

Zhu Liu (S1885464)

z.liu.9@umail.leidenuniv.nl

MSc in International Relations & Diplomacy

Leiden University and Netherlands Institute of International Relations ‘Clingendael’

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# **Case Studies on China’s Public Diplomacy Strategies in the Netherlands: Non-State Actors’ Involvement and the Collaborative Network**



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Supervisor : Prof. Dr. Jan Melissen

Second Reader: Dr. Jaroslaw Kantorowicz

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# I. Introduction

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## 1. 1 Research Topic

“Confucius Institute belongs to China, it also belongs to the world,” said the ambassador of the People’s Republic of China (hereafter China) in the Netherlands, Mr. Wu Ken in July 2017<sup>1</sup>, when the third Confucius Institute was newly opened in Maastricht, a city in the southern Netherlands (Xinhua, 2017). We often can hear similar statements from many Chinese leaders, who claim the importance of the Chinese culture in contributing to the people around the globe and thereafter their mission to disseminate Chinese culture to the world.

A gradual shift of focus from military to economic power and soft power in the 20th century leads to the increasing importance of culture and mass communication in public diplomacy and public relations (Servaes, 2012; Nye, 2004). More and more countries begin to explore the new tools and approaches in order to improve their communication strategies and to build soft power. In 2007, the former President of China Hu Jintao declared in “the Report of the 17th National Congress of Communist Party of China (CPC)” that building China’s cultural soft power is one of the most important steps for improving China’s international prestige. And cultural public diplomacy is the fundamental tool to build China’s soft power abroad and thus an important pillar of China’s modern foreign policy (CPC News, 2007).

Since then, the Chinese government has greatly increased its investment in related areas and has taken various kinds of top-down initiatives. Two unprecedented events, 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and 2010 Shanghai World Expo, were held domestically right after, while a variety of other public diplomacy initiatives have been taken place worldwide. From 2004 to 2017, the Chinese government has built 525 Confucius Institutes in 146 countries spreading all over five continents (Hanban, 2017). The Chinese Ministry of Culture has been actively building the brand “Happy Chinese New Year” through celebration events in major foreign metropolises. And plenty of cultural exchange activities focusing on transmitting Chinese cultures can be found in more and more foreign cities. Besides these, the CPC has realised the power of media and has begun to promote national news media brands abroad in order to upgrade its communication strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: [http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off\\_the\\_Wire/2017-07/08/content\\_41176176.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off_the_Wire/2017-07/08/content_41176176.htm).

With tremendous investment and efforts put in this field, the Chinese government has claimed that significant achievements in public diplomacy had been received during the past few years. However, some data in the public opinion surveys claims the opposite. The BBC World Service Polls show that people's view of China as a positive "global influencer" decreased 4% from 2005 to 2011 globally, while people's negative view of China increased 8%. Remarkably in Asia, people's favourability of China dropped 15% within these six years. On the contrary, other Asian major powers with less investment in related areas, such as Japan, enjoyed a "stable public opinions in other Asian countries" (Hall & Smith, 2013). According to the global opinion polls conducted by the Pew Research Centre, people's favourability of China in major European countries<sup>2</sup> has fluctuated from 2012 to 2017. For example, people's view of China increased slightly in 2015 in general with the average increase rate of 11%, but decreased greatly in the following year (decrease rates range from 7.5% to 34% in 2016), and increased again in 2017 with different increase rates ranging from 13% (Poland) to 53% (Spain). That is to say, increasing visibility does not necessarily equal to building a positive image.

A growing number of scholars begins to pay close attention to the top-down public diplomacy strategies of the Chinese government and points out many limitations and problems of its centralised approaches which are badly in need of certain improvement. Astonishingly, a Chinese scholar, Cao (2016), even proves that "no significant short-term impact" of China's public diplomacy campaigns in major European countries has been observed. And ironically, some negative impact is observed in Germany, which demonstrates that "people's favourability decreases as China expands the depth and scope of its public diplomacy". Moreover, some scholars criticise that the propagandist flavour of Chinese government's foreign communication results in the resistance from the recipients (Zhang & Liu, 2008). Some further argue that the Chinese government neglects the foreign cultures and has been using an alien language to communicate with the target audience, which brings about the ineffectiveness of building its soft power abroad (Wang, 2011). Western scholars criticise that China's state-centric approach is the core issue. And they believe that less government control and the liberation of China's civil society is the key to solve this puzzle (Nye, 2012).

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<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of data availability and consistency from 2012 to 2017, five major European countries are chosen by the researcher. They are United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, and Poland. The data is available at <http://www.pewglobal.org/database>.

The public diplomacy in the new era, especially in the information and digital age, requires the government to fully mobilise the society and invite different actors to join this increasingly intense campaign. As the influence and diversity of sub-state actors, non-state actors, and sometimes individuals keep increasing, state actors are not the only credible entities in diplomacy anymore. For this reason, the governmental agencies need to modify their traditional strategies with themselves as the dominant and assertive player in public diplomacy. It requires them to endeavour to build a collaborative network to connect valid and credible participants together. Only by doing so, the government will be able to combine its resources and power with the different perspectives, expertise and experience of other actors.

## **1. 2 Research Question**

With the fast development of the contemporary public diplomacy theory, the Chinese government has received many critics from scholars. However, the heated discussion on China's public diplomacy only stays at the stage of evaluating the first tremendous wave of China's public diplomacy reform. That is to say, the majority of the conclusions and policy suggestions are based on the evaluation of China's public diplomacy practice from 2008 to roughly 2012. However, as China has been developing rapidly in numerous fields and has been unprecedentedly active on the global stage, the researcher can't help asking whether there are any changes in its most recent public diplomacy strategies and practices? It requires more empirical evidence on this subject to further explore the issue, to test the existing assumptions and to connect the practice with the theory.

Does the Chinese government realise the importance of non-state actors in public diplomacy and begin to change its strategies accordingly? And to what extent does Beijing translate what's in the literature into practice? With so many critics on Chinese government's public diplomacy strategies, this research will examine the evolvement of China's public diplomacy in building its soft power in one of the major European countries, the Netherlands, during the time period from 2006 to 2018.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, it will examine the changes of the involvement of non-state actors in China's public diplomacy campaigns over time. And it intends to put the puzzle together to find out how the CPC utilises and interacts with the networks combining state and non-state actors in order to realise its foreign policy goals. Therefore, the research question of this paper reads as follow:

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<sup>3</sup> For the reason of choosing this specific time period, please refer to Chapter IV. Research Design.

*“What are the changes, if any, in China’s public diplomacy campaigns in the Netherlands in regard to the involvement of the non-state actors?”*



## II. Literature Review

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### 2. 1 Overview of the Existing Literature

This section provides a literature overview of public diplomacy regarding China's strategies and practice. China's public diplomacy has been a highly discussed topic among both Chinese and western scholars. Interestingly, as one of China's main strategies to generate soft power abroad, China's public diplomacy strategies and practices have received mostly critics from scholars. In general, many scholars hold a neutral or negative attitude on China's public diplomacy practices. Kavalski (2012) describes China's public diplomacy as a "charm offensive" which only has "modest influence". Yang (2007) states that there are merely "limited returns on investment" from China's current approaches. The following section will provide a brief description of the discussions.

#### 2. 1. 1 Public Diplomacy and the Role of the Government

The concept of "public diplomacy" was advanced in the early 20th century, but the definition of it is still under discussion among scholars. Many scholars and diplomatic agencies agree that public diplomacy lays emphasis on developing the relationship between the government and the people of one country with the public of other countries. And it focuses on "strategic and mass communication" (D'Hooghe, 2015; Han, 2011) and aims at "reducing misperceptions" (Tuch, 1990) and "influencing opinions" of the global audience (Melissen & D'Hooghe, 2014; the US Department of State, 1977). Therefore, if the nation-states use it efficiently and smartly, they will be able to transform the culture, foreign policies and political values of a country into "soft power" or "smart power" and thus win the "hearts and minds" of the foreign publics (Nye, 2008).

Governmental agencies used to be and are still the main actors in practising public diplomacy. These actors include but are not limited to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies abroad, State Official Information Offices and national leaders. However, with the tide of globalisation and economic development, non-state actors, such as corporations, international organisations (IOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civic groups and citizens, have gradually shaped their significant roles in public diplomacy. Governments are thus not the monopoly in diplomacy

anymore and are often challenged by non-state actors on governments' "outdated structure and legitimacy" on certain issues (D'Hooghe, 2015; Huijgh, 2016). And this development of "non-hierarchical networks consisting of state and non-state actors" has contributed in building the "new" public diplomacy (Melissen, 2005). In most cases of public diplomacy practices nowadays, government agencies are the centric actors who have been increasingly engaging with members of networks to conduct activities (D'Hooghe, 2015).

