘Chinese threat’ often appears in Western political discourse. The United States is always worried that China will challenge its dominant position on the global stage and hamper its vested interests in the process of cooperation between the two countries, so it constantly creates certain obstacles, such as the issues of human rights, environmental concerns, and trade barriers. Europe has always been dependent on the US in many respects, for example in the economic, political and military spheres, while at the same time hoping to diminish US control and seeking to play an independent role in the international arena. Against this backdrop, the BRI is certainly in line with the interests of both China and Europe, and therefore mutually-beneficial cooperation could be achieved.

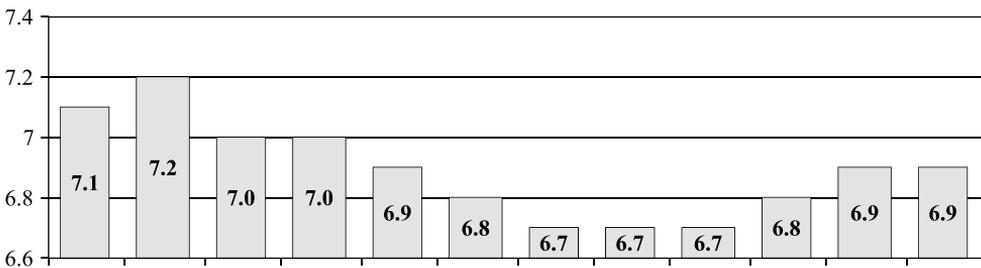


Figure 1. China GDP annual growth rate

Source: Tradingeconomics.com, National Bureau of Statistics of China.

However, there have been some problems between China and Europe relating to mutual trust, especially on sensitive issues such as Tibet and Taiwan. In particular, Europe disagrees with China on issues of human rights, rule of law, freedom and democracy, leading to a certain level of distrust of the Chinese government. Apart from this, due to different values, China and Europe also run into disputes on issues such as the European leaders’ meeting with the Dalai Lama. Moreover, the EU is dissatisfied with its trade deficit with China and occasionally initiates anti-dumping battles against it.

Since 2013, when President Xi put forward the strategic concept of OBOR, which was renamed BRI in mid-2016 due to potential misunderstandings of the word ‘one’, Chinese scholars have published a great many relevant articles. In academia, it is well known that there are discrepancies between China and Europe. However, it is rarely mentioned how public diplomacy strategies could minimise the friction between

⁴ <https://tradingeconomics.com/china/gdp-growth-annual> (accessed on 26 June 2017).

China and Europe and enhance mutual political trust, therefore increasing mutual benefits and cooperation. There is no doubt that promoting the creation of public diplomacy in order to enhance mutual understanding between the peoples of China and Europe is one of the most important ways of strategically boosting the smooth construction of the BRI. By examining its concept, its theoretical foundations and its role in China-EU BRI construction, this article illustrates ways of advancing China's public diplomacy in Europe, and in particular what China should do to strengthen political communication and cultural exchange between the peoples of China and Europe, thus enhancing Europe's understanding of and trust in China through methods such as empirical analysis, case studies and surveys. But it also lists the challenges that China is encountering in the exercise of its public diplomacy in Europe. It points out that making good use of this important diplomatic tool to improve the image of the country, enhance national influence and improve its soft power will greatly promote the construction of BRI and achieve mutual benefits for China and Europe.

Conceptual Review of Public Diplomacy

Nicholas J. Cull from the USC Center for Public Diplomacy pointed out that 'The earliest use of the phrase "public diplomacy" to surface is actually not American at all but in a leader piece from the *London Times* in January 1856'.⁵ He explained that in modern times, the term 'public diplomacy' was coined in 1965 by Edmund Gullion, when he established the Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy.⁶ An early Murrow Center brochure provided a convenient summary of Gullion's concept: '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 another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the process of intercultural communications'.⁷ Later, the concept and its definition was interpreted by scholars such as Hans N. Tuch (August 1990), Carnes Lord (October 1998), Jill A. Schuker (July 2004), Alan K. Henrikson (April 2005), and Crocker Snow Jr. (May 2005). According to Cull, the term 'public diplomacy' entered common usage in foreign policy circles outside the US in the 1990s.⁸ In 2002, the British government established the Public Diplomacy Strategy Board (PDSB), and public diplomacy

⁵ <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/public-diplomacy-gullion-evolution-phrase> (accessed on 26 June 2017).

⁶ J. Melissen (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 88–105.

⁷ <http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/pdfs/gullion.pdf> (accessed on 26 June 2017).

⁸ *Ibidem*.

was defined as 'work which aims at influencing in a positive way, including through the creation of relationships and partnerships, the perceptions of individuals and organizations overseas about the UK and their engagement with the UK, in support of HMG's overseas objectives.'⁹ We can see that Europe's public diplomacy is more focused on culture.

