



Aalborg University and University of International Relations

Master's Thesis

**The Role of State and Non-State Actors in the
EU-China High-Level People-to-People Dialogue**

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Summary

This paper analyses how European and Chinese state and non-state actors engage in the development of the intercultural dialogue between the European Union and China. This dialogue is institutionalised within the third pillar of their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership – The High-Level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD). As such, HPPD is one of the instruments of public diplomacy and soft power. However, the EU and China have dissimilar stances on these concepts. The purpose of this thesis is to assess whether the contrasting approaches to soft power and implementation of public diplomacy challenge the development of cultural relations between the EU and China under the HPPD framework and, if so, to point out directions where these differences could be managed and where governments could enhance their collaborative potential.

My analysis was guided by three simple questions: 1. Where does the problem come from? 2. Why is it a problem? 3. How to solve this problem? To answer the first question, I explored the evolution of official discourses of the European Union and China on soft power and public diplomacy, especially in regard to their actors, and highlighted their main differences and similarities in understanding these two concepts. In order to answer the second question and describe the problem, I analysed the evolution of the HPPD since its establishment. Finally, to answer the third question, I relied again on the soft power and new public diplomacy concepts to draw final conclusions and suggestions for improvements. Overall, I applied a holistic analytical approach, with documentary method to analyse qualitative data, as the primary analytical design supported by elements of comparative and historical analyses and validated through theoretical considerations of soft power and new public diplomacy.

The results of my analysis revealed that both the EU and China assign an important role to culture in their foreign policy and that they both see it as a major source of soft power. As a consequence, both have recently started developing their public diplomacy to promote their soft power, and even engaged in a bilateral intercultural dialogue which took the form of HPPD, however the two have different understandings of the two concepts. While for the EU soft power is based primarily on norms, China capitalizes soft power mainly on its cultural heritage. In what regards public diplomacy, the divergence

is even larger. While China has a well-developed government-driven public diplomacy mechanism, the EU's public diplomacy actively promotes grassroots participation, but remains largely underfinanced and underregulated, or, to put it simply, while China prefers a top-down approach to public diplomacy, the EU is more inclined to use the bottom-up approach.

To what extent do these divergent positions impact the EU-China HPPD? As documented in my thesis, they make it hard to establish an open and transparent relationship based on mutual trust and respect because the HPPD, as a model of new public diplomacy, requires a better coordinated multi-actor approach, with more power and freedom delegated to non-state actors, in order to produce positive outcomes in terms of soft power.

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1 INTRODUCTION

"Culture is not a luxury, but a necessity."

Gao Xingjian

"I have long believed, as have many before me, that peaceful relations between nations requires understanding and mutual respect between individuals. If only people will get together, then so eventually will nations."

Dwight D. Eisenhower, President of the United States from 1953 to 1961

On 16 July 2018, top European and Chinese political representatives met in Beijing on the occasion of the 20th EU-China Summit and the 15th anniversary of the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. During this meeting, the leaders celebrated the "fruitful outcomes achieved in politics, economy, trade, culture, people-to-people exchanges and other fields" and committed to "deepening their partnership for peace, growth, reform and civilisation, based on the principles of mutual respect, trust, equality and mutual benefit, by comprehensively implementing the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation" (European Council, 2018). However, less than in one year, on the eve of Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Europe and the 21st EU-China Summit in Brussels, the European Commission publishes the *EU-China – A strategic outlook*, in which China is labelled for the first time as "an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance" (European Commission, 2019a). Such a deliverance leaves little room for a "comprehensive strategic partnership."

In the context of deteriorating economic and political relations between the European Union (EU) and China, I wish to draw attention to the third, relatively neglected, dimension of their cooperation – cultural relations – with a genuine belief that building relationships with people from different cultures has the potential to overcome divisions and improve international relations.

Despite the recent decline in the EU-China relations, "the first decade of EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership has witnessed not only continuous deepening of political and economic ties between the two sides, but also remarkable expansion of people-to-people exchanges," culminating with the establishment of the EU-China High-Level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD) in 2012 as the third pillar of the CSP, alongside

the High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue and the High Level Strategic Dialogue (Hong, 2014). Tibor Navracsics, the current European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, pointed out that “people to people dialogue is key to deepening mutual understanding and friendship, and is also important for EU-China economic and trade relations” (Navracsics, 2015). However, after seven years since its establishment, the social and cultural dimension of the EU-China collaboration has received little attention from the scholarship and remains underexplored compared to the highly discussed economic and political issues and government-to-government relations.

In this paper, I attempt to fill this research gap with a modest contribution to the discussion of the EU-China cultural relations under the HPPD. By adopting the High-Level People-to-People Dialogue on the 18th of April 2012, “the European and Chinese leaders have enthusiastically expressed the hope that the rapidly expanding people-to-people contacts will broaden and deepen mutual knowledge, understanding, trust and friendship between the EU and China, which is fundamental to the advancement of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” (Hong, 2014). A few months later, European Commissioner Vassiliou and Chinese Minister Cai signed the Joint Declaration on EU-China Cultural Cooperation to further their collaboration in the field of culture, acknowledging that:

Increasing cooperation and exchanges will also require the promotion of new opportunities for direct cooperation and joint projects between all levels of cultural institutions, organisations and actors. The European Commission and the Ministry of Culture of the Peoples' Republic of China will explore the possibilities to mobilise resources to support such direct cooperation. (European Commission, 2012)

In this paper, I argue that HPPD is a form of public diplomacy that encourages the engagement of non-state actors with the aim of mutually promoting soft power. However, taking into account that the EU and China have differences in norms, values and political structures, which manifest in the conduct of their public diplomacy and soft power pursuit, this paper considers ***how the European and Chinese state and non-state actors engage in the High-Level People-to-People Dialogue under the overarching dissimilar public diplomacy frameworks and soft power approaches.***

The purpose of this paper is to see whether the contrasting approaches to soft power and implementation of public diplomacy can challenge the development of

cultural relations between the EU and China under the HPPD framework and, if so, to point out directions where these differences could be managed and where governments could enhance their collaborative potential, especially now that a new cooperation agenda beyond 2020 is in the preparatory stage. As the Chinese Premier Li mentioned in the German newspaper Handelsblatt,

Given the differences in geographical location, history, culture, social system, and development path, it is natural for China and Europe to have different views and even differences over some issues," but "both of us have the wisdom and capability to properly handle differences, jointly tackle challenges, and expand mutually beneficial cooperation to the benefit of our nearly 2 billion people. (cited in CGTN, 2019)

This paper consists of four key chapters. First, I explain how I conducted my research in the methodology section. Then, I proceed with a discussion of soft power and new public diplomacy concepts which constitute the conceptual framework of the analysis. In the third part, I present an overview of the EU-China relations prior to the establishment of the HPPD. In the analysis part, I introduce the EU's and China's perceptions of soft power and new public diplomacy and compare them, with a focus on the actors engaged in their diplomatic purposes, then I examine the evolution of the HPPD since 2012, and draw final conclusions on the roles of state and non-state actors in the development of the EU-China intercultural dialogue.

2 METHODOLOGY

This paper seeks to explore the roles attributed to state and non-state actors in the Sino-European cultural exchanges formalised within the EU-China High-Level People-to-People Dialogue and analyse how their distribution acts upon the development of cultural relations between Europe and China in order to establish potential areas of improvement. The uneven engagement of European and Chinese governmental and non-governmental actors in the conduct of cultural exchanges has been listed in numerous sources as a major challenge for the EU-China cultural dialogue. At the same time, this issue remains somewhat underexplored within scholarly literature. Therefore, I considered filling in this gap with a modest research of this problem.

My research is guided by three simple questions:

1. Where does the problem come from?
2. Why is it a problem?
3. How to solve this problem?

To answer the first question, I assumed that the uneven engagement of European and Chinese state actors and civil society in the development of their cultural relations stems from the divergences in their understandings of soft power and implementation of public diplomacy mechanism. In this line of thought, I analysed the evolution of official discourses of the European Union and China on soft power and public diplomacy based on primary sources such as official statements, policy papers, reports (although to a much lesser extent in the case of China due to a limited availability of sources translated into English), as well as corresponding secondary sources, including academic papers, books, news articles, etc. As a result, I could identify the key aspects of their interpretations of soft power and public diplomacy, especially in regard to their actors and tools, and highlighted their main differences and similarities. To sum up, I conducted a combination of documentary, historical and comparative analyses in order to identify the source of the research problem.

In order to answer the second question and describe the problem, I applied a similar analytical and data collection approach, and analysed the evolution of the High-Level People-to-People Dialogue since its establishment in 2012 based on official statements, websites, reports, working papers, book chapters, etc. The information

gathered helped me to argue that HPPD is a form of public diplomacy and a tool of soft power, which, in its turn, allowed me to explore how the European and Chinese actors interact within the framework of the HPPD and identify the main points for discontent in the EU-China intercultural dialogue.

Finally, to answer the third question, I relied again on the soft power and new public diplomacy concepts to draw final conclusions and suggestions for improvements in the upcoming EU-China cultural agenda.

Overall, in this research, I applied a holistic analytical approach, with documentary method to analyse qualitative data, such as scholarly articles, books, official documents, etc., as the primary analytical design, supported by elements of comparative and historical analyses, and validated through theoretical considerations of soft power and new public diplomacy.

The concepts of soft power and new public diplomacy were selected as the main theoretical pillars of this research because they closely discuss the role of culture in international relations and explain how to fully uncover its potential in the international context, including the roles of actors involved in this process.

Joseph Nye put forth the concept of soft power in the aftermath of the Cold War, defining it as the “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments” (Nye, 2004). In his writings, Nye emphasized the role of culture as one of the main sources of state power and public diplomacy as one of the main instruments of soft power conversion. Even though Nye did not clearly explain how soft power tools convert soft power sources into the desired outcomes, he offered a pretty good picture of how a country can utilize its cultural assets in order to improve its position on the global stage, including the means of multiple channels of communication and of a more active engagement of the private sector, civil society and individuals. Moreover, Joseph Nye distinguished between the soft power wielded by governments and soft power wielded by civil society.

The concept of new public diplomacy also delineated the role of governmental and non-governmental actors in the conduct of public diplomacy and the pursuit of soft power. Its main contribution was that it had challenged the traditional view of public diplomacy as a process taking place among governments and brought into discussion a multi-actor approach to public diplomacy. The proponents of new public diplomacy

suggested that the success of external cultural policies depends on the open and active engagement of different types of actors in diplomatic purposes.

Due to their emphasis on culture, international relations and multi-actor approach, I considered the theoretical tenets of soft power and new public diplomacy well-fitting in the context of a bilateral high-level dialogue promoting cultural encounters and people-to-people exchanges. Nevertheless, these concepts are not flawless as they leave some theoretical ambiguities and were developed in the context of Western liberal democracies.

In writing this research paper, I had to confront several challenges and, therefore, feel the need to point out some of the potential limitations of this research. The limited number of scholarly articles covering the underexplored cultural dimension in the EU-China relations is the first major limitation of this paper. This problem was exacerbated by the fact that neither do I speak Chinese nor could I find English versions of relevant Chinese documents necessary for my research. Therefore, it is based primarily on Western sources even though I did analyse several articles in English written by Chinese scholars. Furthermore, some of the key online sources, such as the dedicated page to the EU-China HPPD on the official website of the EU and China's online platform dedicated to its cultural policies chinaculture.org, were inaccessible throughout the whole duration of my research process. I also noticed that the third pillar of the EU-China strategic partnership is somewhat neglected not only in the academic field, but also in the official sources. As a result, I tried to use in my research all the sources I could find on the topic, some of which were slightly outdated.