Many scholars confirm that China remains "a state-centric public diplomacy model for its projection of soft power" (Zhang, 2011) and the Chinese government is the "major messenger" of this process (D'Hooghe, 2010). In recent years, China's non-state actors have gradually increased their presence and involvement in China's public diplomacy, although "clearly circumscribed by centralised authority" (Melissen & D'Hooghe, 2014). In China's case, non-state actors mainly include cultural or educational institutes and diaspora groups. The activities carried out by them are mainly initiated and sponsored by the government. Thus, they need to follow the policies, principles, and guidelines from the Chinese government. While in the West, its "poly-centric" approach is quite obvious (Huijgh, 2016). Besides the traditional academic institutes, multiple independent non-state actors, such as NGOs, are also playing important roles in this process. In the case of the US with its pop-culture cosmopolitanism, individual celebrities also carry the task of being cultural ambassadors spontaneously.

Because of the highly centralised power of the government and China's economic development, Beijing is able to "mobilise huge resources, such as funds, expertise and people, for conducting public diplomacy" (Han, 2011). However, many scholars focus on the problems of China's public diplomacy. They point out that the biggest problem of China's state-centric public diplomacy is government's lack of credibility (Wang, 2011; D'Hooghe, 2010). Nye (2012) studies the impact of China's domestic governance and stresses that it is the development and the liberalisation of "civil society" that contributes a large part to building a positive image and generating soft power for China. Barr (2011) further claims that national credibility and domestic governance provide more charm to the global audience. Otherwise, the Chinese government will continuously fail at offering a consistent image of what it says and what it does (Anholt, 2010). Some Chinese scholars urge the government to liberate and mobilise the civic society, especially "Chinese internet users", in order to start a "people's war of public diplomacy" (Ma & Min, 2006).

## **2. 1. 2 Culture as the Main Resource of China's Soft Power**

Nye (2011) identifies that there are three main resources for soft power, namely culture, foreign policies and political values. Many Chinese political leaders and scholars claim that the fundamental resource of China's soft power is culture, especially traditional culture. The Chinese government believes that a better understanding of the Chinese culture and core values would contribute to the recognition and acceptance of China's domestic governance and foreign policies. Former President Hu Jintao (2007) declared that building China's cultural soft power is one of the most important steps for increasing China's international prestige. For many Chinese scholars, China's cultural diplomacy contributes to the strategic objectives of China's peacefully rise and the rejuvenation of the nation (Liu & Qu, 2013). Liang (2015) states that China's culture has the potential to provide not only cultural entertainment but also the valid alternatives to the existing values for world politics and global issues. These Chinese values include building a harmonious world ("gongjian hexie shehui"), win-win cooperation ("gongying"), mutual learning and shared prosperity ("hujian, gongrong"), and etc.

Indeed, as the globalisation keeps accelerating, the cultural dimension is probably "one of the most noticeable and experienced dimensions of the globalisation" (Jeffrey, 2017). Based on these understandings on the modern world political system, soft power and public diplomacy, the Chinese government has developed and strengthened a cultural public diplomacy strategy with strong Chinese characteristics. And many Chinese scholars and leaders have brought up a new concept called "cultural and people's diplomacy" ("renwen waijiao"). While in the West, cultural diplomacy and people diplomacy (sometimes called civil diplomacy or citizen diplomacy) are separated from each other. Zhao (2011) claims that the divergences are due to the different understandings of the nature of the word "people". He further states that the word "people" is also associated with the idea of "humanism" or "humanities" in western culture. The Chinese cultural and people's diplomacy emphasises on communication among different nations and connecting among different cultures and values. China's first Premier, Zhou Enlai, says that the first and foremost work of diplomacy is to focus on people. The wider your network is, the better and easier your work will be (Zhao, 2011). And many Chinese leaders and scholars have been following this principle and believe that people are the fundamental part of diplomacy work and thus cannot be separated from cultural diplomacy.

While the word "people" in China's cultural public diplomacy focuses on human interaction, the "people" or "civil" in the West refers to not only human interaction but also humanism. It lays

emphasis on individuality, liberty, freedom and equality of the people and the realisation of self-values and self-potential. Thus, their culture diplomacy campaigns not only cover their domestic cultures, religions and languages, but also cover relatively wider topics of humanities, such as gender equality, women's rights, freedom of expression, and etc. For example, the Swedish Embassy in the Netherlands has been holding several forums on promoting gender equality in 2018<sup>4</sup>, while the Chinese Embassy generally holds more events on showcasing the Chinese culture, such as calligraphy and traditional dance.

Concerning the cultural elements in China's public diplomacy approach, Jeffrey (2017) and D'Hooghe (2010) claim that it mainly includes what the government believes is more "suitable" and "enjoyable" to the rest which emphasises almost exclusively on traditional culture. And this refers to "an amalgam of Confucian social and political values, folk and high customs and art, and the Chinese language" (Wuthnow, 2008, p.9) or "mainstream Han Chinese culture" (Jeffrey, 2017).

### **2. 1. 3 China's Public Diplomacy Dilemma and Chinese Government's Communication Style**

"Without communication, there is no diplomacy," claimed by Jnsson (2016). If public diplomacy is an art of communication, the Chinese government has not yet mastered this skill according to many western and Chinese scholars. It is not easy task for Beijing to communicate with European countries for the purpose of image projecting and soft power building. Besides the fact that Beijing faces credibility and legitimacy issues, there is also a clearly profound cultural gap between China and target western countries. Moreover, as stated above, many foreign audiences have already had a negative opinion against China. Some Chinese scholars criticise that the Chinese government's foreign communication has a "propagandist tune" and "advertising flavour", which creates "audience resistance" and inefficiency (Zhang & Liu, 2008). Wang (2011) further points out that the Chinese government neglects the foreign cultures and continues to use the "concepts and languages" that are "alien to a targeted audience", which results in the ineffectiveness.

As the new technology has been astonishingly changing the way people communicate, diplomatic agencies are confronted with more challenges from the internet and social media (Jnsson, 2016). This calls for "governments to update public practices in light of societal changes" and to adopt new

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<sup>4</sup> Source: <https://www.swedenabroad.se/sv/om-utlandet-för-svenska-medborgare/>.

tools and apply new strategies to communicate both offline and online (Huijgh, 2016). Thus, a state-centric approach alone may not be effective. In this sense, introducing multiple actors who can bring more resources and more credibilities to convey the messages together with the governmental agencies is a key feature of public diplomacy in the modern time. Furthermore, digitalisation has equipped many non-state actors with legitimacy in more and more fields and has enhanced their voices. For instance, Greenpeace and Oxfam, as the leading NGOs in environmental protection and human rights, have not only been raising people's attention and pushing the discussion further but also have been able to mobilise personnel and resources to actually solve the problems. Their presence on the internet and the active online engagement from their audience and donors have showcased the power of digitalisation in the 21st century. In China's case, the government is facing a more challenging situation, namely its highly censored and controlled system of speech freedom both online and offline. This causes the distrust from the foreign audience. Besides, China has its distinguishable social media system with the West. When the western diplomats have begun to master the game of Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram which have been shaping people's perceptions and changing their behaviours nowadays, the Chinese government is a relative newcomer on these platforms, practising the basic activities reluctantly and clumsily.

## **2. 1. 4 China's Image in Europe: Strengths and Weaknesses**

China's public diplomacy is under transformation through learning from the experience of other countries (Han, 2011). According to Wang (2011), there are two new trends in China's image projection in developed countries in recent years. First and foremost, the Chinese government has begun to increase its investment in building public relations abroad. Various cultural and educational activities have been organised by the Chinese government, including cultural tours, art festivals, and etc. Secondly, Chinese policymakers have become "more attentive" to the western media coverage about China and have begun to explore the value of mass media (D'Hooghe, 2010; Wang, 2011).

Wang (2011) explores Chinese government's self-portrait by examining several key international communication products controlled by the government from 1954 to the 2000s. Within this time period, China continuously presented itself as a peaceful and "anti-hegemony" nation, as well as a "victim of foreign aggression". However, it changed its projection of a "socialist country" and a "revolutionary supporter" to an "international cooperator" in recent decades. In the case of

projecting its image specifically in Europe, D’Hooghe (2010) states that China wants to be seen as a harmonious country with its valid political system, a reliable and more importantly peaceful “economic partner”, a “trustworthy member of the international political community and “an ancient but vibrant culture”.