From the evolution of its definition, it can be concluded that, firstly, while there are many separate actors implementing public diplomacy, governments are the main sponsors. The *Dictionary of International Relations Terms* gives the following definition: 'Public diplomacy refers to government-sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries'.¹⁰ Hans Tuch defined 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 policies'.¹¹ Crocker Snow Jr. defined it in a more specific and developmental way: 'Public diplomacy that traditionally represents actions of governments to influence overseas publics within the foreign policy process has expanded today – by accident and design – beyond the realm of governments to include the media, multinational corporations, NGOs and faith-based organizations as active participants in the field'.¹² Secondly, the higher aim and fundamental purpose of public diplomacy is to promote national interests, which is interpreted by the United States Information Agency (USIA) as follows: 'Public diplomacy seeks to promote the national interest and the national security of the United States'.¹³ Thirdly, its targets are foreign publics and governments. By employing public diplomacy in foreign countries, actors will influence the ideas and images that people in the targeted countries have of their country. In addition, it can serve its purpose of influencing the politics and actions of other governments, as mentioned by Alan K. Henrikson.¹⁴ Finally, there are various means and instruments for implementing public diplomacy, such as NGO activities, cultural exchange programmes and social media. In the new era of information, the Internet has become an increasingly significant instrument.

The concept of public diplomacy came to China in the 1990s. Certain Chinese scholars started to introduce it from abroad. The first book mentioning public diplomacy in China, *Diplomacy Abroad*, was a collection of translated articles, edited by Zhou Qipeng and Yang Chuang in 1990, which introduced the background and theory

⁹ Public Diplomacy Strategy Board, *Terms of Reference*, 2002, www.fco.gov.uk. (accessed on 26 June 2017).

¹⁰ US Department of State, *Dictionary of International Relations Terms*, Washington, DC: Department of State Library, 1987, p. 85.

¹¹ H. Tuch, *Communicating with the World: US Public Diplomacy Overseas*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1990, p. 3.

¹² <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/Murrow/Diplomacy/Definitions> (accessed on 26 June 2017).

¹³ <http://publicdiplomacy.org/pages/index.php?page=about-public-diplomacy> (accessed on 26 June 2017).

¹⁴ <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/Murrow/Diplomacy/Definitions> (accessed on 26 June 2017).

of public diplomacy,¹⁵ while the first monograph about it in China, *Output America: US Information Agency and American Public Diplomacy* by Han Zhaoying, appeared in 2000.¹⁶ This book introduced the early practice of public diplomacy in the US, such as the evolution of the US Information Agency, which is the key organisation for conducting public diplomacy in the US. Since then, the study of public diplomacy in China began to thrive. However, since the concept was introduced from the West and Chinese scholars did further research based on US sources, the theories of public diplomacy in China are basically built on top of US theories. Therefore, the understanding of public diplomacy in China tends to apply to the US context rather than to that of Europe, thereby leading to different public diplomacy practices between China and Europe. For a long time after the founding of the new China, there had been no real public diplomacy. However, China developed its own terms, such as ‘folk diplomacy’, ‘people diplomacy’, and ‘international publicity’, and put public diplomacy into practice.¹⁷ ‘Folk diplomacy’ appeared in Chinese official discourse in 1959 when it was implemented as part of China’s Japan diplomacy. ‘People diplomacy’ was used more in the context of China’s international publicity and public diplomacy. In fact, the terms ‘people diplomacy’ and ‘folk diplomacy’ connote Chinese characteristics. In China, public diplomacy is defined as aiming to enhance the image of the country, improve the attitude of the foreign public, and thus influence foreign government policies. The government, firms, social organisations and public of a state describe their national conditions and explain their country’s policies to the foreign public, dispelling foreign misconceptions through a variety of means. At the same time, they are familiar with the corresponding ideas of their counterparts in the international debate.¹⁸

In 1980, China established the International Communication Group. Its function was to help the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) with international publicity. In 1991, the State Council Information Office (SCIO) was founded to coordinate all the agencies for international communication, with the declared purpose to ‘promote China as a stable country in the process of reform, a China that takes good care of its population, including minorities, and works hard to reduce poverty’.¹⁹ With the development of the new China, its top leaders paid increasing attention to the strategy of public diplomacy. In 1999, former president Jiang Zemin called on

¹⁵ Z. Qipeng et al., *Guowai Waijiaoxue* (Diplomacy Abroad), Beijing: Chinese People’s Public Security University Press, 1990.

¹⁶ H. Zhaoying, *Shuchu Meiguo: Meiguo Xinwenshu Yu Meiguo Gonggong Waijiao* (Output America: US Information Agency and American Public Diplomacy), Tianjin: Tianjin People’s Publishing House, 2000.

¹⁷ Z. Qizheng et al., *Zhongguo Gonggong Waijiao Shiye De Xingqi, Zhongguo Gonggong Waijiao Fazhan Baogao, Gonggong Waijiao Lanpishu* (The Rise of China’s Public Diplomacy, The Development Report of China’s Public Diplomacy, The Blue Book of Public Diplomacy), Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (China), 2015, p. 93.

¹⁸ Z. Qizheng et al., op.cit., p. 135.

¹⁹ I. d’Hooghe, ‘Public Diplomacy in the People’s Republic of China’, in J. Melissen (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, London: Palgrave, 2005, pp. 92, 98–99.