3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Cultural and people-to-people exchanges have become more accessible and more frequent over the past few decades. As a result, major powers like the EU and China have increasingly paid attention to such exchanges as soft power instruments and integrated them in their public diplomacy systems.

Cultural exchanges between the EU and China have been formalised under the High-Level People-to-People Dialogue framework. In this paper, I argue that the HPPD is an EU-China public diplomacy collaboration, which serves the purpose of promoting their soft power. Therefore, it is prerequisite to explain what the concepts of soft power and public diplomacy stand for in the context of cultural relations.

3.1 SOFT POWER

Thinking about soft power today is still largely based on the insights of the American political scientist Joseph Nye. Nearly three decades ago, Nye coined the term *soft power* in his 1990 *Bound to Lead* book. Initially, the Harvard scholar put forth the concept of soft power to challenge the opinion that the United States seemed relatively weaker than it had been at the end of the World War II. Nye argued that the country possessed a unique source of power – its soft power or its noncoercive power – which helped the Americans to cement their global leadership (Li, 2018). Since then, the concept of soft power has gradually evolved within the political discourse not only in the United States, but also in Europe and China (Nye, 2017).

Soft power is first and foremost a source of power. Nye explains that “power is the ability to affect others to get the outcomes one prefers, and that can be accomplished by coercion, payment, or attraction and persuasion” (Ibid). Soft power stands for the third method and is defined as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments” (Nye, 2004). According to Nye, soft power describes a nation’s ability to attract and persuade as opposed to the more familiar *hard power* – the ability to coerce through military force and economic sanctions (Ibid). Nye argues that “a country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries want to follow it, admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness” (Nye, 2014).

Influence is what soft power and hard power have in common. However, soft power is not solely about influence. It is also about “persuasion or the ability to move people by argument” and attractiveness or “the ability to entice and attract” (Nye, 2008). Over the years, Nye acknowledged that there should be a soft power-hard power balance in a country’s foreign policy and coined the term of *smart power* (Nye, 2004).

According to Nye, there are three major sources of a country’s soft power, its culture, political values and foreign policies.

In international politics, the resources that produce soft power arise in large part from the values an organization or country expresses in its culture, in the examples it sets by its internal practices and policies, and in the way it handles its relations with others. (Nye, 2014)

Nye adds that it is necessary that that these sources of soft power “are seen as legitimate or having moral authority” in order to generate positive outcomes, otherwise “cultural soft power can be undercut” (Ibid).

The main instruments through which a country can “develop, deploy, or engage its soft power with other countries” (Rivera, 2015) and which “play an important role in the perceptions and soft power of a country abroad” (Vandewalle, 2015) are: public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, along with scientific and educational diplomacy, and cultural relations, which require “an understanding of the roles of credibility, self-criticism, and civil society in generating soft power” (Nye, 2008). In a video interview to Foreign Policy Association, Nye notes that it is important to distinguish between “the soft power that the government does and the soft power that the civil society does,” and adds that “in a world in which you have modern communications revolution and more openness, if you have societies that are open, that may help in terms of increasing the number of channels of soft power” (Nye, 2016). In fact, soft power originates mainly from individuals, the private sector, and civil society (Nye, 2014). According to the soft power theory, “countries whose dominant culture and ideas are closer to prevailing norms; whose credibility is enhanced by their domestic and international performance; and those with most access to multiple channels of communication and thus more influence over how issues are framed” are most likely to succeed in promoting soft power (D’Hooghe, 2010).

Even though the concept of soft power has become so popular in international relations, it carries numerous practical and theoretical deficiencies as some aspects of soft power remain confusing and vague. This makes soft power a quite flexible concept, which is open to interpretations. Nye himself acknowledges that establishing soft power is difficult "because many of its crucial resources are outside the control of governments, and their effects depend heavily on acceptance by the receiving audiences," and that developing soft power capabilities takes a long time (Nye, 2004). Besides, the attractiveness of soft power sources lies in the eyes of the beholder, depending on the cultural peculiarities of the recipient countries. Hence, what may seem attractive in one part of the world, may trigger repulsion in other part (Gilboa, 2008; Nye, 2008). This means that soft power tends to have diffuse effects, which are hard to predict (Nye & Ikenberry, 2004).

Furthermore, Nye does not clearly explain how soft power tools convert soft power resources into the desired outcomes. Other scholars and policymakers have also found it difficult "to build a theoretical model that explains how soft power tools and resources are developed and used [...] because each state generally seeks to achieve different objectives by using its soft power, depending on its international status and influence" (S.-W. Lee, 2011).

Finally, a major limit of soft power is that "Nye's presentation of soft power is rooted in neoliberal assumptions regarding the legitimacy of the norms and institutions of the contemporary international system, and the superiority and consequent allure of Western style democracy" (Wilson, 2013).

3.2 CULTURE

Joseph Nye regards culture as the main source of soft power "in places where it is attractive to others" and defines it as "the set of practices that create meaning to a society" (Nye, 2008). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, culture is made up of the collective human intellectual achievements in music, literature and painting, philosophy, religion, ideas, values, language, education, sport, etc. (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019).

Culture is what governments seek to exhibit and export abroad by practicing public diplomacy, which is an instrument of "linking soft power resources to preferred outcomes" (D'Hooghe, 2014). Ingrid D'Hooghe, an expert in China's foreign policy and

diplomacy, argues that "culture is fundamental to how people think, behave and communicate, and as public diplomacy is about communication, it is a factor that impacts on a country's public diplomacy" (Ibid).

In soft power and diplomatic purposes, culture is a broad concept which "spans a wide range of policies and activities, from inter-cultural dialogue to tourism, from education and research to the creative industries, from protecting heritage to promoting creative industries and new technologies, and from artisanship to development cooperation" (EC & HRFASP, 2016), and which has always been at the core of the "debate about the extent to which it should be a captive purveyor of government information or an independent representative" (Nye, 2008).

3.3 NEW PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Although there is no consensus on a definition of public diplomacy, it is a widely used concept and practice, which is "nearly as old as diplomacy itself" (Melissen, 2005b). Activities involving image cultivation have been known since ancient times, however it is only after the end of the Cold War when public diplomacy became a "central element of diplomatic practice" (Ibid). Mai'a K. Davis Cross and Jan Melissen point out that "public diplomacy is typically defined as how a nation's government or society engages with external audiences in ways that improve these foreign publics' perceptions of that nation," and that "in the long run, public diplomacy that is successful should result in more soft power" (Davis Cross & Melissen, 2013). Jan Melissen adds that "public diplomacy has become essential in diplomatic relations" between countries with a high level of economic and/or political interdependence and civil society interconnection (Melissen, 2005a).

Diplomacy itself has received various definitions ranging from "the art of resolving international difficulties peacefully" to "the conduct of relations between sovereign states through the medium of accredited representatives" and "the management of international relations by negotiation" (cited in Melissen, 2005). Andrew F. Cooper, Jorge Heine and Ramesh Thakur offer a more up-to-date and comprehensive definition of diplomacy within the 2013 *Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*:

Diplomacy at its essence is the conduct of relationships, using peaceful means, by and among international actors, at least one of whom is usually

governmental. The typical international actors are states and the bulk of diplomacy involves relations between states directly, or between states, international organizations, and other international actors. (Cooper, Heine, & Thakur, 2013)

Public diplomacy emerged around fifty years ago as a new diplomatic tool in the arsenal of traditional diplomacy, which started to address publics, and continued to evolve over the years (G. Lee & Ayhan, 2015). As a diplomatic method and a theoretical paradigm, public diplomacy has shifted from “traditional, state-centred, and hierarchically organized public diplomacy to a network or ‘new’ public diplomacy model that involves a wide variety of actors and promotes dialog and collaboration” (cited in D’Hooghe, 2014). The main reasons behind this shift are believed to be: “the increased importance of public opinion, the rise of more intrusive and global media, increased global transparency, and the rise of a global culture leading to a reflexive desire to protect cultural diversity” (Gilboa, 2008). These factors have also led to what Joseph Nye calls a “greater flexibility of non-governmental organizations in using networks” (Nye, 2008) and to “less clearly delineated roles and responsibilities for actors in international relations” according to D’Hooghe (D’Hooghe, 2014).

This paper addresses public diplomacy through the definition provided by Paul Sharp, according to which public diplomacy is “the process by which direct relations with people in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented” (Sharp, 2005) as well as through the theoretical discussion of the new public diplomacy, which is “also about building relationships with civil-society actors in other countries and facilitating networks between non-governmental parties at home and abroad” alongside traditional public diplomacy methods such as messaging or promotion campaigns (Nye, 2010).

According to Paul Sharp's definition of public diplomacy, its aim is "to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented." However, the scope of public diplomacy is much broader in practice. By following objectives such as "advocacy, influence, agenda-setting and mobilization; reinforcing other foreign policy objectives; promotion and prestige; correcting misperceptions; dialogue and mutual understanding; and harmony based on universal values" (G. Lee & Ayhan, 2015), public diplomacy seeks “to create an attractive image of a country that can improve its prospects for obtaining its direct outcomes” such as influencing another government's foreign policy decisions

(Gilboa, 2008; Nye, 2008). Public diplomacy is also about “creating public understanding and support for a government's international policy, substantiating a government’s outreach to foreign public and increasing outside knowledge; and thus consolidating overall credibility, legitimacy and efficiency at home and abroad” (Nye, 2008). A greater role for social actors is therefore necessary to strengthen government’ legitimacy and credibility in an increasingly transnational environment (Melissen, 2011).

3.3.1 New Public Diplomacy vs Traditional Diplomacy

It is important to highlight the differences between traditional and new public diplomacy as the analysis will further discuss and compare how the EU and China perceive public diplomacy. Even though there is much interest in public diplomacy and soft power in both the EU and China, their interpretations of these concepts may not be congruent.

The main difference between traditional state-centred and new public diplomacy is that “contemporary public diplomacy needs to – or should – encompass at least two features: first, a multi-actor approach, with many actors above and below the level of national government and different types of nongovernmental actors at home and abroad; and second, the formation of relations between them through dialogue and networking activities” (Huijgh, 2016).

Ingrid D’Hooghe adds that “the new public diplomacy is about engaging publics, not just informing them” and that it goes far beyond the traditional one-way communication to foreign publics (D’Hooghe, 2014). It means that the new public diplomacy has a more active audience as it involves direct participation and engages more domestic and foreign actors. In fact, “collaborating with those outside government and operating in the field is fast becoming a necessary condition of success in diplomacy” as developing “overseas attractiveness requires reaching out to transnational civil society” (Melissen, 2011). Overall, public diplomacy will be more effective if it’s less government-driven, even though states remain the key players in international relations.