Regarding China’s strengths in its image projecting in Europe, Tao and Page (2013) claim that China’s increased willingness to contribute to international cooperation, especially its contributions in peacekeeping and humanitarian aid through the United Nations (UN), serves as an asset for favourability. The EU and China share same visions of strengthening their cooperation in coping with global issues, such as climate change and nuclear proliferation. They also claim that China’s economic growth can also serve as a strength in respect of dealing with global economic recovery, such as “committing itself to purchasing Greek and Spanish government bonds” in 2010.

D’Hooghe (2010) further states that the weakness of China’s image projecting in Europe lays in its misperception of “European values”. A big obstacle for the effectiveness of China’s public diplomacy is the fundamental gap between “Chinese and European ideas and values”. The Chinese government has kept seeking the recognition from Europe on its politics and their economic partnership but has neglected the fact that European society is highly driven by “the values of democracy, human rights, rule of law, freedom of speech, and etc.”

## **2. 1. 5 China’s Public Diplomacy with Digital Diaspora Communities**

Brinkerhoff (2012) claims that the importance of diaspora networks not only exists in domestic issues but also global affairs. They are able to help other diasporas to better integrate into the local society, to build trade networks, and even to influence the political system and governance. Especially in the information and digital age, they have more potential to provide “constructive political and socio-economic contribution” through the digital tools at an unexpectedly fast speed without the restriction of borders (pp.3-7). Moreover, diasporas may gradually evolve into the advocators of the government of their home country. Through the communication platforms they build (especially online), they are able to “explore identity and mobilise these to foster democratic values and contribute to security and socio-economic development in their homelands” (p.12). Biao (2006) states the importance of informal networks or personal connections among overseas Chinese professionals (OCPs) in information and knowledge sharing. He finds out that the Chinese

government has been encouraging the knowledge sharing through informal diaspora networks. Through this encouragement process, the formal networks and informal networks often overlap. Interestingly, according to his research, “83% of OCPs listed personal connections with former classmates and colleagues as the most important means of establishing connections with China institutes” (p.51).

## **2. 2 Research Gap and Significance**

### **2. 2. 1 Limitations on the Evaluation and Assessment of Public Diplomacy**

Among most of the related literature, the evaluation and assessment of public diplomacy and soft power remain a difficult part in the academic circles. Nye (2008) claims that “whether a particular asset is an attractive power resource can be measured through polls or focus groups. And whether that attraction, in turn, produces desired policy outcomes has to be judged in each particular case”. Thus, the measurement of the effectiveness of public diplomacy lies in the “change of minds” which can be reflected in “interviews or polls”. Even though, many western and Chinese scholars have been devoting to find out more credible and reliable ways to assess the effectiveness and outcomes of China’s public diplomacy campaigns. Wang (2011) examines the opinions stated by the opinion leaders of foreign countries towards China in order to evaluate the image of China in one targeted country. Because not all of the general public of a country is interested in foreign affairs, then their opinions are “susceptible to public opinion leaders’ influence” (Rosenau, 1961). D’Hooghe (2010) measures three European countries’ perceptions of China by using opinion polls. She analyses Europeans’ views of China on issues such as security threat, economic partnership, and political values. However, all these scholars point out that there are many limitations of these measures. For instance, people’s perceptions or public opinions are changeable and are usually affected by many unpredictable factors, such as the relative economic ratio between two countries, bilateral investment relations, military expenditures, international incidents, and etc. (Jervis, 1968; D’Hooghe, 2010; Reilly, 2012).

Based on all the limitations which have been declared by scholars repeatedly with no satisfactory resolutions, this research will not touch the field of evaluation and assessment and will merely focus on examining the public diplomacy practice of the Chinese government. The researcher is dedicated

to finding out the new development in China's public diplomacy strategies through empirical evidence in order to contribute to the field of assessment in return.

### **2. 2. 2 Development on the Diversity of Non-State Actors**

With China becoming increasingly important in global affairs, it begins to realise the urgent importance of building soft power and a positive image. And many scholars who study China's public diplomacy claim that there is an increase in the diversity of the actors participating in China's public diplomacy. They mainly focus on the cultural and educational institutes, as well as NGOs. And they conclude that even Beijing has increased the participation of the non-state actors, these actors are still "not fully independent actors" and are thus "regulated, supervised or co-opted by the government" (D'Hooghe, 2015, p.133). However, the overseas Chinese groups have been growing and developing so fast in recent years, especially in the information and digital age, traditional non-state actors who are dependent on the government are not the only participants in the public diplomacy campaigns anymore. But rarely any scholars, no matter western or Chinese, have paid enough attention specifically on the overall evaluation of the non-state actors who have been involved in China's public diplomacy. When it comes to the discussion on these fully independent non-state actors, there are only a few comments on this topic without the verification from the empirical evidence. Even some Chinese scholar (Biao, 2006) mentions the importance of the Chinese diaspora groups, there are no clear connections between these diaspora groups and China's public diplomacy. Therefore, the researcher realises the urgent need for an overview of the most updated version of the participants and their relative networks in China's public diplomacy.

### **2. 2. 3 Relative Networks in China's Public Diplomacy**

Concerning the importance of networks in public diplomacy, many western scholars have devoted researches combining both empirical studies of specific countries and contemporary public diplomacy theory (Fisher, 2013; Huijgh, 2016; Gerzon, 2010). While in a country like China where relationships ("guanxi") and networks ("quanzi") are an indispensable element of the social functioning and human interaction, there is rarely any researchers pay too much attention to the network within China's public diplomacy system. Some Chinese scholars discuss the cooperation public diplomacy network between China and the US on the climate change issue (Yang, Wang, R & Wang, J., 2017). Other Chinese scholars usually like to pay more attention to the effects of



individual actors and the evaluation of outcomes, but haven't yet put the actors together and examine the flow among the relation web of China's public diplomacy.

Therefore, this research aims to find out more evidence and insights through specific case studies and interviews on whether the Chinese government has increased the diversity of actors who participate in the public diplomacy campaigns. And the research will further evaluate the network of China's public diplomacy in the Netherlands and how each actor collaborates with others in order to bring the optimal results. Last but not the least, this research will also lay emphasis on the involvement of fully independent Chinese diaspora groups and how they contribute to China's public diplomacy networks in the Netherlands.

#### **2. 2. 4 China's Public Diplomacy Strategies towards Targeted European Countries**

China has distinct public diplomacy strategies towards different regions and countries. Among European countries, mainly central countries, namely the United Kingdom, Germany, and France are under consideration. With most researchers focusing on examining China's soft power building and public diplomacy strategies in few major European countries, more empirical studies are needed for testing the theoretical arguments in other countries. Therefore, more studies focusing on the specific bilateral relationship between China and individual European countries are needed.

Concerning the cases under evaluation, most of the previous evaluations on China's domestic public diplomacy campaigns almost all focus on the mega-events and the most eye-catching campaigns, such as the Beijing Olympic Games and the Shanghai Expo. Regarding the campaigns abroad, some scholar evaluates China's corporate diplomacy in Africa and lays emphasis on the importance of the corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Tang & Liu, 2011), while some examine China's huge public diplomacy campaign in its neighbourhood and point out China's objective of building the image of "a non-threatening good neighbour" (Wei, 2016; D'Hooghe, 2015). Even some scholars examine the cultural events held by the Chinese government in western countries, they only focus on the large-scale events, such as the Chinese New Year celebration. However, because of the diversity of China's foreign policy goals in different countries, more systematic case studies are needed to further explore the discourse of China's public diplomacy change over time. Besides all these large-scale campaigns, more case studies on less visible initiatives which have been continuously carrying

out by the government declare more attention. By examining them, this research will be able to contribute a different perspective to the field.

In regard to the time period, lots of critics have been given to the Chinese government on its behaviours before 2012. Does Beijing change its strategies gradually or stay the same? There is no existing literature can provide a satisfactory answer. By evaluating a series of public diplomacy activities in one targeted country, this research will be able to enrich the understanding of the evolvement and development of China's public strategies over time. And the exclusive information and interesting findings generated from this research will also provide insights to the modern public diplomacy studies, which might be able to provide some inspiration for further studies and to lead to more interesting research questions.

### **2. 2. 5 Social Significance**

In regard to the societal relevance, the Chinese government, Chinese companies, and China as a nation are highly affected by the fact that China is in lack of soft power and has a relatively negative image abroad. Therefore, China's policymakers have been investing a large number of funds and expertise in order to solve the puzzle of how to successfully build China's soft power abroad. However, the Chinese government finds it difficult to gain credibility and legitimacy among its global audience. More and more Chinese scholars point out the problem of lacking "scientific assessment" and systematic evaluation on China's overseas public diplomacy strategies (Wang, 2011; Lin, 2012; Cao, 2016). By providing a detailed analysis of the highly debated issues on China's public diplomacy practices, this research will be able to provide a clear landscape of the current development and limitation through case evaluation. Therefore, this research aims to contribute to the strategy building and policy making for the Chinese government.