China to 'establish a publicity capacity to exert an influence on the world opinion that is as strong as China's international standing'.²⁰ An office of Public Diplomacy was set up by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in 2004. At the 11th Conference of Chinese Diplomatic Envoys Stationed Abroad, held in 2009, former president Hu Jintao stressed the important role and functions of public diplomacy, which meant that public diplomacy was officially promoted to a strategic position. In November 2012, the report of the 18th National Congress of the CPC made it clear that China should bring public diplomacy to the fore, carry out friendly exchanges with political parties and organisations in various countries, strengthen foreign exchanges involving the National People's Congress (NPC), the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and local and civil society, and consolidate national relations.²¹ In December 2013, with the elaboration of the 'Chinese dream' and the enhancement of national soft power, President Xi emphasised that we should focus on shaping the image of our country, clarifying the basic path employed by the Chinese government to spread Chinese culture, disseminate Chinese narratives, and highlight Chinese values, which is also the mandate for China's public diplomacy.²² An increasing number of facts indicate that public diplomacy in China has been raised to the level of national strategy.

In 2007, the Chinese government began to focus explicitly on soft power as a further dimension to its foreign policy and public diplomacy. In October 2007, at the 17th National Congress of the CPC, President Hu called for the enhancement of the 'soft power' of Chinese culture. This was the first time that 'soft power' appeared in China's official discourse as an instrument of public diplomacy. The concept of 'soft power', coined by Joseph Nye in 1990, signifies the ability to affect others by obtaining the outcomes one wants through attraction, rather than coercion or payment. A country's soft power rests on its resources of culture, values, and policies.²³ In 2011, Nye updated the definition of soft power. According to Nye, the soft power of a country rests heavily on three basic resources: its culture, its political values, and its foreign policies.²⁴ The cultural theme has been broadly emphasised since President Hu argued that 'the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will definitely be accomplished by the thriving of Chinese culture [...] raising our cultural propaganda abilities and continuously expanding China's cultural influence'.²⁵

²⁰ J. Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008, p. 39.

²¹ Z. Qizheng et al., op.cit., p. 112.

²² Ibidem, p. 112.

²³ J. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs, 2004.

²⁴ J. Nye, *The Future of Power*, New York: Public Affairs, 2011.

²⁵ 'Hu Jintao stressed enhancing Soft Power of Chinese culture', Xinhua, 15 October 2007.

The Theoretical Bases of Public Diplomacy

The purpose of public diplomacy is to safeguard national interests and serve national strategic objectives. In practice, public diplomacy has at least three major features. First of all, the main body for public diplomacy must be a government. It can seem that actors engaged in the direct activities of public diplomacy are non-governmental organisations and public groups, but behind them, it must be the government which organises and promotes these activities. Secondly, the main goal of public diplomacy is to influence the public in the target countries, creating a favourable environment for public opinion towards the source countries, and thus achieving the actor's strategic expectations. Thirdly, the role of public diplomacy is indirect, and public diplomacy often does not happen directly on the governmental level but exerts its influence on governments through various interest groups, non-governmental organisations, and the public.

The reason why public diplomacy has such a great influence in the contemporary world is closely related to the development of theoretical research in the field of international relations, in addition to its substantial dissemination by developed countries such as the US. The neo-liberalist school, as represented by R. Keohane and Joseph Nye, put forward the theory of 'complex interdependence': firstly, the state is not the only actor in the system of international relations; in the global arena, a place is also occupied by international, regional, and non-governmental organisations, multinational companies, etc. Secondly, national security and military power remain important, but economic, social and ecological issues appear more frequently on the international agenda. Thirdly, in contemporary international politics, the role of military forces is diminishing and the effectiveness of violence is shrinking, while the value of cooperation has become increasingly prominent. In a highly interdependent international community, cooperation is beneficial to all countries, while economic and environmental interdependence increases the need for cooperation. Neoliberalism places great emphasis on increasing the possibility of cooperation and reducing conflict through international mechanisms. In the field of international politics, constructivism introduces 'ideas' into the international political sphere, and it is premised upon the idea that the specific type of structure is of less importance, while the fact that international actors have both the ability and mentality to effect change is key. There are two basic principles of constructivism: firstly, the structure of human relations is mainly constructed by shared ideas rather than by material forces; secondly, the identity and interests of purposeful actors are constructed by such shared ideas.²⁶

Winter divided the international community into three specific cultural states: first, Hobbesian culture, characterised by the 'law of the jungle'. The relationship between states is hostile, and the fittest one survives; secondly, Lockean culture, the relationship

²⁶ A. Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

between states is competitive, conflicts of interest and mutually-beneficent cooperation co-exist; thirdly, Kantian culture, in which the relationship between states is friendly, and non-violence and mutual assistance are defining characteristics. In the view of constructivism, international relations will eventually be dominated by Kantian culture, in which humankind's desire for peace will be completely and permanently realised.