Another major difference between the traditional and new public diplomacy is that the latter has no longer clear boundaries between foreign and domestic, and promotes interaction between international and domestic publics (Huijgh, 2016). As the public overseas and at home grow increasingly interconnected, “domestic groups and

citizens are seen as the government's potential partners," and national public diplomacy takes a people-to-people approach (Melissen, 2011).

Overall, public diplomacy is an evolving concept and practice, and, as Melissen points out, "theory and practice are sometimes worlds apart in the world of public diplomacy" (Melissen, 2011). Therefore, it is no surprise that the normative concept of new public diplomacy is not universally accepted. Moreover, little comparative research has been conducted outside the Western countries, in which the civil society dimension is more visible than in other parts of the world, "where public diplomacy is largely conceived in terms of governmental national strategy," or even as an intrusion in their domestic affairs (Ibid).

3.3.2 Public Diplomacy vs Propaganda

Despite its theoretical evolution, public diplomacy is often referred as the "transnational flow of information and ideas" – a description coined in 1965 by Dean Edmund A. Gullion, which remains the essence of public diplomacy to this day (cited in Huijgh, 2016). However, so is propaganda about the communication of information and ideas (Melissen, 2005b).

Since the definitions of public diplomacy and propaganda do not draw a clear line between them, diplomacy can easily be dismissed as an attempt at manipulation, especially that some countries still use propagandistic techniques in their public diplomacy. Nevertheless, there are a few aspects that differentiate these two concepts.

According to Jan Melissen, "the distinction between propaganda and public diplomacy lies in the pattern of communication" (Melissen, 2005b). While propaganda is "generally uninterested in dialogue or any meaningful form of relationship-building" (Melissen, 2011) and takes the form of a one-way messaging, modern public diplomacy is a two-way street that engages both official agents and foreign publics at the same time. From this angle, propaganda is similar to the traditional state-centred public diplomacy. It is that element of "listening" and not just talking that distinguishes new public diplomacy from propaganda and traditional public diplomacy (Melissen, 2005b).

Joseph Nye asserts that it is credibility what distinguishes public diplomacy from propaganda (Nye, 2008) and explains that "the evolution of public diplomacy from one-way communications to a two-way dialogue treats publics as co-creators of meaning and communication" (Nye, 2010). In the context of modern public diplomacy, "government

policy is aimed at promoting and participating in, rather than controlling, such cross-border networks," especially that an excessive government control can weaken the credibility of public diplomacy (Nye, 2010).

3.3.3 Trust and Credibility

Jan Melissen argues that "public diplomacy builds on trust and credibility, and it often works best with a long horizon" (Melissen, 2005a). Moreover, "without underlying national credibility, the instruments of public diplomacy cannot translate cultural resources into the soft power of attraction" (Nye, 2008). Indeed, credibility of public diplomacy is essential in creating trust between societies and strengthening soft power. As governments are often mistrusted and state agencies may lack credibility, it is the non-state actors who might bring credibility to where states lose it (G. Lee & Ayhan, 2015). Ingrid D'Hooghe sustains that "as a wide variety of actors with varying perspectives are involved in creating public diplomacy messages, these messages are considered more legitimate and credible than those developed by state actors in the state-centered model" (D'Hooghe, 2014). It is also important that the new actors enjoy "equal status or ability to participate" (G. Lee & Ayhan, 2015), and that governments accept criticism of their own policies (Nye, 2008).

3.3.4 Subsets of New Public Diplomacy

3.3.4.1 People-to-People Diplomacy

Joseph Nye distinguishes between three dimensions of public diplomacy: daily communication by means of press, strategic communication, and development of long-lasting relationships through people-to-people exchanges. Since an effective public diplomacy should be a two-way street, Nye considers social and cultural exchanges more effective than the other two dimensions of public diplomacy (Nye, 2008).

The increasing integration of non-state actors into the new public diplomacy led to the emergence of the "for and by the public" diplomacy, also known as the citizen or people-to-people diplomacy (Huijgh, 2016). A sub-set of new public diplomacy, "citizen diplomacy refers to contacts among people of different nations, as opposed to official contacts between government officials or between officials and people" (D'Hooghe, 2014). In people-to-people diplomacy, the role of government officials and diplomats is limited as the main stage for the formation of relations is given to nongovernmental

actors at home and abroad (Huijgh, 2016). Their aim is to establish sustainable intercultural relations through dialogue and networking activities.

3.3.4.2 Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Relations

Cultural diplomacy is another important sub-set of public diplomacy. The canonical definition of cultural diplomacy was coined by the American political scientist and author, Milton C. Cummings: “the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture, with the intention of fostering mutual understanding” (cited in Hemming, 2019). According to the theory of cultural diplomacy, non-state actors can act as unofficial cultural diplomats, even though their motivation is purely personal (Pan, 2013).

It is argued that the classic definition of cultural diplomacy by Milton Cummings combines cultural diplomacy with the aspects of cultural relations or cultural exchange (Brown, 2009). However, unlike cultural diplomacy, which is a form of government advocacy, “cultural exchange aims to be a genuine exchange of people, cultural goods or ideas, based on reciprocity and a symmetrical relationship” (Brown, 2009). Richard Arndt explains that “‘cultural relations’ then...means literally the relations between national cultures”, which “grow naturally and organically, without government intervention” (cited in Rivera, 2015). Therefore, cultural relations are different from both cultural and public diplomacy in that they are not always a result of states' policies and are rather deliberate and non-coercive relations between societies (British Council, 2017).

Cultural diplomacy is consistent with the concept of soft power as it aims to promote culture not only to foster mutual understanding, but also as a resource of attraction, and often includes political ideals and values (British Council, 2017). Cultural diplomacy “refers to the methods governments and organizations use to communicate their values, policies and beliefs – with the goal of improving their relationship, image and reputation with the publics (i.e. not just governments) or other countries (Barr, 2015). As a result, cultural diplomacy has become an important instrument of foreign policy and governments often try to influence its activities, such as cultural performances, film festivals, exhibitions, etc. (D’Hooghe, 2014).

4 EU-CHINA RELATIONS: AN OVERVIEW

4.1 SINO-EUROPEAN CULTURAL RELATIONS

The cultural contact between Europe and China was established a long time ago along the trade routes of the Silk Road, opened in 130BC during the rule of the Han Dynasty in China, and was increased after the Europeans had reached China by the sea in the 16th century (Edmonds, 2002). In the 17th century, early modern Europe and early Ming Dynasty China had already communicated via people-to-people diplomacy as European missionaries brought new knowledge and knowledge to China's imperial palace (Wang, 2016). The direct people-to-people interactions started after the 1840 Opium War, when Europeans established concessions in major Chinese cities and spread their cultures and languages there (Ibid). However, the period from 1840 until the end of the Second World War is also known as the "century of humiliation" in Chinese history, when the country struggled to liberate itself from Western colonizers (Edmonds, 2002). After the end of the WWII and the foundation of 1949, the relations between European countries and China became estranged and had been slowly revived first with the recognition of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1964 by France and, then, with the establishment of diplomatic relations between the European Community and PRC in 1975.

4.2 THE EU-CHINA DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

The diplomatic relations between the EU, at that time European Community, and China were established in 1975 and the first agreement on trade and economic cooperation was signed in 1985 (Burnay, Hivonnet, & Raube, 2014). Over the years, the EU-China cooperation has gradually expanded due to three main factors: China's reform and opening up, the EU's enlargement and increased capacity, and globalization (Zhou, 2017). As a result, the EU-China relations have progressively developed to a threefold cooperation from economy and trade, to politics, and, finally, to culture. Even though the EU and China have always been actively engaged in developing a stable relationship, it has not been without its ups and downs. The successful economic and technical cooperation gained a political aspect as Europe's relations with China got complicated after the Tiananmen Square events in June 1989. For the next three years, the European

Union would freeze relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and impose sanctions on it. The political relations were also troubled by the EU's and Member States' contact with Taiwan. In 1992, the EU-China relations went back to normal and a new bilateral political dialogue was established. In 1995, the EU and China launched a dialogue on human rights and, in 1998, they started direct bilateral strategic communication whereby the European and Chinese leaders meet at annual summits (Zhou, 2017). In 2000, the EU and PRC reach an agreement on China's accession to the World Trade Organisation and, in 2001, China becomes its 143rd Member. Also in 2001, the EU-China relations are upgraded to the "comprehensive partnership" and, in a couple of years, the EU and China start a "comprehensive strategic partnership" (Ibid).

4.3 THE EU-CHINA COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AND STRATEGIC 2020 AGENDA

Relations between the European Union and China have developed fast since the establishment of their diplomatic ties in 1975. In over 40 years of diplomatic relations, the EU and China have grown very interdependent. Since 1998, the EU and China have held annual summits which culminated with the creation of the ever-evolving Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) in 2003. The opening of the CSP had been met with success and the following year 2004 was made the Year of Europe for China's diplomacy and the Year of China for EU diplomacy (Zhou, 2017). In 2004, the EU and China have also become one of the world's largest trading partners – the EU is China's biggest trading partner while China is the EU's biggest source of imports – with an average of €1 billion worth of trade volume per day (Vergeron, 2015). The increased economic interconnectedness has pushed the EU and China towards an even closer cooperation to face common challenges. As a result, the EU-China relations have evolved from a purely economic cooperation into a comprehensive political, economic and cultural dialogue covering four main areas: international peace and security, prosperity, sustainable development, and people-to-people connectivity (Delegation of the European Union to China, 2016).

In November 2003, the EU and China reaffirmed their commitment to promote the strategic partnership by jointly signing in 2013 the agreement that defines the EU-China relations today – *The EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation*. It was agreed "to continue to consolidate and develop their strategic partnership to the benefit of both sides, based on the principles of equality, respect and trust" (European Union External

Action Service, 2013). The 2020 Agenda is a highest-level joint document steering the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership which outlines an overall formal framework guiding the EU-China relations during a seven-year time span. The coordination of bilateral relations takes place during the annual EU-China Summit, at which the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and China's State Councillor for Foreign Affairs meet to hold a Strategic Dialogue. In 2014, the Chinese President Xi Jinping himself paid a visit to Brussels. It was the first official visit of a Chinese Head of State to the EU's headquarters, indicating to a considerable improvement in the EU-China relations and to a long-term interest in their maintenance (Wang, 2016).

The main goal of the Strategic 2020 Agenda is to ensure a strong, stable and sustainable cooperation for win-win results between the EU and China. It consists of a set of strategic guidelines for peace and security, prosperity, sustainable development and people-to-people exchanges advanced by the leadership of both the EU and China, which are being implemented through three pillars of EU-China partnership: a High-Level Strategic Dialogue, a High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue and a biannual People-to-People Dialogue including exchanges and cooperation (Ibid). Even though the political and economic pillars of the strategic partnership remain essential in the context of the EU-China relations, the third recently introduced pillar representing the cultural dimension of their cooperation has also been gaining ground for the past seven years.

4.4 THE EU-CHINA HIGH-LEVEL PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE DIALOGUE

The EU-China HPPD devoted to culture and people-to-people exchanges was launched on the 18th of April 2012 "after over a decade of active, though unstructured, cooperation in culture, education and youth" (Marchetti, 2016). The HPPD was introduced as the third pillar of the EU-China strategic partnership to deepen and upgrade their relations with the establishment of the people-to-people diplomacy institute (Vergeron, 2015). Its primary role is to build trust and intercultural understanding between the peoples of the EU and China by encouraging cultural cooperation, tourism, student mobility, academia exchanges and civil society action.