# III. Theoretical Framework

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## **3. 1 Modern Public Diplomacy Theory**

Following the introduction of public diplomacy and the literature review on China's public diplomacy practice and its key elements, this section further explores the ideas and arguments from the modern public diplomacy theory. And the concepts and arguments derived from the contemporary theory will be further applied in the analysis in order to reach a better understanding on China's public diplomacy in the Netherlands and the engagement of non-state actors.

### **3. 1. 1 Components of Public Diplomacy**

Western and Chinese scholars have some different opinions on the components of public diplomacy. D'Hooghe (2015) claims that "citizen diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and strategic communications" are the three main components of public diplomacy. Citizen diplomacy, or civil diplomacy, offers the two-way communication which focuses on direct human interaction. It is usually conducted through education exchange programmes, cultural activities, and sometimes business events. While cultural diplomacy lays emphasis on the understanding of each other's cultures, ideas and values, and can be conducted through language exchanges, art exhibitions, dance performance, and etc. However, for many Chinese scholars, civil diplomacy, or people diplomacy, cannot be separated with cultural diplomacy. Considering the fact that civil diplomacy and cultural diplomacy overlap with each other in many aspects, Han (2011) and Cao (2016) divide public diplomacy only into cultural and/or educational exchanges and "media communication". Moreover, the so-called cultural and people diplomacy with a strong Chinese characteristic is also derived from Chinese scholars' and leaders' understanding of cultural relations and human interactions. Moreover, in this research, "strategic communications" and media communications refer to the similar subject, that is the public diplomacy campaigns using media and publications. In general, compared with the traditional diplomacy which is the track-I diplomacy, the new public diplomacy which pays close attention to human interaction and cultural exchange. It is believed that the new public diplomacy could build a valid relation with the target community and thus to "transcend political difficulties" for the government (D'Hooghe, 2015).

### **3. 1. 2 Governments' Credibility Issue and the Involvement of Non-State Actors**

Melissen (2005) states that public diplomacy won't be effective if the messages sent by the government are not consistent with "a country's foreign policy and military actions". For example, the media coverage of Beijing's military action in the South China Sea would potentially damage the image of China as a "non-threatening neighbour" in South-East Asia. Moreover, diplomats have more difficulties in practising public diplomacy in countries with divergent values and cultures. Because of the differences, the diplomats not only need to carefully craft the content and the tone of the messages but also need to deal with foreign public's sceptical attitude towards their motives. In the situation that the governments haven't gained trust from the foreign public and thus is in lack of credibility, it would be more "effective" to invite non-state actors from "the sending countries' own civil society" and local communities in the host countries to facilitate the public diplomacy process. In practice, lessons from the US prove that public diplomacy actions can benefit from the "limited use" of corporates' expertise, especially in "public relations and marketing". This leads to the exploration of collaborative public diplomacy or the utilisation of the networks.

### **3. 1. 3 Collaborative Public Diplomacy and the Network**

Fisher (2013) claims that "a successful public diplomacy strategy will find ways to collaborate within the multi-hub, multidirectional networks that exist between communities around the world" in this network society in the 21st century. He believes that the modern public diplomacy is more about bringing out the potentials of these connections among various communities, instead of obtaining "absolute control" over them which will limit the potential benefits and influence which they could bring into the process. These participants are more than just a "service provider", but "partners" who can bring the different perspective, expertise, experience and other valuable connections. The government should listen to their voices and count them into the organising and delivering procedures. More importantly, this requires governments change its dominant and "assertive mindset" and strategies and avoid the nominal partnership in order to achieve the network synergy (pp. 4-6).

Gerzon (2010) further indicates that the contemporary public diplomacy may evolve into an employ of the "interconnected networks" in practice. Various actors during this process contribute different relations and connections to the public diplomacy campaigns. This collaborative networks set the

government agencies as the hub and connect with other actors, such as non-governmental organisations, sub-state actors and non-state actors. Under the wave of globalisation and with the flourish of the information age, the members or the points in the networks is becoming increasingly diverse. Zaharna (2010) even stresses that increasing the diversity of the network itself is “a means to improve it”. In order to fully utilise the collaborative network, the government should understand the “dynamic nature” of it and relationships among the actors are not “static” (p.8).

### **3. 2 Variables and Operationalisation**

#### **3. 2. 1 Dependent Variable**

The dependent variable of this research is *the involvement of the non-state actors in China’s public diplomacy in the Netherlands*. This refers to the level of the involvement of the governmental actors and non-state actors, as well as the expression and creation freedom of the latter in specific public diplomacy campaigns. The non-state actors in this research refer to the actors who are not governmental agencies, including cultural and educational institutes set up by the government and the fully independent actors from the Chinese diaspora groups.

On the basis of the existing literature and discussion, China’s Public diplomacy campaigns in the Netherlands in this research include the following feature. First, it is initiated, authorised, led and supported by the Chinese government, mainly the Chinese Embassy in the Hague; second, it is usually performed by non-state actors, such as Chinese cultural and educational institutions, as well as diaspora groups; third, “the content concerns the field of humanities and includes issues such as language, religion, ethnicity, ideology, culture, education, science, and etc” (D’Hooghe, 2015); fourth, with the Dutch publics and Chinese diasporas in the Netherlands as the target groups; Lastly, it performed through activities like “cultural exchanges and media publicity” (Cao, 2016).

This research will examine the involvement and operationalise the dependent variable by firstly identifying different kinds of the actors in specific public diplomacy campaigns and then examining the level of their involvement, which refers to their roles and impact in each activity. In the first step, the researcher will identify the kinds of the actors who participated in the specific public

diplomacy activities. And the researcher will find out whether there is a clear increase or decrease of the diversity of non-state actors in such activities. For example, besides the traditional non-state actors, namely institutes set up by the Chinese government, this research will identify whether there are relatively new non-state actors joining the campaigns. This requires the researcher to examine the main public diplomacy activities in order to identify the key actors who jointly held the events with the government and their natures. The first step can be finished mainly through information gathered from online sources. In the second step, the researcher will examine the level of such involvement. This refers to the role and the impact of each non-state actor in public diplomacy campaigns. And specifically, this can be operationalised in examining these elements in different phases in a campaign. At the organising phase, this research will find out who initiated the campaign and in what level the subjective initiative of non-state actors is. At the delivery phase, what the roles of the non-state actors and their relative impact are. This step relies on both online sources and the insights gathered from the interviews.

### **3. 2. 2 Independent Variable**

The independent variable of this research is *the Chinese government and its public diplomacy strategies towards the Europe/the Netherlands*. The Chinese government in this researcher mainly refers the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China (MFA of China), the Chinese embassy in the Hague, and the Ministry of Culture and Education of China. And according to the policy papers and related statements from its official website, the MFA of China has been actively changing its public diplomacy strategies towards the European countries.

Started from 2006, the phrases “cultural exchanges” and “people-to-people exchanges” have increased their appearances in the China-EU joint statements and other Chinese policy papers. In “The Joint Statement of the Ninth China-EU Leaders’ Meeting” in 2006, it states that China and member states from the EU support and encourage the increase of cultural exchanges, especially the visits of performance groups and artists (MFA of China, 2006). In 2012, Beijing expresses its satisfaction in the improvement of the China-EU cultural communication and further agrees that it will strengthen their cooperation in education, culture, language diversity and youth exchange programmes (MFA of China, 2012). In 2013, “The China-EU Cooperation 2020 Strategy” states that the cultural and educational exchange system is “the third pillar” of the China-EU cooperation. The Chinese government will enhance the exchanges through 1) establishing cultural centres and

giving impetus to the long-term cultural cooperation; 2) encouraging the spread of Chinese language education; 3) encouraging the communication between Chinese and EU scholars through summits and people-to-people exchanges; 4) supporting the establishment of the China research centres in the EU universities; and 5) promoting the cooperation between the two in media, publication and broadcasting (MFA of China, 2013). In 2014, the Chinese government further elaborates in its “EU Policy Paper” that it will actively promote their cooperation in education, culture, media publicity and youth exchange programs (MFA of China, 2014).

Therefore, this research will try to find out what has been changed in China’s public diplomacy in the Netherlands regarding the involvement of non-state actors following the strategy change by tracing the evolvement of its public diplomacy campaigns from 2006 to 2018.