From a practical point of view, the action of both public diplomacy and constructivism is indirect. Public diplomacy influences people in other countries so as to affect other governments through the media, civil organisations, think tanks, academic institutions, celebrities, and the actions of ordinary people. Constructivism emphasises the interaction between actors and generating structures, which in turn affect the actors. This kind of indirect process is also bi-directional: on the one hand, the behaviour of the constructionist affects structures, but on the other hand, the structures also affect the behaviour. A structure in the process of formation will form some of the same concepts, and these ideas will continue to shape the actors. The same holds for public diplomacy. When the originating country exerts its impact on the foreign country and its public opinion, the domestic political environment is bound to be in sync with this. Therefore, the originating country is actually also being changed by the target country, so as a matter of principle, the communication is bi-directional. Otherwise, public diplomacy will become unilateral publicity, which would be far from being capable of achieving national strategic interests. Secondly, through the means of its implementation, public diplomacy aims to influence the target country through information, culture, and other means, while constructivism places emphasis on discourse: ideas, ideology, cultural knowledge, and language. In fact, both emphasise non-physical forces over material means. Thirdly, from the point of view of their implementation, both stress the significance of interaction. Public diplomacy and constructivism do not see the external environment as stable, and both believe that the principal actors in mutual interactions will transform one another. Through conscious promotion and construction, a more favourable environment which benefits one or both sides could be reached. For public diplomacy, this type of environment aims to improve the image of a country and to enhance its national influence; for the constructivist, it aims to obtain a common identity and build a mutually-beneficial international cultural sphere, at the core of which is mutual trust and cooperation.

Due to different strategic goals, various countries have distinct guiding theories and ideas. The strategic goal of China's public diplomacy is, above all, to reverse the situation China currently faces and help the public understand its national conditions, internal and external policies and future trends. In the long run, the strategic goal of China's public diplomacy is to promote the international public's capacity to accept and support its peaceful rise, reducing and eliminating any apprehension or fear of a 'China threat', in order to make them realise that they not only can cooperate with China to reach a mutually-beneficial outcome, but also understand one another and work together to

create a more harmonious world. In the context of internationalisation today, China tries to help European peoples understand that its BRI is not just a means of generating revenue from Europe, but designed for the joint prosperity of Asia and Europe, with the purpose of benefiting all the countries and peoples taking part in it. But China's theory of public diplomacy is still articulated quite bluntly in Chinese academic discourse.

At present, China's public diplomacy theory is not yet mature, it needs to be further improved and developed. In general, Chinese scholars believe that building a theory of public diplomacy can start from different perspectives and aspects of guiding theory, communication theory, and values theory to form a basic framework. Its guiding theory can be summarised as follows: Firstly, the initial step for China's public diplomacy is to exert influence and fight for its people, to promote China's development and progress, and to influence the world's peace and prosperity. Secondly, in order to both safeguard national interests and seek common ones, China does not place value on differences in social systems and ideologies. Thirdly, China recognises the reality of the diversity of the world. Its communication theory can be summarised thus: it is necessary to present China's actual situation (such as its large population, environmental pollution, and individual freedom) to the world and let it discover its internal and external policies. At the same time, China also absorbs the world's advanced ideas, experiences and knowledge, treating all countries equally, seeking common ground while respecting differences, seeking truth based on facts, and keeping promises, making allies and being friendly. Its value theory comprises four points. Firstly, none of the cultures of the world deserve more respect than others, therefore all should learn from one another, attempt to understand one another, and work together. Secondly, any culture has the potential to contribute to overall human values and may ultimately serve to form shared human values. Thirdly, a culture in the process of dissemination will inevitably adapt to the backgrounds and needs of other cultures and become more profound. Fourthly, the formation of values shared by human beings requires long-term efforts. Harmony and mutually-beneficial cooperation are the unique values advocated by China and have attracted attention worldwide.

The Role of Public Diplomacy in China–Europe BRI Construction

At present, a new environment in the international order has been created by governments in order to win the hearts and minds of people. This is the purpose of public diplomacy, attempting to influence the public or elites in other nations through values, policies and actions to achieve its target. Governments always attempt to communicate with foreign publics to export their ideas, institutions and culture as well as national goals and current policies.

Public diplomacy looks at promoting a country's culture to achieve long-term goals. It can be seen as propaganda for a nation-state, which will be favourable to that state by improving its image abroad. It provides the public, NGOs, businessmen, educators and academics with opportunities and means to communicate with potential targets

and convey direct cultural and diplomatic messages, a more efficient and productive way to improve a nation's image in a foreign country.

Public diplomacy also serves both bilateral and multilateral diplomacy in the sense that they serve the national interest: investment, promotion of trade and international tourism, which is also referred to as branding and creates communication, interaction and cooperation. Therefore, it plays a crucial role in the construction of the China–EU BRI.

In terms of economic power and world influence, China and Europe are two potential poles in an increasingly multi-polar world, and these two sides also place more pressure on each other. However, they still need to improve their mutual understanding, especially on the European side. In recent years, a variety of BBC²⁷ and PEW Research Center²⁸ public opinion polls have shown that Europe is one of the regions where the public has the most negative impression of China (for the survey data, see Table 1). The root cause is not only because Europe is suffering a relative decline while China is on the rise, but more significantly, the rise of China, as a great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, has been challenging the concept of 'universal values'²⁹ proposed by European civilisation, which has been influencing the entire world for centuries.

Table 1. The percentage of people with a positive view of China in big European countries from 2012–2016

Countries	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
United Kingdom	37	59	47	48	49
Germany	28	59	28	28	29
France	33	66	47	42	40
Spain	28	60	39	48	49
Poland	37	46	32	43	50

Sources: The Pew Research Center. See <http://www.pewresearch.org/>

This table shows the percentage of respondents in large European countries with a **positive** view of China from 2010 to 2014 based on the Pew Research Center's Pew Global Attitudes Project.