The People-to-People Dialogue was added in 2012 on the initiative of the Chinese government with the purpose of encouraging people connectivity. Apart from increasing

mutual understanding and trust between European and Chinese people, the HPPD also seeks to strengthen the political and economic ties between the EU and China.

People-to-people exchanges are an essential vector of peace, while contributing to economic development. Together the EU and China represent over a quarter of the world's population. Expanding contacts between peoples on both sides is crucial to enhance common understanding and foster cross-fertilisation between societies. (European Union External Action Service, 2013)

5 ANALYSIS

The aim of this analysis is fourfold. First step is to explore how the EU and China perceive soft power, public diplomacy and the role of culture in international relations, with a focus on their public diplomacy actors, in order to identify potential convergences and divergences in their perceptions. Second step is to evaluate what has been achieved since the establishment of the EU-China High-Level People-to-People Dialogue and analyse it as an instrument of soft power and new public diplomacy aimed at promoting intercultural dialogue between Europe and China. Then, I will compare the EU's and China's perceptions of soft power and public diplomacy as well as the roles which they assign to the state and non-state actors in the context of the HPPD. In the concluding part of the analysis, I will point out several suggestions for strengthening the role of laymen in the EU-China cultural dialogue and for improving the intercultural dialogue between European states and China.

5.1 THE EUROPEAN UNION'S SOFT POWER AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

5.1.1 The European Union's Discourse on Soft Power

The European Union has only relatively recently acknowledged the importance of "perceptions and cultural engagement as a driver of foreign policy", even though European culture has always served as a source of attraction beyond its borders (Vergeron, 2015). In 2005, the EU ratified *The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* and "committed to promoting the diversity of cultural expression as part of its international cultural relations" based on values, such as human rights, gender equality, democracy, freedom of expression and the rule of law (European Commission & HRFASP, 2016).

As parties to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, the Community and the Member States have reaffirmed their commitment to developing a new and more pro-active cultural role for Europe in the context of Europe's international relations and to integrating the cultural dimension as a vital element in Europe's dealings with partner countries and regions. (European Commission, 2007)

A couple of years later, the EU recognised the role of culture in its foreign policy within the *European Agenda for Culture in a Globalising World*, which states:

Europe's cultural richness and diversity is closely linked to its role and influence in the world. The European Union is not just an economic process or a trading power, it is already widely - and accurately - perceived as an unprecedented and successful social and cultural project. The EU is, and must aspire to become even more, an example of a "soft power" founded on norms and values such as human dignity, solidarity, tolerance, freedom of expression, respect for diversity and intercultural dialogue, values which, provided they are upheld and promoted, can be of inspiration for the world of tomorrow.
(European Commission, 2007)

The European Agenda for Culture also established that the EU action in the future would be guided by the “promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue” as well as by the “promotion of culture as a vital element in the Union’s international relations” (Ibid).

The above statements illustrate that culture is a significant component of the EU’s foreign policy, used to achieve more influence in the world and to ensure a stronger presence of the European Union on the international scene. European cultural richness and the EU’s successful governance model are seen as the primary sources of the Union’s soft power. Moreover, European norms and values are also promoted as a source of attraction and an example of soft power. The European Union, therefore, projects itself as a normative soft power.

In the EU’s understanding, culture “can refer to the fine arts, including a variety of works of art, cultural goods and services” as well as to “a symbolic world of meanings, beliefs, values, traditions which are expressed in language, art, religion and myths,” which play “a fundamental role in human development and in the complex fabric of identities and habits of individuals and communities” (European Commission, 2007). However, culture is not just about art and meanings, it also “spans a wide range of policies and activities, from inter-cultural dialogue to tourism, from education and research to the creative industries, from projecting heritage to promoting creative industries and new technologies, and from artisanship to development cooperation” (European Commission & HRFASP, 2016). The role of culture in the EU’s external policies is therefore to “promote

reconciliation, growth and freedom of expression on which other fundamental freedoms can be built” (Ibid).

The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 and the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS) in 2010 allowed the European Union to increase its contribution to international cultural relations by creating a new architecture for a coherent and coordinated EU foreign policy (European Commission & HRFASP, 2016). Furthermore, the introduction of the EEAS also “opened the way to reconsider the role and the importance of public diplomacy in the EU’s foreign policy, and within it, the significance of culture” (Vergeron, 2015). The Chinese partners interpreted the creation of the EEAS as “an advance for Europe’s identity” but remained critical of EU’s lack of political integrity in foreign policy (Ibid). It is true that the Union’s political structure is very complex and, therefore, it is hard to project a coherent foreign policy and public diplomacy. Nevertheless, it has been less than a decade since the establishment of the EEAS and, in this short time, the European Union has been actively experimenting with its external cultural policies.

In 2011, the European Parliament issued a report on the cultural dimensions of the EU’s external actions and called for further incorporation of cultural policies into the EU’s external affairs to strengthen its position as a leader on the global stage in the context that the United States already had a “strong cultural presence globally” and that emerging global powers such as China were heavily increasing their soft power capabilities (Schaake, 2011). Here we can detect the competitive aspect of the European Union’s promotion of soft power. The report also stressed the “importance of cultural diplomacy and cultural cooperation in advancing and communicating throughout the world the EU’s and the Member States’ interests and the values that make up European culture” as well as “the need for the EU to act as a (world) player with a global perspective and global responsibility”. That is, the Union complemented its soft power toolbox with cultural diplomacy and cultural cooperation to promote European culture, values and interests abroad. Another objective of the EU in international cultural relations is to promote respect for freedom of expression, communication, of access to information and freedom of internet as “important preconditions for cultural expression, cultural exchanges and cultural diversity,” and condemns censorship and monitoring of the internet (Schaake, 2011). In other words, the Union values openness and transparency in cultural cooperation.

5.1.2 The European Union's Public Diplomacy

The EU's public diplomacy gained momentum as the EU-China High Level People-to-People Dialogue was established in 2012. It was a bold move for the European cultural diplomacy as the EU had never before conducted a comprehensive cultural dialogue with non-Western countries. China was chosen as a test case for the EU external cultural policy as it had already been an important economic and trade partner. In this case, economic interdependence paved the way for the establishment of closer social and cultural relations. In the context of an increasing interconnectedness and an evolving strategic partnership, a comprehensive dialogue, including cultural and people-to-people dimension, was unavoidable, especially that "as an emerging global political actor, the EU wants to develop an 'all-inclusive', comprehensive foreign policy in general and with China in particular" (Reiterer, 2014).

The appointment of a cultural adviser to the Secretary's office of the European External Action Service marked the first advancement towards a coordinated strategy for culture for Europe's external action (Vergeron, 2015). In 2016, the European Commission adopted a new strategy to make the EU a stronger global actor – *The Strategy for International Cultural Relations*, which puts culture at the heart of the EU foreign policy and which "aims at encouraging cultural cooperation between the EU and its partner countries and promoting a global order based on peace, the rule of law, freedom of expression, mutual understanding and respect for fundamental values" (ASEF Culture360, 2016). The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini pointed out in her opening speech:

Culture has to be part and parcel of our foreign policy. Culture is a powerful tool to build bridges between people, notably the young, and reinforce mutual understanding. It can also be an engine for economic and social development. As we face common challenges, culture can help all of us, in Europe, Africa, Middle East, Asia, stand together to fight radicalisation and build an alliance of civilisations against those trying to divide us. This is why cultural diplomacy must be at the core of our relationship with today's world. (ASEF Culture360, 2016)

The Strategy for International Cultural Relations reiterated the role of European culture and values for the EU's global influence and emphasized the role of cultural

diplomacy in its international relations. In addition, it introduced a new and more coordinated framework for the EU's external cultural policy, providing more ground for the development of the European public diplomacy. The guiding principles for the EU action in international cultural relations include the promotion of cultural diversity and respect for human rights, fostering mutual respect and intercultural dialogue, respecting complementarity and subsidiarity, encouraging a cross-cutting approach to culture, promoting culture through existing frameworks for cooperation (European Commission & HRFASP, 2016). Michael Reiterer sustains that:

Cultural relations in the broad sense will complement political dialogues with third countries, contribute to conflict prevention, strengthen public diplomacy as well as the people-to-people dimension of the relationships and will allow cultural cooperation with stakeholders in third countries. This will also strengthen the perception of the EU as a full international player through its soft power in leveraging the considerable cultural assets of its Member States which will also improve the EU's image which has suffered in the financial crisis. (Reiterer, 2014)

In other words, the role of cultural relations in EU foreign policy is to support its political and economic cooperation with partner countries by reaching mutual understanding, to promote peace, socio-economic development, and trust as well as to enhance its international attractiveness and global position. It is equally important for the EU to maintain its soft power based on European values and to portray itself as a “global norm entrepreneur” (Melissen, 2011).

5.1.3 The Actors and Instruments of the European Union's Public Diplomacy

The promotion of European culture remains primarily the responsibility of the Member States in full respect of the principle of subsidiarity and in accordance with the open method of coordination (OMC), consisting of “a non-binding, intergovernmental framework for policy exchange and concerted action” (European Commission, 2007).

However, alongside the Member States and their regions, the EU has also consistently encouraged to contribute various stakeholders in the field of culture, including professional organisations, cultural institutions, non-governmental organisations, European networks, foundations, etc., and even organised thematic

programmes such as “Investing in People” and “Non-state Actors and Local Authorities in Development” (European Commission, 2007). The EU’s call upon non-state actors to actively participate in its cultural initiatives indicates that the Union values “public-private cooperation with a strong role for civil society, including NGOs and European cultural networks, in addressing the cultural aspects of the EU's external relations,” and encourages cooperation with non-state actors in “drawing up and implementing external cultural policies and in promoting cultural events and exchanges” (Schaake, 2011).

The key actors in developing and implementing EU public diplomacy besides national governments are EUNIC, a cooperation scheme for a network of European cultural institutes, the EU’s diplomatic service EEAS with its delegations, and the Cultural Diplomacy Platform, launched in 2016. The EUNIC and the EEAS collaborate on building and implementing EU international cultural relations. The EUNIC is comprised of 32 European cultural institutes and “carries out joint projects to promote European values and enhance the visibility of European arts, cultural and linguistic diversity, both in the EU and in third countries” whereas the role of EU delegations is “to encourage synergies and cooperation between national cultural institutes and foundations as well as private and public enterprises worldwide” (Christensen-Redzepovic, 2018). The task of Cultural Diplomacy Platform’s is to consult on cultural policy and facilitate networking between cultural stakeholders, Member States and EU delegations.

The European framework for culture Creative Europe also participates in joint actions with third countries, however, it is “a rather limited initiative” as “most cultural programmes are in fact devised and funded by the individual member states both internally and externally, with varying levels of intensity across European countries, ranging from traditional state-centred cultural projects to predominantly private operations, and with equally varying effects” (Vergeron, 2015). In this context, it is necessary for the EU develop a fully formulated European soft power policy and strengthen the coordination of its external cultural relations.