### **3. 3 Hypotheses**

The existing literature and theories, as well as researcher’s preliminary observation and examination, lead to the formation of the four following hypotheses:

*H1*: The Chinese government has increased the involvement and diversity of non-state actors in its public diplomacy campaigns in the Netherlands.

The first hypothesis is preliminarily formed according to the existing literature and theory which state that the increase of the diversity of non-state or sub-state actors and the improvement of their involvement will bring about successful public diplomacy outcomes. What’s more, from the basic investigation, the researcher is able to identify that more and more non-traditional and new non-state actors, namely the ones besides Confucius Institutes and Cultural Centres, have been emerging in China’s public diplomacy campaigns.

*H2*: The Chinese government has begun to develop and maintain the network for public diplomacy.

Since there is rarely any articles discussing the network effect in China’s public diplomacy, the second hypothesis merely comes from the basic investigation from the empirical evidence in the Netherlands and the theory built upon empirical evidence from other countries. From the online sources, the researcher is able to identify a rough outline of the network the Chinese government

has been engaging, maintaining and developing. However, for the scope, operation and impact of this network in China's public diplomacy, it still yields for deeper examination and analysis in order to test this assumption.

*H3:* The Chinese government has raised its awareness on the importance of diaspora groups in the Netherlands and has gradually increased their involvement in its public diplomacy campaigns.

According to the information gathered from the website, the Chinese Embassy has begun to raise its attention on the Chinese diaspora groups in the Netherlands since 2013, especially the Overseas Chinese Professionals. Also, based on the existing literature on diaspora diplomacy, the Chinese government is trying to encourage the knowledge exchanges among students and scholars. This research will further explore other relevant diaspora groups which have joined China's public diplomacy campaigns and examine their roles and impacts in this process.

*H4:* The Chinese government has gradually increased the cooperation with relevant local Dutch stakeholders.

According to the existing literature, increasing the diversity of non-state actors who participate in public diplomacy is not limited to diaspora groups, namely the overseas Chinese in this research, but also includes more involvement of appropriate local stakeholders. That is to say, whether the Chinese government has increased the cooperation with Dutch communities? In order to test this hypothesis, the researcher will examine specific cases for further enlightenment.



## IV. Research Design

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### 4. 1 Case Selection

This research will examine the performance of China's public diplomacy in the Netherlands in the time period from 2006 to 2018, focusing on the involvement and participation of the Chinese non-state actors and the development of the relative network. The reason that the researcher chooses 2006 to be the start year of the research is that Beijing started to shift more focus on cultural diplomacy from this year<sup>5</sup> and the first Confucius Institute in the Netherlands was built in this year. Therefore, base on the preliminary investigation and research, the researcher carefully selects the most typical and important non-state actors, namely four Chinese institutes and groups, which have played indispensable roles in China's public diplomacy in the Netherlands. They are the Confucius Institutes at Leiden University and Groningen University, the Association of Chinese Students and Scholars in the Netherlands (the ACSSNL), the Chinese Culture Centre in the Hague (The CCChague), and Chinese digital diaspora groups.

As the bilateral relation between China and the Netherlands keeps developing, China's public diplomacy practices in the Netherlands during the past few years are comprehensive and representative in the EU. The researcher chooses the Netherlands as the host country for several reasons. First, the Netherlands is the fifth biggest economy in the Eurozone (International Monetary Fund, 2017). Second, the Netherlands has been China's third biggest trade partner in European Union since 2014 and the third biggest investor in China among all EU countries by the end of 2016. China is one of the top three countries the Netherlands has given priority to the development and cooperation of education (MFA of PRC, 2017). In the case of China's public diplomacy strategies in the Netherlands, Beijing conducted quite a number of important activities. Only in the past two years (2016 and 2017), the Chinese government has newly opened a cultural centre in the Hague, transported pandas by using Dutch royal airplane, and held various cultural exhibitions and events in different cities in the Netherlands.

Regarding four selected institutes and groups under evaluation, the Confucius Institute at Leiden University and Groningen University were founded in 2006 and 2011 respectively, following

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<sup>5</sup> For more details on Beijing's foreign policies, please refer to the "Independent Variable" section under "Theoretical Framework" above.

Beijing's foreign policy strategy with respect to public diplomacy and specifically cultural exchanges. They have been providing Chinese language courses, cultural activities and academic exchanges as an academic institute until now. In 2016, the CCChague was newly built in the Hague which is the political and cultural centre of the Netherlands. And it is "an official, non-profit cultural institution set up by the Chinese government" (CCChague, 2016). A variety of events have been held by the CCChague, such as art exhibitions, dance performances, and etc. Compare with the educational and cultural institutes of the West who have more "diverse financial resources" and ideological independence, Confucius Institutes and the CCChague are clearly more dependent on the Chinese government. Not only they receive funding or sponsorships from the government, but also "policy guidance and instructions" (Han, 2010). Regarding the fact that China's civil society groups are underdeveloped, the ACSSNL is one outstanding Chinese diaspora group in the Netherlands which was established by Chinese scholars and students for more than twenty years till now. It is not only sponsored by the Chinese government but also recognised by the Chinese embassy in the Hague and receive the guidance, instructions and sponsorships from the embassy.

Table 1. Selected Institutes or Groups

<b>Non-State Actors</b>	<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Sponsorship</b>	<b>Targeted Group</b>
Confucius Institutes	Non-profit education institute set up by the Chinese government	Academic and cultural programs	The Chinese government	The Dutch public
CCChague	Non-profit cultural institute set up by the Chinese government	Cultural activities	The Chinese government	The Dutch public and Chinese diasporas
ACSSNL	OCPs group	Academic and cultural events	Multiple kinds of sponsors	Chinese students and scholars
Hoiiland	Digital diaspora groups	Online networks	Self-sufficient	Chinese diasporas

## **4. 2 Data Collection & Methods**

This research will mainly apply qualitative research method by combing case studies with interviews. And the interviews are based on the data collected from reliable and multiple online sources. In the first step, the researcher will gather background and secondary information from the website and social media of four institutes and groups in order to provide a general analysis on each actor's nature, function and most importantly main activities (cases) it has carried out over years. The information of the events held by Confucius Institutes, the ACSSNL and the CCChague cannot be found on one single website but spread over many online platforms. In the second step, the researcher will collect "new primary information" through face-to-face or telephone interviews (Pierce, 2011). And when conducting the interview questionnaires, the researcher will use more open-ended questions for insights.<sup>6</sup>

### **4. 2. 1 Confucius Institutes**

For the Confucius Institutes at Leiden University and Groningen University, as well as their branch in Amsterdam, their information and related data can be collected through its official website and social media account (Facebook<sup>7</sup> only), as well as the Hanban official website. They keep the audience (students and other interested people) updated with detailed and timely information. On the Facebook account (with 625 followers)<sup>8</sup>, it posts regularly and actively (three to five times a week and sometimes even on a daily basis) with various kinds of information as well as multimedia content, such as informative introductions of art performance, notifications of competition and events, and videos about the institute itself. What's more, the institutes maintain an interactive relationship with its audience online by answering each comment and question. On the official website, the information is sufficient in regard to its introduction and board members, the fields it covers, and services it offers. As mentioned at the beginning of this research, a third Confucius Institute was opened in 2017 in Maastricht. However, since there is no information and data online available for this institute, this research won't include it.

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<sup>6</sup> For a detailed overview of the data sources, list of the interviewees and the forms of the interviews, please refer to the Appendix "Table 2. Data Sources & Interview List".

<sup>7</sup> Since the Confucius Institutes at Leiden University does not have a lot of online appearance, the "Facebook" account and "website" of Confucius Institutes in this research only refers the account of the Confucius Institute at Groningen University.

<sup>8</sup> By the time of 5 March 2018.

To be clear, this research intends to find out whether there are any changes in the performance of this non-state actor and what has been improved. Thus, the researcher will only spend limited space in discussing the nature, operation mode, or other general identification of the Confucius Institutes which can be found in many researches conducted by other scholars (Jeffery, 2017; Chan & Hunter, 2012; Hartig, 2012; D’Hooghe, 2015). For example, this research will not introduce what is “Confucius classrooms” or “Chinese Bridge Competitions”. In this research, the focus will be on the evaluation of organisational behaviours of individual institutes and the actual activities it conducted through the years. Preliminarily, the researcher will compare cases to figure out whether there are any obvious changes in these activities conducted by the Confucius Institutes overtimes. Besides that, the research also reviews other literature on the Confucius Institutes in other countries, such as Australia, in order to have a broader understanding of the functioning and nature. The researcher will then build interview questionnaires based on the primary analysis. And the researcher conducted a face-to-face interview with the Dutch director of the Confucius Institutes at Leiden University, Prof. Maghiel van Crevel, for around half an hour.