However, after a period of observation, Europe took note of the rise of China's international standing and influence. In the long run, China's rise is unstoppable, and China's rapid and strong development is a fact that cannot be ignored. More importantly, the development of China, and that of other countries, does not pose severe

²⁷ The British Broadcasting Corporation is a British public broadcaster with its headquarters in London. It is the world's oldest national broadcasting organisation and the largest broadcaster in the world.

²⁸ A non-partisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. It conducts public opinion polling, demographic research, media content analysis and other empirical social science research. See: <http://www.pewresearch.org/>.

²⁹ <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1116&context=orpc> (accessed on 26 June 2017).

international challenges to others. On the contrary, a strong China offers the world more opportunities. Overall, more European politicians, elites and mass media discuss cooperation, rather than friction, with China.

In recent years, Europe has initiated positive changes in terms of its relations with China. The European understanding of China is deepening and Europeans view China from a new perspective that is both more rational and pragmatic than in the past.

China's Way to Employ Its Public Diplomacy in Europe

As globalisation continues to accelerate, a rising China will exert greater influence on the world. The traditional values of Chinese culture, which promote harmony, coexistence, and mutual prosperity, have the potential to contribute positively to world peace. But China must first communicate these values to the international community, in particular to Europeans, who often misunderstand China's culture and values. To do so, Beijing must improve its public diplomacy in Europe.

The strategic direction of the BRI lies in the progress of policies such as communication, infrastructure connectivity, trade links, capital flows and understanding among peoples. Among these, policy communication and understanding between peoples can be achieved through diplomacy, while public diplomacy is an important way of achieving understanding between peoples.

In recent years, under the unified command and guidance of the central government, many international and domestic departments have strengthened their cooperation and made significant progress on the relationship between China and Europe. But in this respect, China's news media still has not placed enough emphasis on the China–EU relationship. It should devote more attention to China–EU relations in order to promote a more positive atmosphere and to enhance mutual political trust. In addition to the efforts of the news media and domestic think tank experts, the Chinese people can play a crucial role in public diplomacy, taking into account the unique advantages of the CPPCC National Committee, coordinating with China's overall diplomacy and elevating China–EU relations to a higher level.

China has made great progress in its public diplomacy since the 1990s. The number of international broadcasters and television channels has gradually increased. As of 31 December 2016, 512 Confucius Institutes and 1073 Confucius Classrooms had been established in over 140 countries and regions. In addition, China actively holds Chinese Culture Year exhibitions and performances in various countries and regions. On 24 April 2017, the China – Central and Eastern Europe Institute was launched in Budapest, Hungary, which is China's first independently registered think tank in Europe. Under the 16+1 mechanism,³⁰ the China–CEE Institute will promote

³⁰ The 16+1 mechanism is a platform created in April 2012 by China and 16 Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. See: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-04/25/c_136235516.htm (accessed on 26 June 2017).

person-to-person exchanges through field study, joint research, conferences, seminars and lectures.

However, a variety of problems and deficiencies remain. The Chinese government lacks experience when it comes to public diplomacy and strategy. Numerous Chinese officials are not adept at public relations and have difficulty communicating with foreigners; some Chinese foreign affairs professionals are not familiar with European religious etiquette and customs, which causes problems in China's international cultural communications; and some Chinese unfortunately act in a way that Europeans consider impolite or unhygienic during social encounters, which impairs China's image. However, there are a number of ways in which China can address these deficiencies and improve its public diplomacy in European countries, mainly within the domain of perception, politics and the economy.

Promoting Mutual Understanding of European and Chinese Values

European countries have their own stories, histories and richly diverse cultures. Britain, France and Germany have all projected their respective power across the globe. The British and French bourgeois revolutions destroyed feudal monarchies and systems while advocating the values of freedom, equality, democracy, rule of law and human rights. These values have remained vital and have been adjusted to European demands for increased productivity, industrialisation, and modernisation. They have been widely accepted all around the world. Although different classes understand them from different perspectives, these values have undoubtedly played an active role in the progress of the modern world.

China should absorb these advanced values of the modern world and merge them with the progressive values in traditional Chinese culture to create a new system of core socialist values. Therefore, the Chinese government should energetically promote intercultural communication with Europe, which will help Europeans and Chinese to learn from each other, find common ground, resolve differences, and thus bring about mutual prosperity. China has taken some steps to achieve these goals.

China's public diplomacy in Europe serves mainly to eliminate negative European perceptions of China by projecting cultural soft power and to enhance European understanding of Chinese values. It should proceed from the following three points: strengthen intercultural communication, e.g. by promoting Chinese cultural activities in Europe and introducing Chinese traditions and customs to the Europeans; promote the learning of Chinese overseas, e.g. by setting up Confucius Institutes, cultural exchange programmes between schools, and organising international conferences; develop mutual cultural exchanges through 'city diplomacy' and 'culture diplomacy'.

Helping Europeans Understand China's Policies, Political Practices and National Conditions

The primary purpose of China's public diplomacy in Europe is to help Europeans understand China's policies, political practices and national conditions. Politically, this is mainly performed in four ways.