The new EU strategy for international cultural relations marked the first step towards a coordinated structure to engage a wide variety of stakeholders from public and private sectors, from governments to civil society, from the EEAS and its delegations to national cultural institutes, “thereby direct communication to the interested general public in making use of media, social networks, think tanks, academia, cultural events,

etc. would be as important as contributing to proper messaging of the significance of cultural diplomacy in policy speeches of EU politicians and high officials” (Reiterer, 2014).

According to the new strategy, “states have an obligation to respect, protect and promote the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, including artistic expression,” and the EEAS and the EUNIC network play the role on independent links between the state and non-state actors in the EU cultural sphere. Furthermore, the EU strategy has a specific clause, which emphasizes the role of an active civil society (made up of civil society organizations, artists, cultural operators, grass roots organizations, etc.) in cultural relations, and in which the EU commits to “strengthen its support to civil society organisations active in the cultural field” (European Commission & HRFASP, 2016).

Jan Melissen mentioned in his article *Beyond the New Diplomacy* that “the European Union has become a true laboratory for public diplomacy experimentation, constantly pressing the boundaries of what is acceptable diplomatic behaviour” and that its collaborative public diplomacy initiatives, such as EUNIC and EEAS, “are breaking new ground” (Melissen, 2011). Indeed, the EU’s unprecedented expansion of cultural policies, engaging a wide range of actors above, below and outside the level of government, and promoting an active dialogue and collaboration between domestic and foreign publics, illustrates a strong commitment to develop a far-reaching public diplomacy and a bold move to enhance its soft power internationally. However, the European Union is currently only at the beginning of its road of creating a coherent public diplomacy and soft power strategy, so a number of issues remains unresolved, such as the lack of coordination due to the complex structure of the EU and financial constraints. To illustrate, “the new Creative Europe programme agreed upon in November 2013 only represents €240 million a year, less than 0.2 percent of the EU’s budget for the next six years (2014-2020), that is to say merely the cost of building a 240-kilometre motorway linking Berlin to Weimar, or Paris to Lille” (Vergeron, 2015).

In 2014, Prof. Yudhishtir Raj Isar, lead expert for the consortium supporting the Preparatory Action *Culture in EU External Relations*, stated:

EU institutions, national cultural relations agencies and cultural civil society need to work together to build a ‘joined up’ international cultural relations strategy based on the values of reciprocity, mutuality and shared responsibility in a spirit of global cultural

citizenship. Such a strategy requires political will, an enabling framework and commitment. It also has to be adequately funded under the European Union's budget and implemented mainly by cultural professionals. (cited in Ouchtati, 2014)

Since then, the European Union launched its new strategy for international cultural cooperation, comprised of more coordinated cultural objectives and initiatives, and deepened, in this way, its commitment to promote European culture internationally. Even though the EU still misses a comprehensive budget for its cultural and diplomatic policies, it has showed the political will to strengthen its cultural strategy. Hopefully, step-by-step, the European Union will solve the underlying conflicts in its international cultural engagement.

5.1.4 The European Union's Public Diplomacy in China

As I have already mentioned above, the EU's public diplomacy gained momentum with the establishment of the HPPD. Michael Reiterer explains that "developing through culture, the EU soft power projection capacities in China can strengthen the EU image while promoting the diversity of its culture and its shared values, and improve mutual understanding which can be further useful in political dialogues and trade relationships" (Reiterer, 2014). As a consequence, China has become the main Asian target of the EU actions in the field of culture (Picciau, 2016).

In its new strategy on China, the EU committed to strengthen its relations with the PRC and drive forward people-to-people connectivity between European and Chinese citizens. The strategy also stressed the importance of improving links between the EU and China in higher education, creative and cultural industries, tourism, as well as under China's *One Belt One Road* initiative, in order to foster inter-cultural dialogue, promote cultural diversity and civil society participation (European Commission & HRFASP, 2016). Here again we can see that the EU calls for an active civil society engagement in cultural cooperation with China. At the same time, the European Union expressed concern for China's human rights situation and the development of civil society:

China's crackdown on defence lawyers, labour rights advocates, publishers, journalists and others for the peaceful exercise of their rights, with a new and worrying extraterritorial dimension, calls into question China's stated commitment to the rule of law and its respect for international obligations. The recent adoption of a number of restrictive national security laws and regulations is also a matter of concern. The EU is particularly worried that China's newly

promulgated Law on the Management of Foreign Non-Governmental Organisations' Activities could hamper the development of civil society in China and have a negative impact on people-to-people exchanges between the EU and China. (European Commission & HRFASP, 2016)

5.2 CHINA'S SOFT POWER AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

5.2.1 The Chinese Discourse on Soft Power

The idea of soft power has long existed in ancient Chinese philosophy. In Confucianist legacy, for instance, the idea of soft power is closely linked to the ideal of a harmonious world and peaceful government, and is reflected in the following quotes:

Never do to others what you would not like them to do to you
(Confucius)

and

When one by force subdues men, they do not submit to him in heart. They submit, because their strength is not adequate to resist. When one subdues men by virtue, in their hearts' core they are pleased, and sincerely submit. (Mencius) (cited in Zhang, 2010)

In modern Chinese political discourse, the term *soft power* has started to proliferate since the publication of the Chinese translation of Joseph Nye's *Bound to Lead* in 1992 (Chen & Song, 2012). At first stages, it has not attracted substantial interest and was only mildly covered in Chinese academic research. Later, however, academic works in China started actively developing the concept of soft power and adapting Nye's ideas "to suit China's situation" (D'Hooghe, 2010). Chinese scholars and politicians acknowledged the values of soft power, however they tend to use the term *ruan shili* (soft capacities) rather than *ruan quanli* (soft power), preferring the understanding of soft power as concrete existing power resources (capacity) rather than a means of dominance (ability) (Chen & Song, 2012). That is, soft power was received in China with a defensive rather than offensive connotation. Nevertheless, *ruan shili* could also be used to influence the behaviour of other states. Eventually, soft power became a key component of China's comprehensive national power, which serves to "advance China's domestic and international agenda, to guard Beijing against criticism, and to boost the country's international standing" (D'Hooghe, 2010).

The concept gained momentum in Chinese political discourse only after fifteen years since it was introduced to China when President Hu Jintao mentioned “soft power” in his speech to the 17th Chinese Communist Party Congress in 2007 (Chen & Song, 2012) and presented it as a key element of national comprehensive power as well as an “important source for national cohesion” (cited in D’Hooghe, 2010). In this speech, the former President also stressed the importance of soft power for China’s international influence and the role of culture as the means to achieve it (Lo & Pan, 2016). From this moment, China will start making tremendous efforts to increase its soft power.

The 12th and 13th Five-Year Plans (FYP) emphasized China’s ambition of becoming a cultural superpower and the need to build China’s cultural soft power by developing cultural industries and media (Seungeun Lee, 2018). Hu’s successor, President Xi Jinping has also placed emphasis on the development of China’s cultural soft power and mentioned it in his *Chinese Dream* discourse: “We should increase China’s soft power, give a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China’s messages to the world” (cited in Shambaugh, 2015). As a result of Hu Jintao’s and Xi Jinping’s deliberations on soft power, the term has spread in both China’s domestic and international contexts.

China’s sudden increase in soft power may be explained by the fact that it had already achieved tremendous economic and military growth due to its hard power policy, and decided to switch attention to its *soft* influence in the world – “at a historical juncture in which China is bound to rise economically and militaristically, the country hopes to have a lasting cultural and ‘ideological’ influence upon the world” (Seungeun Lee, 2018). It can be also argued that China intends to take a combined *smart* approach to power.

China also tries to project itself as a “peacefully rising nation with desirable soft power offerings” (Seungeun Lee, 2018) in the context of its dynamic political and economic rise, which triggered geopolitical anxiety. In 2003, Zheng Bijian, a party theorist, introduced the theory of China’s “peaceful rise”, later known as “peaceful development”, and advocated the advancement of Chinese culture and soft power abroad in order to “to promote China’s international image, alleviate the fear of the ‘China threat’ and establish a favourable environment for China’s sustainable development” (Lo & Pan, 2016). The definition of soft power as “using power softly” is therefore in line with the Chinese ideal of building a harmonious world and China’s strategy to assuage the Western

concern for its “threatening” rise (Zhang, 2010). Moreover, the theory of *harmonious world* (hexie shijie), which is the “official cornerstone of China’s foreign policy” also promotes “tolerance and enhancement of dialog among civilizations” under the concept of “harmoniously coexisting with differences (he er bu tong)” (D’Hooghe, 2014).

China started building its cultural influence during the former President Hu Jintao’s office (2002-2010). In 2004, the 10th Five-Year Plan (2001-2005) introduced a new strategy for “culturally going global” (Zhang, 2010) and for the first time discussed the role of cultural industries in governmental planning. It is also during the 10th FYP that the first Confucius Institute was founded in Seoul with the purpose of promoting Chinese language and culture (Ibid).

Confucius Institutes represent “the most visible manifestation of China’s pursuit of soft power” (Blanchard & Lu, 2012), serving as “the global keystone for China’s commercial, cultural, and linguistic prosyletization” (cited in Blanchard & Lu, 2012). By the end of 2016, the number of Confucius Institutes around the globe rose to 500 (and a bit over 1000 Confucian Classrooms), covering over 140 states (Tai-Ting Liu, 2019). In 2005, China acted as one of the key players in the development of the UNESCO Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which regulates the international cultural policies of individual states (Pan, 2013).

The main strength of China’s soft power is believed to be the Chinese culture (Chen & Song, 2012). Ingrid d’Hooghe points out that “China’s leaders realize that more understanding of Chinese culture and ideas are an absolute prerequisite for acceptance by the international community” (D’Hooghe, 2010). Therefore, it is no surprise that the inclusion of cultural policies in China’s foreign relations coincided with its recent push on soft power. According to Claire Seungeun Lee, the author of *Soft Power Made in China*, “Chinese soft power is developed in notions of ‘culture,’ in its reproduction in Chinese discourse, as well as in China’s institutionalizing cultural industry” (Seungeun Lee, 2018). However, while China’s cultural heritage is a unique advantage for developing its soft power, China’s soft power is not confined to cultural dimension and also includes political, economic and diplomatic means (Lo & Pan, 2016).

To sum up, China has only recently got accustomed with the concept of soft power. Nonetheless, in a relatively short time, the concept got deeply enrooted in Chinese political discourse, although not in its original version but “with Chinese characteristics.”

By means of soft power, China wants to simultaneously strengthen its position on the international stage and to project itself as a peaceful country. The main source of Chinese power is culture. It is also “a core element of national identity and thus a means to safeguard national security” (Vergeron, 2015). As a result, Chinese government started making huge investments in the cultural sphere and developing a comprehensive public diplomacy system to promote its soft power (Shambaugh, 2015).

5.2.2 China’s Public Diplomacy

The Chinese public diplomacy has developed impressively fast since 2003 as a result of China’s deeper involvement in the international community. In an attempt to strengthen its soft power, China has been increasingly developing its public diplomacy and “has mounted a major public relations offensive” – China’s *charm offensive* (Shambaugh, 2015). In 2011, President Hu Jintao emphasized the role of public diplomacy in promoting a more appealing image of China at the 11th meeting for Chinese diplomats. In 2013, the succeeding administration led by Xi Jinping continued to strengthen the role of public diplomacy in both domestic and foreign affairs under the concept of *telling a good story of China* (Kejin, 2015). Eventually, “the idea of telling a good story became a foreign policy priority under Xi Jinping that is to be realised through various forms of public diplomacy” (Tai-Ting Liu, 2018).