#### **4. 2. 2 The CCChague**

The information on the CCChague is gathered through both the Facebook account of the Chinese Embassy in the Hague and the CCChague website. From the basic research through online sources, the researcher has already been able to identify few important changes in its behaviours regarding the cultural exchanges it has been conducting. And the detailed information on specific events is gathered through researcher’s personal observations in few activities and the interviews with the Chinese artists who joined the performances and other representatives who attended the events. The researcher didn’t get the chance to interview its director, Mr. Yang Xiaolong, directly. But fortunately, the researcher found an interview with him on the CCChague conducted by a local Dutch business agency. From the interviews conducted with key participants, the researcher is able to understand the link between the CCChague with other non-state actors and how they connect and cooperate with each other.

The researcher will focus on evaluating the events it held, namely the Chinese cultural week in 2017, the International Women’s Day event on 8 March 2018, the Chinese diasporas spring social gathering in March 2018, and the Sino-Dutch co-operated contemporary drama in March 2018. Since it is newly built, the researcher will try to find out whether there were any changes regarding

its performances at the beginning of its opening. That is to say, whether the CCChague has any behaviour changes which are catered to the contemporary public diplomacy theory and critics from the scholars. And the research will further focus on what features it possesses and what changes it carries. In addition, the researcher will try to find out the role of the CCChague in the process of China's public diplomacy strategies implementation in the Netherlands and its impact on the collaborative network. This will be found out from the interview with the Chinese artist, Mr. Wei Liangfu, who is also a PhD student at Delft University and thus has been frequently participating in the cultural performances conducted by the ACSSNL and the Chinese Embassy.

#### **4. 2. 3 The ACSSNL**

With regard to the ACSSNL, all the information can be found at its official website<sup>9</sup>, its Chinese social media channels (Weibo and WeChat), and its western social media account Facebook<sup>10</sup>. Its website started to release information from 2012 and thus the researcher will examine the ACSSNL during the time period from 2012 to 2018. More importantly, all information regarding news, events, elections and meetings can be found under the "Activities-Notices & News" section at its website. And each post from this section contains detailed introduction and coverage of the events, including the list of people who attended the event and who gave speeches and the main content of the speeches.

According to the preliminary information the researcher gathered from these online sources, the researcher selects three key members both from the ACSSNL board and one of its branch, "the Association of Chinese Students and Scholars in Leiden" (Leiden branch in short). These three interviewees are the president of the ACSSNL council, the president of the Leiden branch and the project manager of the ACSSNL council. And each interview, conducted via face-to-face conversations in April, lasted from half an hour to one hour.

Since it is a diaspora group, many activities it has carried out may have no governmental influence on them. Thus, the purpose of the investigation at its website and conducting interviews with key participants is to find out: firstly, whether the Chinese Embassy has increased its attention paid on the ACSSNL and has increased the role of the association in its public diplomacy campaigns;

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<sup>9</sup> Source: <http://www.acssnl.org>.

<sup>10</sup> Source: [https://www.facebook.com/pg/acssnl.main/posts/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/acssnl.main/posts/?ref=page_internal).

secondly, how the Chinese Embassy utilises and influences the association to conduct activities to realise its public diplomacy goals; thirdly, how the embassy supports and provide sponsorships. Besides the routine activities it conducts, the researcher will focus on evaluating the events which reflect China's public diplomacy strategies through the policy papers. The interviews focus on evaluating two key events which were initiated by the Chinese Embassy. They are "the Young Scholars Summit" in 2017 December and "the association summit for the 19th National Congress of the CPC" in 2017 with the attendance of the Chinese ambassador and other diplomats.

#### **4. 2. 4 Chinese Digital Diaspora Groups**

In this research, the Chinese digital diaspora groups in the Netherlands refer to the two biggest Chinese online media companies, namely Hoiand ("Holland Wei Shenhuo")<sup>11</sup> and Gogodutch ("Hele" Website)<sup>12</sup>. All the information and data on them is gathered through their websites and social media. Base on this information, the researcher is able to identify their roles, impacts, and values in the Chinese diaspora groups. During the preliminary investigation, the researcher finds their indispensable role in China's public diplomacy campaigns. Therefore, this research selected one case, the flower parade in April 2018, to further declare their connection with the Chinese Embassy and how they participated in a specific part of this event. The project manager of Hoiand for organising this specific event, Mr. An Xuanran, accepted the interview and provided more insights on the collaboration between the Chinese Embassy and Hoiand.

#### **4. 2. 5 Other Key Actors**

The researcher also contacted the Chinese Embassy in the Hague and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands (the Dutch MFA). The former rejected the interview due to their strict rules on giving opinions. For the latter, Mr. Remy Cristini, the senior policy officer from the Asia and Oceania Department, provided few comments on researcher's questions through emails.

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<sup>11</sup> Source: <https://www.dutchcn.com>.

<sup>12</sup> Source: <http://www.gogodutch.net>.

## V. Analysis

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### 5. 1 Cultural and Educational Institutes Set Up by the Chinese Government

In order to increase its cultural influence and soft power around the globe, Beijing has been actively changing the strategic deployment of its cultural diplomacy. Confucius Institutes and Chinese Cultural Centres are probably the most important actors created by the Chinese government in the cultural exchange process. However, the government tends to draw a distinction between them and Chinese governmental agencies. Therefore, these two major actors are claimed to be the “non-profit” cultural and educational institutes. Even though, both of these institutes possess a strong governmental flavour considering that they are set up and founded by the government. Following the establishment of Confucius Institutes and Chinese Cultural Centres in many major European cities, such as Paris, Berlin and London, the Confucius Institute in the Netherlands was established in 2006. Ten years after that, the Chinese Cultural Centre in the Hague was finalised.

They have held various kinds of cultural exchange events. These include large-scale and long-term project, for example, the annual celebration event for “the Happy Chinese New Year” which is a brand the Chinese government has been actively building. They also include relatively small events, such as art exhibitions and dance performances. Corresponding to the cultural diplomacy abroad, the Chinese government has also been “reform the cultural industries at home” (Yun, 2011).

#### 5. 1. 1 The CCChague

This cultural institute was established in 2016 and begin to hold events since 2017. The director of the CCChague, Mr. Yang Xiaolong, confirms that this institute has “an intergovernmental background” and this is the main reason why it is located in the Hague, which is considered to be “the political and cultural centre of the Netherlands” (The Hague Business Agency, 2017).

#### Changes and Highlights of Its Activities

The main themes the Chinese government sets for its cultural diplomacy campaigns vary in different targeted countries. And it is a reflection of how a foreign country is perceived by Beijing. In the case of the Netherlands, its image projection in China includes its innovation in various

industries (such as innovative architecture, new energy, and hydraulic engineering) and the well-being of the Dutch citizens.<sup>13</sup> Based on this understanding and reflection, the very first “China Cultural Week themed ‘Inheritance and Innovation: China Intangible Cultural Heritage’ was held in the CCChague” in June 2017.<sup>14</sup> Besides the traditional Chinese art performances and exhibitions which are usually conducted during the cultural exchanges, this event also introduced a new concept of China, that is “innovation shows” and “the creative products” (CCChague, 2017). A Chinese artist and a local Dutch artists group jointly performed a show which mixed the Dutch contemporary dance and Chinese traditional music together. After the performances, the CCChague presented “the creative products of Jiangsu Intangible Cultural Heritage” to the audience.

Similar traits can be found in another activity organised by the CCChague and the Chinese Embassy. In March 2018, a Sino-Dutch co-operated contemporary drama was performed in the Hague. According to the news, this drama presented the traditional Chinese love story with the modern Dutch means of artistic expression. This show was praised by the Chinese Embassy because it was able to contribute to the cultural fusion between the two, to connect with the audience both mentally and artistically, and thus to truly present the charm of the Chinese culture.

In addition to the performances and exhibitions, there is another event which is worth mentioning here. That is the International Women’s Day event on March 8, 2018. According to both Western and Chinese scholars, the Chinese government merely presents its culture to the audience during cultural exchanges, while the West also introduces its ideologies on topics covering human rights, gender equality, freedom of speech, and etc. This event shows a slight evolution of China’s public diplomacy strategies in regard to the content it promotes. This event was jointly organised by the CCChague, the Chinese Embassy, and the International Women’s Contact The Hague (IWC) which is a social club. And the female audience with more than 20 different nationalities joined the event.