Firstly, the government plays a major role in promoting public diplomacy and relations with Europe, the most intuitive of which is that Chinese leaders should communicate with common European people directly.

Secondly, making the best possible use of mass media. With the increasingly substantial means of mass media, the Chinese government makes more use of the press, publishing, radio, TV, films, and network tools to showcase China's achievements after the Reform and Opening-Up, and thus to improve the European public's perception of China. As an example, the China Global Television Network (CGTN) is China's new international media organisation. It was launched by the national broadcaster, China Central Television (CCTV), on 31 December 2016. According to the official website of CGTN: 'By launching CGTN, we want to re-brand our product to the world, to cope with the global trend in media convergence.'³¹ Additionally, in order to let Europe fully understand China's human rights situation, the Chinese government published several white papers to demonstrate China's progress on human rights since 1991, expounding China's standpoint on human rights and the development of practical results from multiple angles. Furthermore, the Chinese central government and local governments hold press conferences. Government spokespeople and officials accept foreign media interviews and organise some activities, which also plays an essential role in the exercise of China's public diplomacy in Europe.

Thirdly, activating public diplomacy as promoted by the government and backed by social elites, including parliamentary diplomacy, group diplomacy, think tank diplomacy, etc. The Chinese NPC and CPPCC perform parliamentary diplomacy. They maintain a frequent exchange of visits with the European Parliament and European political parties. The NPC and CPPCC have not only established bilateral exchange mechanisms with the European Parliament, the British Parliament, the Bundestag,³² the French Senate and the Italian Chamber of Deputies, but have also carried out multilateral discussions with the World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments, the Asia–Europe Parliamentary Partnership Conference and numerous international and regional parliamentary organisations.

³¹ https://www.cgtn.com/home/info/about_us.do (accessed on 28 February 2018).

³² The Bundestag is a constitutional and legislative body at the federal level in Germany. It is often described as a lower house of parliament with its function similar to that of the US House of Representatives and the British House of Commons. See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bundestag> (accessed on 26 June 2017).

Fourthly, China's think tanks can direct the attention of European leaders and influence European public opinion on China by publishing research, establishing dialogue with European think tanks as well as proposing policy recommendations.

Relying on Multilateral Platforms to Dispel Frictions and Misunderstandings in China–EU Economic and Trade Cooperation

With a view to expanding the trade and economic benefits to both parties, a comprehensive China–EU strategic partnership can be deepened. Therefore, it is crucial to dispel frictions and misunderstandings in China–EU economic and trade cooperation by relying on multilateral platforms.

The ideal way to solve trade frictions is through multilateral consultation rather than bilateral trade systems. Consultation based on the multilateral trading system of the World Trade Organization (WTO) is a very effective means of promoting economic cooperation through increasingly close political relations between two sides. If we look at the trade situation between China and the whole of Europe, we find that political instability between these two sides often leads to economic and trade frictions. In particular, the relationship between China and Germany is becoming increasingly critical. Germany plays a decisive role in maintaining China-EU relations. First of all, it is necessary for China to build a favourable relationship with Germany in order to build successful China-EU relations. Bilateral visits, closer contacts and the stability of China-EU and China-German relations benefit economic and trade cooperation between China and the EU.

Encouraging Social Sectors and NGOs to Communicate with Europeans as a Matter of Routine

Overall, Europeans know little about China so that at times they are mostly influenced by one-sided media reports. There is a conspicuous gap in the exchange of information between the two regions.

The Chinese government should support groups from Chinese social sectors in communicating with their European counterparts. Chinese organisations should both invite representative European groups to China and travel abroad to meet them so that Europeans can understand Chinese culture and the real situation in China. In the meantime, the Chinese government should encourage and support organisations working in the field of Chinese culture, education, science and social work in order to promote mutual understanding and clear up common misconceptions through intercultural dialogue.

Supporting Dialogue and Cooperation between Chinese and European Mainstream Media

Media diplomacy is an essential element of public diplomacy. Chinese audiences should be open and receptive to foreign media reports and commentaries. Except in cases of malicious slander and rumour-mongering, China should react to critical comments calmly and quietly.

China should also make the best use of its media capabilities to disseminate the advanced values of Chinese culture and moral consciousness, which will help Europeans understand the extent and profundity of Chinese culture. Meanwhile, it should be more open to foreign media, allowing journalists to freely gather information and report news in the country, and by inviting mainstream European journalists to visit and explore the true China.

Challenges of China's Public Diplomacy in Europe

The relationship between the EU and China is shaped by historical encounters, the nature of the two political systems, and their interests in the international system. The EU envisions its role in the world very much as an international actor committed to the development of democracy, good governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights. However, China always puts sovereign rights ahead of individual rights. While China emphasises sovereign independence and prioritises economic development, the EU shows a high-profile commitment to human rights and democracy both within and outside the Union.