China’s former Foreign Minister and one of the architects of China’s foreign policy today, Yang Jiechi explained the rapid development of Chinese public diplomacy strategies by the need “to enable the general public in other countries to know China better” in order for them to “better appreciate and support China’s domestic and foreign policies” (cited in D’Hooghe, 2010). The high-ranking Chinese diplomat also emphasized that:

The fundamental goal of China’s public diplomacy programmes was to shorten the distance between China and the world, to present a real China to the external world as a country dedicated to perpetual international peace and prosperity, to eliminate the concerns, misunderstandings and prejudices towards China, and to contribute to the mutual understanding, trust and cooperation between different countries (cited in Kejin, 2015).

The concept of public diplomacy (gonggong waijiao) came to China from the West and received two distinct understandings there. On the one hand, the Chinese tend to associate public diplomacy with external propaganda (duiwan xuanchuan), which refers to the dissemination of information to foreign publics in order to build a new image of China by means of a comprehensive system of state publicity (Kejin, 2015). On the other hand, Chinese public diplomacy is closely related to people-to-people diplomacy (minjian waijiao), which promotes the participation of ordinary people in foreign affairs (waishi) (Ibid). Moreover,

Cultural diplomacy (wenhua waijiao) and people's diplomacy (renmin waijiao, or minjian waijiao) have always been part of the diplomatic picture in the People's Republic of China. In recent years, however, in line with the call to strengthen China's cultural soft power, their roles have been strengthened and they are now regarded as major elements of China's public diplomacy strategy and the best instruments to show China's political, socioeconomic and cultural developments to the world. (D'Hooghe, 2014)

In 2002, people-to-people diplomacy became an essential pillar of China's diplomacy as it was recognized that "China's diplomacy must be based on people, work for people, and reliance on people, thereby forming friendships across different countries through various exchange activities to deepen mutual understanding and solidarity" (Kejin, 2015). Later, during the last administration led by Hu Jintao, Chinese leaders placed even more emphasis on the "'non-governmental diplomacy' so as to 'give full play to the advantages of the people-to-people exchanges with other countries'" (cited in Wang, 2016). With the increasing emphasis on people-to-people diplomacy, "China is hence trying to promote effective dialogue, mutual understanding, and durable self-sustaining trust through its foreign policy" (Kejin, 2015). By engaging in people-to-people diplomacy, China also tries to move away from the traditional state-to-state diplomacy by encouraging a more active participation of non-governmental organisations and individuals in order to portray itself as a friendly and trustworthy nation to the international audiences. At the same time, according to the Chinese Ministry of Culture in charge of foreign cultural activities, "the international cultural exchange activities shall serve the national diplomatic strategy, domestic cultural construction and

promotion of national reunification” (cited in Dewen, 2017), and, therefore, remain heavily regulated by the central government.

5.2.3 The Actors and Instruments of China’s Public Diplomacy

People-to-people diplomacy alongside cultural diplomacy are the core of Chinese public diplomacy and illustrate that China has attracted growing attention to the role of non-state actors in the development of its public diplomacy. Indeed, during the past three decades, Chinese public diplomacy has witnessed a growing number of both state and non-state actors: among state actors, there is an increasing number of governmental and Party bodies, as well as of provincial and municipal governments, and, among non-state actors, there is a growing engagement of civil society groups, individuals, and companies (D’Hooghe, 2014). Moreover, “a growing number of Chinese social organizations are able to exert their influence on policymaking, either directly by advising the government, or indirectly via national or international media” (Ibid). Similarly, students, researchers, tourists, and artists can act as purveyors of Chinese culture and messengers of Chinese diplomacy (Blanchard & Lu, 2012). Nevertheless, the number of state actors remains much larger than that of non-state actors in China’s public diplomacy.

It also is important to mention here that the non-state actors of the Chinese public diplomacy “are not fully independent” as they “are not allowed to go against official policies” and their activities “are regulated, supervised or co-opted by the government” (D’Hooghe, 2014). Ingrid D’Hooghe further explains that “if their activities are considered harmful for China or the government, the government will close them down”. At the same time, “they can be rather autonomous in daily practice and can serve their own societal or commercial interests, as long as they do not pose a serious challenge to official policies” (Ibid).

China’s political system dominated by a single party holds a monopoly over the government and “exercises a considerable degree of control over society, the economy, culture and the media,” which “results in a lack of media freedom and a lack of political and civil rights in China, issues that can be considered big liabilities for China’s public diplomacy in democratic countries” (D’Hooghe, 2014). At the same time, “China’s political system is in continuous transition, which manifests itself in an ongoing institutionalization of Chinese leadership politics, measures to improve the legal system, social reforms, growing civil consciousness and influence, and delegation by central

powers to lower level and to society” (Ibid). However, their role is still rather limited and in line with the government’s overall policy

The leading voice in China’s public diplomacy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), stated that “the basic goal of public diplomacy is to enhance exchanges and interaction with the public in order to guide and win the understanding and support of the public for foreign policies” (cited in Kejin, 2015). At the same time, China’s MFA “assumes that public diplomacy is government-led diplomacy, characterized by government-initiated diplomatic activities designed to open up communication with the public to foster a beneficial public environment, thereby protecting and promoting core national interests” (Kejin, 2015). That is, despite the increasing emphasis on people-to-people diplomacy, the overall public diplomacy in China remains state-centred and the purpose of non-state actors is primarily about promoting national interests.

The growing number of non-state actors indicates that the Chinese government acknowledges their “role in softening the rough images of government policies” and, therefore, wants to attract a greater variety of actors in the conduct of its public diplomacy (D’Hooghe, 2014). However, it does not mean that the government wants to simultaneously loosen its grip over public diplomacy. In fact, it is currently facing the challenge of controlling a greater complexity of actors involved in China’s public diplomacy. As Jan Melissen pointed out, “China’s centralized public diplomacy style sits rather uneasily with the evolving concept of public diplomacy” (Melissen, 2011). Its efforts to move away from traditional diplomacy and engage more actors will get undermined as it continues to apply a state-centred approach and heavy regulation of non-state actors.

What the Chinese leaders do not understand is that, in order to be more trusted abroad, especially in the West, the social and cultural component of China’s public diplomacy has to act, if not entirely, than at least in a more open and independent manner from the sending government. Chinese public diplomacy experts have already expressed the need to give more freedom to and engage more non-state actors in this process even if they acknowledge that the government should maintain the central role in the development and implementation of public diplomacy (D’Hooghe, 2014). The issue is how to “balance between empowering and managing them in a political system in which the state aims to control society” (Ibid).

A significant, although not the most important, player in China's public diplomacy is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its embassies and missions abroad. Its primary tasks is to implement public diplomacy guidelines abroad. The State Council Information Office (SCIO), an organ affiliated with China's State Council, created in 1991, is the main actor responsible for developing Chinese public diplomacy policies as well as monitoring foreign media and censoring domestic media and internet. It is also believed to be the “institutional nerve center” of Chinese propaganda (which is not a derogatory term in China) (Shambaugh, 2015). The fact that the same institution is responsible for China’s public diplomacy, censorship and propaganda at the same time and, what is more, is closely affiliated with the central government, confirms David Shambaugh’s statement that “in China, the government manipulates and manages almost all propaganda and cultural activities” (Ibid) and points to a major flaw in developing a trustworthy and credible image of China abroad. A successful public diplomacy strategy should be less government-driven and reflect openness of the sending country to engage in a free dialogue, which is the opposite of one-way propagandistic communication and limited freedom of expression.

In charge of international cultural cooperation, including the strongly promoted student exchanges and institutional cooperation, between China and other countries are the Ministries of Culture and of Education, whereas the General Administration of Press and Publications (GAPP) supervises the media outreach. It is important to note here that Chinese cultural centers and Hanban/Confucius Institute headquarters are affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education respectively. Because of the close affiliation to the central government, Confucius Institutes have been received with controversy in the West, often linked with propaganda “or even ‘Trojan horses’ that disseminate China’s worldview and limit discussion on topics that are politically sensitive in China, such as Tibet and human rights” (D’Hooghe, 2014; Mattis, 2012). As a result, “media outlets and legislatures across Europe are now scrutinizing Confucius Institutes, and at least one, at Stockholm University, has decided to shut down as a result” (Shambaugh, 2015).

As Beijing is actively promoting its culture abroad through exchanges in education, research, sports as well as through arts, film festivals, exhibitions, individuals and non-governmental organisations can also be regarded as messengers of China’s

public diplomacy and soft power, however their role is overshadowed by the activities of governmental actors.

5.2.3.1 Chinese censorship

Chinese media is another important instrument in China's public diplomacy as the Chinese government uses it for shaping public opinion (Shambaugh, 2015). In a similar fashion, the government controls the internet. In fact, China has a complex censorship system supervised by the CCP's Publicity Department (CPD), which censors not only Chinese media and internet by deleting unwelcome and banned words and phrases such as "Tibet" or "4 June", but also blocks some of the major Western informational outlets, including The New York Times and Bloomberg, and even some foreign social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Ibid). In this way, the role of media outlets and social media to let Chinese society to communicate with foreign publics has been limited by the Chinese government (D'Hooghe, 2014). At the same time, Chinese Xinhua News Agency actively uses these websites for their promotional purposes.

Media and internet are not the only subjects of Chinese censorship. David Shambaugh reveals that "foreign China scholars are increasingly practicing self-censorship, worried about their continued ability to visit China" (Shambaugh, 2015). The case of Cambridge University perfectly illustrates China's tendency to censor foreign scholars. Cambridge University Press had blocked online access to its journal articles in China as it had to comply with a request from Beijing to censor articles on delicate subjects in China, including "the Tiananmen Square massacre, the Cultural Revolution and President Xi Jinping" (The Guardian, 2017). However, in the face of international protests by academics and demand to uphold the principle of academic freedom, the publisher soon reinstated the blocked articles. Another example, which I have already mentioned, is that "even the Chinese language teaching Confucian Institute funded by the Chinese Ministry of Education has used its influence to censor discussion abroad of sensitive topics like Tiananmen Square, Tibet, Taiwan, and human rights" (Balding, 2017).

Not only scholars, but also governments and NGOs have to self-censor with regard to Chinese problems. For example, European governments avoid direct contact with Dalai Lama as a result of Chinese diplomatic pressure in liberal democracies (Forsby, 2019; Torres, 2017).

Chinese cultural industry is also hampered by lack of freedom as the government “supervises all artists, cultural venues, institutions, and industries” (D’Hooghe, 2014). For example, “galleries must negotiate a slow and capricious approval process to show works of art” (Brady & Movius, 2018), and film directors need to obtain the “dragon seal of approval” to screen at international film festivals (Forsby, 2019; The Japan Times, 2019). Moreover, Chinese government “focuses on promoting traditional and apolitical art, while ignoring the growing number of Chinese artists, writers, filmmakers and actors who combine traditional arts with modern ideas and developments and who are conquering the world on their own” (D’Hooghe, 2014). To illustrate, the Chinese government induced censorship on the activity of the following artists: film director Jia Zhangke, who won the 2013 Cannes Film Festival’s Best Screenplay Award, writer Mo Yan, winner of the 2012 Nobel Prize for Literature, architect Wang Shu, who won the 2012 Pritzker Architecture Prize, visual artists such as Zhang Xiaogang, Yue Minjun and Ai Weiwei exhibit in the world’s most prominent museums and their works are sold for high prices (Ibid).