Besides conducting cultural exchange activities, the CCChague also functions as a networking hub to connect the Chinese diaspora communities, the Chinese governmental agencies, as well as the local Dutch stakeholders together. In March 2018, the CCChague, the Chinese Embassy and the ACSSNL jointly held an event called “the Chinese diasporas spring social gathering”. Relevant

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<sup>13</sup> Source: <https://www.niyuhelan.nl/关于荷兰王国/创意产业、艺术和文化>.

<sup>14</sup> Source: <http://www.ccchague.org/en/news-show-79.html>.



representatives both from the Chinese diaspora groups and the Dutch communities all attended the gathering. From the Dutch side, the groups who joined include local football clubs, financial agencies and business companies. This gathering serves as a celebration of what has been achieved in the past in the Netherlands and a call for more future collaborations.

### **Current Limitations**

Besides the numbers and forms of these cultural activities and events, their contents are also important, which directly determine the quality of the performances. According to a Chinese artist, Mr. Wei Liangfu, who has participated in many performances, the ideas, creation and expression of the majority of these cultural performances in the Netherlands come from the local Chinese artist's groups. There are few active Chinese artist's groups who are recognised by and have been working with the government. However, since these artist groups maintain competitive relations with each other, they devote more energy to competing for benefits instead of art creation, which may result in the quality decrement in the performances.

Another phenomenon is a clear lack of young people's involvement in CCChague's cultural exchanges. Based on the observation in few events in the CCChague, the audience groups who participated initiatively or were invited are usually senior people who are usually more than 40 or 50-years old or teenagers who are under 18. This may due to the reason that the members of the Chinese artist's groups are normally over 40-years old and the content of their performances are usually catering to older generations' tastes. While young people who are more attracted to vibrant and diverse contents. This requires the CCChague continually increase the diversity of the contents and forms of its cultural exchange programs by involving appropriate young generations into the organising and delivery phases.

### **Analysis**

Before the establishment of the CCChague, the Chinese cultural exchange events in the Netherlands are dispersed to many locations and are led and performed by various actors. For example, many Chinese art shows were exhibited in various kinds of museums. It takes more time and energy for the Embassy to approach the appropriate local Dutch stakeholders and to build partnership agreements. In this sense, the CCChague puts these segments together and therefore provides a key point in China's systematic approach to its public diplomacy in the Netherlands. It not only provides a permanent, stable and fully equipped location with the different actors to facilitate their

practices in public diplomacy activities but also serves as an instrument for the Chinese government to connect different networks together. For instance, the Confucius Institutes holds a Chinese language contest called “Chinese Bridge Competition” annually. The locations vary from one city to another and from one university to another. In April 2018, “the Groningen Confucius Institute, together with the Chinese Embassy in the Netherlands and the China Culture Centre jointly organised” this event in the CCChague. Besides, the CCChague is able to connect the existing strong ties of the Chinese government together, as well as to reach out to the weak ties, such as artist’s groups and other local Dutch stakeholders.

Interestingly, through the events it conducted, the Chinese government has begun to add a different flavour to its traditional image projection in the European countries. That is to say, Beijing not only tries to enhance its primary image as a cultural powerhouse which is full of histories and traditional cultures but also adds creativity and innovation to its image building in the Netherlands. It is based on the fact that the image projection or the soft power of the Netherlands in China lies in cultural creativity areas, such as music, design, architecture, and games. This behaviour change also indicates that Beijing has begun to increase its attention and investment in this industry. Some Chinese scholars believe that this is a prelude of Beijing’s will in strengthening its collaboration with the Netherlands in the cultural creativity industry (Du & Yang, 2017).

To achieve this, its main approaches through cultural exchanges include connecting the Chinese artists with the local Dutch artists and encouraging the collaboration between the two in order to provide shows which are easier to be accepted and understood by the Dutch audience. This is thus a solid evidence that the Chinese Embassy in the Hague is trying to tell China’s stories in a Dutch way. Another respectful attempt is from the Chinese ambassador, Mr. Wu. He claims that he has been studying Dutch after his appointment to the Netherlands and was finally able to deliver speeches in fluent Dutch after around one year’s study.<sup>15</sup> From these practices, the Chinese government not only tries to tell China’s stories in the language of the receiving country but also endeavours to learn and apply the mode of thinking and working of the hosting countries.

## **5. 1. 2 Confucius Institutes**

### **Enlargement and Operation**

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<sup>15</sup> Source: <http://www.acssnl.org>.

The Netherlands has witnessed the fast enlargement of the Confucius Institutes. After the establishment of the very first Confucius Institute in the Netherlands in 2006, this Chinese academic institute has been enlarging its scales. The second one opened in Groningen in 2011 and followed by another expand. In September 2016, “the newest branch of the Groningen Confucius Institute was opened” in the capital of the Netherlands, Amsterdam (Jamsterdam, 2016). And the third independent institute was newly established at Zuyd University of Applied Sciences in 2017. From the interview, Prof. Crevel claims that he is not aware of “any concerted efforts” from the Dutch side for such an enlargement nor a large demand of the Chinese language. And it seems to be mostly a strategy deployment from the Chinese government.

Like other Confucius Institutes around the world, the “operation mode” of the ones in the Netherlands are also “cooperation projects mostly between Chinese universities and local partners, usually also universities” (Hartig, 2012, p.263). And the institutes here still follow the original idea, that is both sides of the partnership provide a director to the institute. They are under “the authority of Hanban, the Office of Chinese Language Council International which is affiliated to the Chinese Ministry of Education” (Hartig, 2012, p. 262) And the Confucius Institutes in the Netherlands only receive a very generic framework from Hanban who intends to provide the CIs with some general understandings of the principles from the Chinese government. While with the Chinese Embassy, they only contact with each other occasionally without any specific cooperation.

### **Language Trainings and Cultural Exchange Programs**

Concerning the activities, the Confucius Institutes in the Netherlands provide a variety of educational and cultural training and activities. In general, these activities include regular language and intercultural training, regular and irregular cultural events, and youth exchange programs which offer Dutch students opportunities to visit and study in China. Some Chinese scholar claims that Confucius Institutes are more than an education institute, but a “special representation of China’s soft power which is an important contribution to enforce the good image of China” (Liu, 2007, p. 51). For many Chinese leaders, the Confucius Institutes carry the “goodwill of the Chinese people” to communicate with the world (Xinhua, 2017).

During the online information gathering process, the researcher examines the events and activities these institutes have been holding over the year and find out that the changes concerning the forms and contents of the activities are not obvious but have occurred in some aspects. In regard to the

courses the Groningen Confucius Institute offer, they started with language courses only focusing on academic students and then expanded to courses which focus on intercultural training for business groups. While the forms and contents of the cultural exchange activities have stayed the same, which means that all the courses and cultural exchange activities have been focusing on showcasing and transmitting Chinese traditional cultures, such as Chinese calligraphy, paintings, tea ceremony and martial arts. But the number of the activities and arranged trips to China have been slowly increasing over years. According to the interview, after the partnership agreement between the Leiden Confucius Institute and Shandong University which was established during the time period from 2010 to 2011, the kinds and contents of the cultural activities have remained stable. During an interview with a famous contemporary Chinese writer, Mr. Yu Hua, who was visiting the Leiden University, the Chinese Director of the Leiden Confucius Institute, Mr. Li expressed his thoughts on the current situation of Confucius Institutes and Chinese culture. He states that: “The Confucius Institutes have been adopting a typical and stereotypical mode for Chinese culture ‘going out’. It merely performs traditional Chinese cultures, such as Peking opera, Tai Chi and Chinese paper cutting, which actually reflects a limited understanding of the Chinese culture.” (Hanban, 2017). He further declares that the Confucius Institutes should not only focus on traditional culture but also the modern and contemporary Chinese culture. For example, the Groningen Confucius Institute just organised a “Chinese Cultural day” event in May 2018. Ten performances were all about the traditional Chinese culture.<sup>16</sup> However, Mr. Crevel confirmed in the interview, they should increase the diversity of the contents and forms of the courses and activities in principle, but there are no such actions in practice.

Based on the interview with Prof. Crevel who is the Dutch director of the Confucius Institute at Leiden University, the researcher understands that Confucius Institutes cannot be studied in a generalised manner. Because all the ideas and initiatives on specific programs and activities are usually from the Confucius Institutes themselves. And they vary from one Confucius Institute to another, which depends on the diverse local situations. In the case of Leiden University, because it has already enjoyed a high reputation and a relatively long tradition in providing Chinese Studies, it doesn't offer any language training to university students but only conducts cultural exchange programs. Moreover, the Leiden University itself has already enjoyed a high reputation and a long tradition in providing Chinese Studies ever since the nineteenth century, the Leiden Confucius

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<sup>16</sup> Source: [https://www.facebook.com/pg/Groningen-Confucius-Institute-108520622564327/posts/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/Groningen-Confucius-Institute-108520622564327/posts/?ref=page_internal).