In recent years, China's public diplomacy in Europe can be described as omni-directional, e.g. the setting up of the Confucius Institutes, round-the-clock media broadcasting, and Chinese cultural year exhibitions. But its effects are unsatisfactory and in some ways have deepened perceptions of the contradictions and differences between the two sides, triggering the theory of the 'threat of Chinese soft power'. It must be admitted that, since there are significant differences in culture, political systems and levels of development between China and Europe, the misunderstandings of Europeans concerning China cannot be easily eliminated. On the one hand, China needs copious time to shape a favourable image of itself, but on the other, it faces various constraints to the conversion of its soft power resources into ideal diplomatic policies. One reason for this is that China's economic development has led to the emergence of reasonable competition with European economy and trade, while Europeans see this as a direct threat to their own international status; another is that European ideology and values are at odds with those of China. The 'China threat theory' was coined by the American scholar Ross H. Munro in his article published in *Policy Review* in 1992. He warned that an emerging Leninist, capitalist, mercantilist, expansionist China poses a concrete

challenge to the United States.³³ Munro's theory was applied extensively by scholars and politicians, especially in the West. Additionally, China is regarded as a challenge to the European path of development, and the Europeans even believe that China's development is the largest ideological threat to the West after the Cold War. Therefore the principal challenges are as follows.

First, there is an important gap between the goals of China's public diplomacy for the EU and European expectations concerning China. China's public diplomacy in Europe is geared more towards defensive purposes, promoting mutual communication and understanding between European peoples and the Chinese people and, eventually, deepening exchange between countries and reducing or even eliminating European distrust concerning the development of China. China does not have any intention of exporting its values.

Secondly, there is a difference between China's methods of public diplomacy in Europe and what Europeans are used to. According to Ingrid d'Hooghe, the main obstacle to a successful Chinese public diplomacy is the lack of credibility, since China's ideas on public diplomacy are largely based on a state-centric hierarchical model of diplomacy.³⁴ However, state organisations are seldom trusted as messengers, while China's government is trusted even less by foreign audiences. Europeans are not attracted to China's ideas and values, but expect that Europe will benefit from expanding and deepening political and economic relations with China.³⁵ The hue of China's official public diplomacy is too strong, so that it is difficult to project a sense of intimacy and trust to the European public, which sometimes even deepens the Europeans' negative impression of a propaganda system carefully crafted into 'what should be known'. Europeans generally believe that government-led soft power diplomacy is not within the mainstream of propaganda today, and they are more receptive to information provided by civil society and NGOs. Corresponding specialised public diplomacy agencies have been set up in China's State Council Information Office, the Publicity Department of the CPC, the Ministry of Culture of the PRC, the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPC, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But in terms of convincing the European public, these institutions are often inferior to unofficial sources. Therefore, China needs to apply more wisdom and effort in order to influence ideas rather than disseminate information.

Thirdly, China's public diplomacy in Europe is still subject to the structural problems in China–EU relations. 'More common interest, less common values' is the main reason for the complex attitudes of European citizens to China. Many of the core values of Europe display features of Westernisation, post-sovereignty and post-modernism,

³³ R.H. Munro, 'Awakening Dragon: The Real Danger in Asia Is Coming from China', *Policy Review*, 1992, No. 62, pp. 10–16.

³⁴ I. d'Hooghe, 'The Limits of China's Soft Power in Europe: Beijing's Public Diplomacy Puzzle', *Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael*, 2010, No. 25, p. 30.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

and in the eyes of Europeans, a rising China is still regarded as the ‘Other’, diverging from shared Western values.

Finally, China’s public diplomacy in Europe should be established on the dialogue and interaction between publics, since without full mutual understanding based on public opinion, it is impossible to construct solid and healthy China–EU relations.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated how China can strengthen its public diplomacy through political dialogue and cultural exchange with Europe in order to enhance understanding of and trust in China on the part of Europeans. It has also explained the challenges that China faces as it exercises its public diplomacy in Europe and promotes BRI construction.

The relationship between China and Europe is marked by both differences and commonalities in cultures, political systems, and civil societies. President Xi’s BRI aims to reinforce China’s image, as it is eager to use its wealth for the good of the world. Conflicts and opportunities coexist side by side. It is essential to comprehend China’s conceptualisation of public diplomacy because it helps to better understand how China employs non-coercive strategies to publicise its national image so that the international community can see that its government does not play an authoritarian role in the effort to enhance its public diplomacy in Europe. Based on neo-liberalism and constructivism, it is necessary for China to advance its soft power internationally, in particular its cultural soft power, since the strategic importance of culture is obviously highlighted as both a crucial part of comprehensive national power and a way of defending strategic interests in the context of Chinese political and academic understanding. From China’s perception by a sceptical global public opinion, it can be seen that China is applying a more pragmatic approach in pursuing its interests. By promoting mutual understanding of the ideological values and current political situation, Europeans will hopefully gradually accept a rising China from a more positive point of view within the context of BRI. Time is probably the only currency necessary for China to be able to reverse its negative image through increased dialogue, cooperation and interaction between political, economic and social groups and media organisations on both sides so that a mutually beneficial China-EU relationship can be constructed in the near future.