It is clear that Chinese rigid censorship machine, which goes far beyond China’s borders, hinders the aim of Chinese public diplomacy to build mutual understanding and trust with third countries, especially if they have a democratic system, as it limits freedom of expression, a necessary precondition for successful cultural exchanges, and the ability of different actors to participate equally and openly in cultural cooperation.

5.2.4 China’s Public Diplomacy in Europe

The introduction of the 11th Five-year Plan for Cultural Development in 2016, which placed more emphasis on cultural exchanges with foreign countries, served as a favourable background for the development of the EU-China cultural relations, which eventually led to the establishment of the HPPD in 2012. Besides the favourable policy changes, “the abundant cultural resources, developed cultural industry and sophisticated market operation experience in EU countries, plus the interests of European cultural and art dealers to engage China, already created a decent platform for Chinese culture to ‘go global’ and demonstrate the national image of contemporary China” (Dewen, 2017).

According to D’Hooghe, the main goal of China’s public diplomacy in Europe is building trust:

China's public diplomacy in Europe focuses in the first place on building political trust by improving the image of China's political system, its foreign policies and the human rights situation. Europe is very concerned about China's domestic conditions; much more so, it appears, than the United States. China recognizes Europe as a normative power and knows that human rights are a cornerstone of many European countries' foreign policies. It is therefore not surprising that building political trust is more prominent in China's public diplomacy in Europe than elsewhere in the world. (D'Hooghe, 2010)

In December 2018, China issued a new policy paper on the European Union, preceded by two other policy papers from 2003 and 2014 (Xinhua, 2018). In the latest document, China proposes to “uphold inter-civilization dialogue and harmony in diversity to facilitate mutual learning between the Chinese and European civilizations.” The new policy paper also emphasizes the need to “fully leverage the coordinating role of the High-level People-to-People Dialogue and continue to explore new fields, models and approaches of exchanges and cooperation.” In this regard, China committed to continue to increase people-to-people exchanges in education, culture, tourism, sports, research, media and human rights, and welcomes cultural institutions, think tanks, NGOs and media organizations to contribute in facilitating mutual understanding and strengthening the EU-China cooperation “on the basis of equality and mutual respect” and “in accordance with laws and regulations.”¹ In a previous white paper on the EU, China also declared that it would “be more open in cementing and deepening its exchange and cooperation with EU members in the cultural field” (Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 2003). Therefore, China committed to improve its relations with the European Union by engaging in an open cultural dialogue with European people in order to build trust.

5.3 THE EU-CHINA HIGH-LEVEL PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE DIALOGUE

Cultural relations have recently gained prominence in international relations and have been extended from traditional government-to-government diplomacy to contacts

¹ Full text of China’s Policy Paper on the European Union was published by Xinhua News Agency on http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-12/18/c_137681829.htm

between individuals, networks and other non-state actors. Both the EU and China have recently started implementing this new approach in their foreign policy to improve their soft power.

The introduction in 2012 of a high-level dialogue devoted to mutual cultural understanding and people-to-people exchanges and “devised as a forum which would bring individuals (academics and students, artists, etc.) rather than officials together” (Burnay et al., 2014) as a new, third strategic pillar, alongside the older economic and political pillars, marked a real milestone in Sino-European ties. Michael Reiterer explains, that “within the context of the HPPD, EU-China cultural cooperation aims at enhancing the contribution of culture to the Strategic Partnership while promoting exchanges between the cultural stakeholders and civil societies” (Reiterer, 2014).

For the EU, the cultural engagement with China under the HPPD is the first experience with such kind of cooperation outside of the West: “The new dialogue is very unique in the sense that the EU has not yet established People-to-People Dialogues with any other strategic partner” (Burnay et al., 2014). China, however, had engaged in people-to-people diplomacy before 2012 with India, the United States, and even with Russia (Vergeron, 2015).

In the inaugural address during the opening ceremony of the EU-China HPPD, Androulla Vassiliou, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth at that time, declared that the EU-China people-to-people exchanges were meant “to contribute to the knowledge and common understanding between China and the EU, through closer contacts between the peoples of both sides” (Vassiliou, 2012). The Commissioner also added that “the main result we want to achieve today is to learn a bit more about each other and, as a consequence, become more open-minded and tolerant” (Ibid).

It can be argued that building mutual understanding is an indispensable settlement in the context of lack of trust which “characterizes Western-Chinese relations to such an extent that it impairs core strategic interests on both sides” (Fulda, 2019). In this scenario, the objective of the HPPD expands from the promotion of mutual awareness and attraction to the dissipation of mistrust among European and Chinese societies as well as in the political and economic dimensions of the EU-China relations (Fulda, 2019; Vergeron, 2015). However, even after the establishment of the HPPD and despite the

increased number of cultural and people-to-people exchanges, “both China and the West are far from reaching a level of mutual understanding necessary for enduring and sustainable bilateral relations” (Fulda, 2019).

Joseph Nye argues that in the context of the evolving public diplomacy, trust in international cultural relations is mainly achieved by the representatives of society rather than representatives of governments. In this line of thought, HPPD could be an excellent solution for the issue of lack of trust and mutual respect in the EU-China relations. However, the development of cultural relations between the EU and China under the HPPD has not been flawless.

5.3.1 Areas of Cooperation

By signing the joint declaration on the establishment of the HPPD, the EU and China made a formal commitment to cooperate in four key areas: education, culture, youth and multilingualism. In the field of culture, the European and Chinese partners pledged to carry out the initiatives agreed in the HPPD and strengthen their cultural cooperation on the principles of the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (EEAS, 2020). They also agreed to boost their dialogue in the cultural and creative industries, heritage preservation and contemporary art by establishing cultural centres and institutions, by organising art festivals and art exhibitions, and by facilitating the intellectual exchanges in various forms and fora, including the EU-China High Level Culture Forum, the audio-visual sector through Media Mundus, and the 2012 EU-China Year of Intercultural Dialogue (Vassiliou, 2012). In fact, the designation of 2012 as the EU-China Year of Intercultural Dialogue marked “the first substantial contribution of culture to the EU-China HPPD” (European Commission, 2019). A total of 194 activities and events were planned to take place during 2012 in order to support this initiative. The Year of Intercultural Dialogue marked the beginning of a new phase in the EU-China relations and highlighted the role of culture and mutual understanding in their cooperation.

In education, the EU and Chinese officials shared the commitment to create an EU-China Education Platform for Cooperation and Exchange, which would enhance the exchange of information and best practice. The Platform was launched with a discussion about future collaboration over the EU-China joint schools such as the flagship China-Europe Institute of Clean and Renewable Energy, China-Europe International Business

School and China-Europe School of Law. In higher education, the two sides agreed to launch an EU-China Tuning joint study, co-financed by the European Commission and the Chinese Ministry of Education, with the aim of “strengthening the compatibility of EU and China education systems” (Tuning China, 2019). Alongside the joint Tuning study, the European Commission guaranteed an increased number of mobility opportunities for students and academics through the Erasmus Mundus programme. In its turn, the Chinese Government expressed its willingness to provide scholarships for foreigners and, in this way, make China a more attractive destination for EU students.

The expected result of EU-China cooperation in education included a higher level of reciprocity in student mobility as well as more opportunities for language learning. As the two sides stressed the importance of multilingualism and respect for the cultural and linguistic diversity in a globalised world, they made a deal not only to multiply mobility opportunities for students and professors, but also to create more language training centres for them (Vassiliou, 2012). More and more Europeans had been learning Mandarin by that time already but not all of the 23 EU official languages were popular in China. As a consequence, the European Commission set up a pilot language project to support the lesser-spoken EU official languages.

In the field of youth, the EU and China continued to pursue the goals established in the 2011 China-EU Joint Declaration on Youth and agreed to work together on the EU-China Youth Policy Dialogue with the aim to promote friendship among Chinese and European young people and more sustainable cooperation between youth organisations (EEAS, 2020). The European and Chinese officials present at the opening ceremony of the HPPD also urged “youth organisations from China and the EU to advance EU-China people-to-people-dialogue and reach out to a wider range of civil society organisations through projects such as the China-Europe Symposia on Youth Work Development, jointly organised by the All-China Youth Federation and the European Youth Forum” (Vassiliou, 2012).

5.3.2 The EU-China High-Level People-to-People Dialogue from 2012 to 2019

In seven years of its existence, the High-Level People-to-People Dialogue took place four times. The first round of the HPPD was held in Brussels in April 2012 and led to the establishment of the EU-China Higher Education Platform for Cooperation and

Exchange, a policy dialogue in the field of higher education exchanges. The second round of the HPPD took place in Beijing in September 2014 and resulted with the launch of the EU-China Tuning initiative. The third EU-China HPPD plenary session took place in Brussels in September 2015 on the 40th anniversary from the establishment of the EU-China diplomatic ties and discussed the role of culture, education, youth and gender equality in the Sino-European relations. In November 2017, Tibor Navracsics, the current European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, and Chinese Vice-Premier Liu Yandong met in Shanghai on the occasion of the fourth meeting of the High-Level People-to-People Dialogue, and reiterated the ambition to build trust and understanding between the peoples of the EU and China. Vice-Premier Liu even declared that "the people-to-people exchanges have become a glittering gem of China-EU cooperation" (Yi, 2017).

Over these seven years of the EU-China cooperation under the HPPD, the areas of cooperation expanded from culture, education and youth to sport, research&innovation and gender equality (EEAS, 2017). In the field of culture, the European Union and China have strengthened their collaboration through city-to-city interactions under the European Capitals of Culture and Culture Cities of East Asia initiatives, aimed to promote sustainable urban and regional development; through cultural encounters such as exhibitions, film festivals, book fairs, performances etc.; through the activity of cultural centres and institutes; through projects in cultural innovation and creative industries such as Creative Tracks, which connects young creative entrepreneurs; as well as through the organisation of the EU-China Year of Tourism in 2018 (Christensen-Redzepovic, 2018). Furthermore, the launch of China's ambitious infrastructure project the *Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)* in 2013 has opened new prospects to expand people-to-people exchanges between China and Europe. As Commissioner Navracsics pointed out in his speech during the 4th EU-China HPPD Plenary Session in Shanghai: "Just as the old Silk Road once did, it [BRI] will also help people to move, knowledge to expand and mutual understanding to grow" (Marchetti, 2016; Navracsics, 2017). The two parties have also cooperated in education under Erasmus+ student mobility and capacity building programmes with over 70 participating universities, with Chinese universities remaining the top beneficiaries of the Erasmus+ projects (European Commission, 2018). At the same time, as China Daily reports, "about 5,000 European students have studied in China, supported by the Confucius Institute, which now has 170 branches in Europe to teach the

Chinese language and reveal the culture” (Yi, 2017). During the meeting in Shanghai, the parties also discussed the role of young people in cultural diplomacy (EEAS, 2017).

Aside from culture, education and youth, HPPD covered several other related fields that facilitate mutual understanding, notably in research. The European and Chinese partners agreed to cooperate in research mobility starting with a wider participation of Chinese researchers and research institutions in the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, in which over 300 researches from China had been involved already in the first two years since the launch of the HPPD, and other Horizon 2020 programmes co-funded by the EU and China, which foster the mobility of students, professors and researchers (Dragon Star, 2017; Jankowski, 2014). Cooperation in the field of sport was discussed for the first time during the 4th EU-China HPPD: “China hopes to strengthen its cooperation with European countries in sports management and personnel, a senior Chinese official said at the fourth EU-China High-Level People-to-People Dialogue in Shanghai on Tuesday” (EEAS, 2017; Yi, 2017). Finally, the framework of the dialogue extended to a bilateral discussion of gender equality through seminars (the first EU-China seminar on gender equality was held in the framework of the third HPPD meeting) and symposiums on women’s economic empowerment, employment and entrepreneurship (Pierrot Bults, 2017).

The latest mention of the HPPD appears in the *Joint statement of the 21st EU-China summit*, in which both parties commit “to further strengthen exchanges and cooperation in the fields of education, tourism, mobility of researchers, culture, media, youth, and sport through the High-level People-to-People Dialogue” and express their preparedness to hold the 5th EU-China High-level People-to-People Dialogue in Brussels (European Commission, 2019a).

5.3.3 The EU-China HPPD – An Instrument of Soft Power and New Public Diplomacy

This part of the analysis explains how the EU-China HPPD mechanism situates in the discourse about soft power and new public diplomacy. In previous subchapters, I have explored the EU’s and China’s perceptions of soft power and found out that both entities capitalize on culture to create a better international image and increase their global influence. Similarly, both the EU and China have recently started engaging in active diplomatic relations to promote their soft power. As a consequence, the EU-China High-

Level People-to-People Dialogue was created in the context of their bilateral soft diplomatic relation.

The HPPD seeks to promote mutual understanding and trust by means of citizen and cultural diplomacy, two subsets of new public diplomacy, based on people interconnectedness and cultural exchanges. As its title suggests, the HPPD is composed of two main categories of actors: governmental (high-level) and non-governmental (people-to-people). Besides, I have already shown above that the HPPD includes a wide range of initiatives and actors involved in them: individuals (students and researchers), civil society (gender equality groups), cultural institutes (EUNIC and Confucius Institute) and, of course, high-level political representatives (European Commissioner and Chinese Foreign Minister). According to the official statements and documents analysed throughout my research, the role of state actors should be limited to the promotion of social and cultural exchanges between European and Chinese citizens. Theoretically speaking, the HPPD represents an ideal model of new public diplomacy as it involves a wide variety of actors and encourages interactions between international and domestic publics. At the same time, the HPPD is placed in the broader context of the EU's and China's diverging soft power and public diplomacy approaches. In what follows, I will explore in more detail how the HPPD fits into the EU's and China's discourses on soft power and public diplomacy models, and will discuss the potential challenges stemming from their dissimilarities.

5.3.4 Concerns

Over the past few years, the European Union and China have put a lot into developing the cultural relations between their people. As a result, "China-EU cultural exchange activities have been greatly improved in terms of both quantity and quality" (Dewen, 2017). Friends of Europe, a Brussels-based, independent think-tank for European Union policy analysis and debate, reports that "the objectives of increasing student and professor exchanges, multiplying meetings between youth organisations, strengthening cooperation in the cultural field, triggering dialogue on gender equality, and many others, have been met" (Borrelli & Marchetti, 2016). Nevertheless, "both Europe and China still have a long way to go before they can consider the hard work of building bridges of trust" (Borrelli & Marchetti, 2016), which remains "the main challenge of the EU-China Strategic Partnership" (Burnay et al., 2014), as there is a number of issues

that challenge the development of cultural relations between them and, hence, “it is very difficult to make any breakthroughs in the short term” (Dewen, 2017). Among these issues are the overall cultural and political divergences between European countries and China, the absence of a dedicated budget and a limited set of instruments put in practice to support mutual cultural initiatives, and even the lack of effective enforcement of intellectual property rights legislation and copyright for European cultural content in the Chinese market (Vergeron, 2015).

However, one of the most relevant issues of the EU-China cultural relations, as reflected in a number of official documents (European Commission & HRFASP, 2016b), reports (Borrelli & Marchetti, 2016) and academic papers (Burnay et al., 2014; Fulda, 2019; Picciau, 2016), relates to the complexity of actors involved in this process and different approaches which the EU and China take towards the conduct of public diplomacy and the pursuit of soft power.

In the next part of the analysis, I will summarise my findings from the previous subchapters, analyse the EU’s and China’s differences and similarities, and explore how their divergences might influence the implementation of the HPPD objectives. In the end, I will point out some suggestions for the improvement of the EU-China future cultural cooperation.

5.4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Previously in this chapter, I have explored how the EU and China see the role of culture in international relations, how they conceive soft power and conduct public diplomacy, how they distribute the responsibilities of actors involved in their diplomatic activities, the goals of their public diplomacy towards each other and their formalised cultural cooperation under the HPPD framework. In this final chapter, I will summarise my research findings in a comprehensive comparative analysis and try to uncover, with the help of the theoretical concepts of soft power and new public diplomacy, potential challenges or points of contention within the Sino-European cultural cooperation under the HPPD. The ultimate goal of this research is to point out directions of how to improve the Dialogue.

The first part of the analysis revealed that both the EU and the People’s Republic of China assign an important role to culture in international relations as a driver of

foreign policy and a source of attraction. As a result, both started to increasingly capitalize on their cultural richness as a soft power source, to promote intercultural dialogue and to integrate a cultural dimension in their relations with partner countries. For both the EU and China, the primary goals of incorporating cultural policies into the external affairs are: to enhance international attractiveness and image, to increase global influence, to strengthen economic and political relations with partner countries, to promote peace and development, to build trust and understanding between people.

In the case of the EU, the role of culture is also closely linked to the promotion of European norms and values embedded in the EU's democratic model of governance. That is, the EU is a normative soft power. China, however, is a cultural soft power as it builds attractiveness predominantly on Chinese cultural heritage to promote its national interests. In the case of China, soft power built on culture also serves as a means to alleviate the "China threat" and to portray itself as a peacefully rising power. That is, Chinese soft power is conceived as a defensive capacity rather than an offensive ability.

Both the EU and China have recently started developing public diplomacy systems to promote their soft power. However, unlike the EU, where public diplomacy is still relatively underdeveloped and underfinanced, China has made huge investments to build a comprehensive public diplomacy mechanism.

Chinese public diplomacy is closely connected to the central government and serves the purpose of promoting national interests abroad and providing support for China's domestic and foreign policies. Therefore, Chinese style of public diplomacy is state-centred and hierarchical. Even though China stresses the importance of people-to-people diplomacy and engages an increasing variety of non-state actors in its diplomatic purposes, they are still heavily controlled by the government. Chinese government-driven diplomacy is thus closer to the traditional model of diplomacy than to the new public diplomacy, in which the state and non-state actors act as partners. As much as China tries to promote people-to-people exchanges, its government-controlled public diplomacy system is more driven towards propaganda than to an open two-way communication process, and, therefore, undermines its efforts to build trust and "tell a good story of China." After all, "if public diplomacy is guided by the principle of disseminating propaganda, how credible are China's foreign policy communications and actions?" (Tai-Ting Liu, 2018).

While China prefers a top-down approach to public diplomacy, the EU is more inclined to use the bottom-up approach which empowers the societal and individual actors at the grassroots level. The European Union has actively encouraged the participation of individuals and civil society in its diplomatic efforts to promote European culture, but it lacks a far-reaching mechanism to coordinate its complex diplomatic structure made up of supranational, national and beyond national actors. Moreover, the Union highly values openness and freedom of expression as preconditions for successful cultural cooperation, and has criticised on numerous occasions China's use of censorship and government control of media, internet and cultural industry.

Despite all these differences, both the EU and China employ various forms of promoting their culture, be it student exchanges, cultural events, research cooperation, language courses, tourism, media outreach, etc., which they actively promote in their cooperation under the third pillar of their Strategic Partnership. From a theoretical perspective, these activities may be characterised as people's and cultural diplomacy, subcategories of the new public diplomacy.

Considering the HPPD in the broader context of the EU's and China's different takes on public diplomacy, the complex yet underdeveloped structure of the European public diplomacy and the Chinese authoritative character could become serious challenges in the development of mutual understanding and trust. Moreover, the EU's bottom-up and China's top-down approach to public diplomacy will clash under the mutual HPPD and will make it hard, if not impossible, to establish an open and transparent relationship based on mutual trust and respect between people in Europe and China.

Whether the implemented social and cultural exchanges will finally lead to positive images of the partners will mainly depend on the actors themselves. Therefore, in order to make the EU-China cultural cooperation more successful, it is necessary to create more space for non-state actors and build new dialogues to bring European and Chinese people closer. Moreover, where the EU should take a more united approach to public diplomacy and "streamline existing activities into a concerted strategy" (Vergeron, 2015), China should delegate more power and freedom to act to non-state actors as "the credibility of citizen diplomacy presupposes that the states involved loosen their control" (Fulda, 2019).

6 CONCLUSION

In the context of deteriorating economic and political relations between the European Union and China, I considered it necessary to emphasise the role of the cultural aspect of their relationship (especially that cultural relations between the EU and China is currently an underexplored topic in the academic field) with the conviction that bridging cooperation between people creates the potential to overcome points of contention.

In this paper, I focused on the EU-China intercultural dialogue framed within the third pillar of their Strategic Partnership – the High-Level People-to-People Dialogue, as it is the main network of their cultural cooperation, and the role of European and Chinese state and non-state actors in developing and implementing it. As numerous academic sources revealed divergence in how the EU and China conceive soft power and public diplomacy, and how they distribute diplomatic responsibilities among different actors, I decided to analyse in this paper *how the European and Chinese state and non-state actors engage in intercultural dialogue between the European Union and China under the dissimilar public diplomacy frameworks and soft power approaches*. The purpose of this paper was to see whether the contrasting approaches to soft power and implementation of public diplomacy could challenge the development of cultural relations between the EU and China under the HPPD framework and to point out directions where these differences could be managed and where governments could enhance their collaborative potential.

The results of my analysis revealed that both the EU and China assign an important role to culture in their foreign policy and that they both see it as a major source of soft power. As a consequence, both have recently started developing their public diplomacy to promote their soft power, and even engaged in a bilateral intercultural dialogue. However, the EU and China have different understandings of soft power and public diplomacy. While for the EU soft power is based primarily on norms, China capitalizes soft power mainly on its cultural heritage. In what regards public diplomacy, the divergence is even larger. While China has a well-developed government-driven public diplomacy mechanism, the EU's public diplomacy actively promotes grassroots participation, but remains largely underfinanced and underregulated, or, to put it simply,

while China prefers a top-down approach to public diplomacy, the EU is more inclined to use the bottom-up approach.

How do these divergent positions impact the EU-China HPPD? They make it hard to establish an open and transparent relationship based on mutual trust and respect because the HPPD, as a model of new public diplomacy, requires a better coordinated multi-actor approach, with more power and freedom delegated to non-state actors, in order to produce positive outcomes in terms of soft power.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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