However, China’s public diplomacy in Europe still has much to achieve. The Chinese government should carry out public diplomacy in European countries in the spirit of what former Chinese premier Wen Jiabao called ‘harmony without sameness’ (和而不同)³⁶

³⁶ Wen Jiabao, ‘Ba Muguang Touxiang Zhongguo—Zai Hafo Daxue de Yanjiang’ (Looking to China, Speech at Harvard University), 12 December 2013. See: <http://www.chinanews.com/n/2003-12-12/26/380015.html> (accessed on 26 June 2017). ‘Harmony without sameness’ is a new expression with profound cultural connotations and a new summary of the rich dialectics of China’s peaceful diplomatic policy, which has always been advocated.

and based on the principle described by former premier Zhou Enlai as 'seeking common ground while shelving differences' (求同存异).³⁷

When faced with contradictions, problems and conflicts, the Chinese government should actively seek political dialogue and try to solve the above through communication and negotiation to fulfil the three following special objectives: convince Europe to willingly accept China's peaceful development and rise; explain China's intricacies; enlighten the world.

The core public diplomacy in Europe concerns dialogue about universal values. This requires that we follow the maxim 'No one can command others who cannot command himself' (欲正人先正己),³⁸ therefore China should construct its own version of universal values to enrich the human value system. About four years ago, the SCIO published the *White Paper of China's Peaceful Development* which proposed a three-dimensional vision to deepen strategic ties between China and the world: 'common interest, shared responsibility, common values'. Here, shared interests are on the level of enterprise, shared responsibilities on that of government, while shared values inhabit the social plane.

Naturally, China sees itself as a benevolent member of the international community, as does every state, whereas Western media attempt to demonise China. A rising and economically-developed China offers the region and the world security benefits rather than potential dangers. The collapse of China could upset regional stability by sending out large numbers of refugees or by tempting other powers to invade China, while a strong, unified China would guard against these dangers and provide a potential counterweight to Japan or Russia, according to Gary Klintworth.³⁹ Besides, China has a benign track record. Traditional Chinese morality guarantees a strong China will be a benign China, as asserted by Yan Xuetong.⁴⁰ Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen has also said that 'China will never threaten or invade other countries', strengthening his claim using the Confucian adage, 'do not do unto others what you would not like others to do unto you'.⁴¹ Furthermore, China's military spending is not excessive. People

³⁷ Z. Enlai, 'Yafei Tuanjie, Qitong Cunyi – Jinian Wanlong Huiyi Wushi Zhounian' (Asian and African Unity: Seeking Common Ground while Reserving Differences – On the 50th Anniversary of the Bandung Conference), 18 April 2005. A speech delivered by Premier Zhou at the Asian-African Conference held in Bandung, Indonesia, 18–24 April 1955: <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/23965/3327948.html> (accessed on 26 June 2017).

³⁸ W. Fuzhi, *Sichu Xunyi* (Four Books of Justice), Qing Dynasty, Quoted by president Xi at the Summary Meeting of Party Mass Line Education Practice: http://www.360doc.com/content/14/12/23/03/5719126_435068539.shtml (accessed on 26 June 2017).

³⁹ G. Klintworth, 'Greater China and Regional Security', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 1994, Vol. 48, No. 2, p. 223; G. Austin, 'A New Cold War in Asia?', *ANU Reporter* (Canberra), 1995, p. 4; S. Qurong, 'Security Environment in Northeast Asia: Its Characteristics and Sensitivities', *Contemporary International Relations*, 1992, Vol. 2, No. 12, p. 18.

⁴⁰ Y. Xuetong, 'China's Post-Cold War Security Strategy', *Contemporary International Relations*, 1995, Vol. 5, No. 5, pp. 6–7.

⁴¹ 'Give China "Time and Space"', *FEER*, May 1995, p. 30.

may argue that China has been investing copiously in the modernisation of its military equipment. In reality, China is merely following the pattern set by its neighbours. Compared to those of the US and Japan, China's official defence expenditures are still relatively modest, in particular its spending per capita. Certainly, due to its complicated domestic situation, it is impossible for China to implement its political reforms to make significant change to its current political and social circumstances within a foreseeable future. Also, democracy is not adapted to China's present national circumstances. On the one hand, most European publics are misled by the media. On the other hand, there is a lack of reciprocal communication between the Chinese and Europeans publics. Furthermore, Chinese academics are fully aware of China's adverse position. Hence, in Chinese debates, the favoured strategic vehicle for spreading China's image today is public diplomacy. It is also suitable for the prevailing Western paradigm in public diplomacy scholarship: the new public diplomacy which places emphasis on reciprocal understanding and two-way communication. This understanding 'ties into constructivist IR theory, which emphasizes how dialogue is necessary for norm diffusion.'⁴²

The significance of China's public diplomacy in Europe depends on the cultivation of a deep social foundation for the sustainable and sound development of China-EU relations. To this end, China and Europe should move beyond the emotional entanglements of history and culture, promote innovative thinking and pioneer a new paradigm.

In the BRI process of cooperation to address political and economic challenges, China will continue to tap into the value of commonality, foster common values, and construct new shared values adapted to the needs of human development beyond traditional concepts. In the near future, the theme of China's public diplomacy in Europe should also be transformed from 'seeking common ground while shelving differences' to 'treading different paths that lead to the same destination.' Thus the goal is to promote the start of BRI construction and to realise that mutual benefits can be achieved in China-EU relations.

⁴² G. Raham et al., 'Emotion and Public Diplomacy: Dispositions in International Communications, Dialogue, and Persuasion', *International Studies Review*, 2014, Vol. 16, No. 4, pp. 522–539.