Institute also conduct translation projects on Chinese novels and poems. While the Confucius Institute at Groningen University is in a different situation and it is actively raising its academic profile in Asian studies.

### **Relations between the Confucius Institutes in the Netherlands**

Regarding the relationship between the two Confucius Institutes in the Netherlands, they have been maintaining a limited collaborative relationship with each other. Like the ones in Australia, who “have no formal structure to work with” and thus no one “thinks about what can be achieved with collaboration” (Hartig, 2012, p.265), the ones in the Netherlands have not yet adopted an efficient network approach in order to broaden their collaborations and cooperations in many areas and activities. However, they do have informal communications for some cooperations, mostly for practical matters. For example, the Chinese Bridge Competition in April 2018 was a project of the Groningen Confucius Institute, the Chinese director, Mr. Li, still participated as one member of the judges.

### **Collaboration with the Local Stakeholders**

The Leiden University and the Groningen University both are joint partners to the Confucius Institutes project and also need to provide supports, such as parts of the founding, to the Confucius Institutes. This encourages the collaborative networking between the Chinese actors with the local stakeholders. Besides, because of the prestige and resources of the universities, other local stakeholders would approach the Confucius Institutes for collaboration. For instance, the organisers from the Leiden International Film Festival asked the Confucius Institutes to provide Chinese films to participate in the festival. Dutch publishers also worked with the Confucius Institutes for a project of translating Chinese literature. And occasionally, the Confucius Institutes contact the ACSSNL to promote their events.

### **Analysis**

In general, the ten-years history has not yet witnessed any obvious changes in the Confucius Institutes in the Netherlands. After the establishment and further refining the partnership agreements, the general operation, programs and cultural exchange activities have remained stable. For their roles in China’s public diplomacy network in the Netherlands, they are relatively independent individuals who are away from the “governance” and instructions of the Chinese Embassy in the Hague. This may due to the fact that they are affiliated to Hanban and receive direct

instructions from them. And there is no obvious evidence showing that they have major collaborative projects with other non-state or state actors from China's public diplomacy network.

The quality and quantity of the cultural exchange activities they conduct are purely based on the commitment of the local participants. Even though Chinese directors and other Chinese scholars have been actively discussing the possibility on the "going out" of the modern and contemporary Chinese culture, there is no observable progress has been made in practice. This may due to two reasons, that is to say, lacking resources and lacking a proper market. During the conversation between the Chinese writer Mr. Yu and the Chinese Director Mr. Li, they express the worry about the limited and sometimes zero demand of contemporary Chinese literature in the global market. It is a rarity that a modern Chinese writer could be accepted by the foreign publishers and receive relative success among foreign readers. Moreover, such connections and attempts are initiated mainly by Chinese scholars and writers themselves, while the Chinese government has not been playing a supporting role in this difficult process.<sup>17</sup> The key participants of the Confucius Institutes are usually the academic staff from the universities. On the one hand, this ensures the quality of the language training and academic profile; on the other hand, compared with the Chinese diplomats who practice public diplomacy, staff members from the Confucius Institutes have different considerations and objectives which determine their different performances.

### **5. 1. 3 Conclusion**

Base on the investigation and analysis above, these two major cultural and educational institutes set up by the Chinese government have been gradually increasing the diversity of the content and forms of the activities they have conducted. And they have been increasing the number of the relevant stakeholders and participants to work with as well. However, the changes in these two different kinds of institutes vary in multiple aspects. In the case of Confucius Institutes, there is an inapparent tendency that they are increasing the diversity of their course and activities, however, this is rather limited in many aspects. One of the reasons is that they receive direct instructions from Hanban who hasn't promoted much more about the idea of cooperating with diverse local communities or increasing the contents of relative activities. As a result, just like the Confucius Institutes in other countries, "there is no recognisable evidence that 'the Confucius Institute program is moving to a new phase of involvement of academic teaching and research'" (Hartig, 2012, p.268). While the CCChague is under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture of China and China's MFA, the

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<sup>17</sup> Source: [http://confuciusinstituut.nl/cn/view.php?a\\_id=861](http://confuciusinstituut.nl/cn/view.php?a_id=861).

instructions, ideas and initiatives of its activities come directly from the Chinese diplomatic agencies and itself. Right after the opening of the CCChague, the activities they have conducted have already indicated an increasing diversity no matter in the contents and forms of the cultural exchanges, or the stakeholders and participants they work with.

Compared with the Confucius Institutes, the CCChague also possesses another distinguishing feature. It is not only a cultural institute which carries the mission of transmitting Chinese culture but also a network hub who has been developed by the Chinese government to connect with relevant actors in the Netherlands whether from the local Dutch community or the Chinese diaspora groups. By establishing the CCChague, the Chinese government is able to keep this collaborative public diplomacy network functioning in a more efficient way.

## **5. 2 The Chinese Diaspora Groups in the Netherlands**

On the one hand, compared with the traditional non-state actors who are commonly set up and utilised by the Chinese government, namely cultural and educational institutes, the Chinese diaspora groups have fundamentally different features. That is to say, they are fully independent non-state actors. They are set up by the people who are from the groups, develops on their own, and thus are self-sufficient or have many other sponsorships. The Chinese government discovers them and begins to collaborate with them due to the fact that they blossom out to a certain degree that they possess many assets that the government is in lack of, such as informal networks and digital assistance.

On the other hand, compared with other major Asian countries' diaspora groups in the Netherlands, namely South Korea and Japan, the Chinese diaspora groups mainly focus on connecting with the Chinese expats by offering services including providing local information and organising activities. While diaspora groups of South Korea and Japan in the Netherlands are one of the major actors in transmitting their own cultures and connecting their expats with the Dutch population. A Japanese diaspora group called "Japan Cultural Exchange" is extremely outstanding in this process. It was established in 2015 by a group of Japanese expats in the Netherlands. And surprisingly, it flourishes within three years starting from initially offering Japanese language classes, cultural exchange

events, Japanese products and publications to collaborating with the Japanese Embassy in order to organise giant events such as “Japan Day” and annual fairs like Japanese market.<sup>18</sup> However, the existing Chinese civil groups in the Netherlands only lay emphasis on providing assistance and services with Chinese diasporas for their better integration into the Netherlands. They have not yet begun to focus on transmitting Chinese culture in the Netherlands nor connecting Chinese with the Dutch people. However, some groups attempted in doing the latter individually (without the help from other organisations or governmental agencies, such as universities and the Chinese Embassy in the Hague), but no obviously positive results have been reached so far.<sup>19</sup> Base on the preliminary investigation, this research focuses on the two existing and active Chinese diaspora groups in the Netherlands, namely the students association (the ACSSNL) and news media companies. And the following sections discuss their involvement in China’s public diplomacy campaigns through several case studies and interviews with few key participants.

### **5. 2. 1 The ACSSNL—OCPs Groups**

According to the introduction at its website, the ACSSNL is a civil group set up by and composed of Chinese students and scholars who studied and are studying in the Netherlands. Thus, it is an Overseas Chinese Professionals group (OCPs group) or network. It was established twenty years ago and now has 17 branches in different cities in the Netherlands. And its missions include “improving the Chinese students’ experiences in the Netherlands”, “providing opportunities for the better integration of Chinese students in the local Dutch society” and “transmitting Chinese culture and history to the Dutch public”. There are four official sponsors listed on its website and they are all private companies.

### **Three Stages of the Relationship Development<sup>20</sup>**

According to the information gathered online, the researcher divides the evolvement of the relationship between the ACSSNL and the Chinese Embassy in the Hague into three stages.<sup>21</sup> At

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<sup>18</sup> All information about Japan Cultural Exchange and its related activities can be found at its website: <http://www.japanculturalexchange.nl> and its Facebook page: [https://www.facebook.com/pg/JCEamsterdam/posts/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/JCEamsterdam/posts/?ref=page_internal).

<sup>19</sup> The organisation referred here is the ACSSNL. More discussion on this topic can be found in the sections on individual diaspora groups below.

<sup>20</sup> The information of this section “Three Stages of the Relation Development” is gathered from the ACSSNL website.

<sup>21</sup> To clarify, this research and this section only covers the topic on the evolvement of the practices and collaborations between the two and does not cover the nature of such relationship because it will then become a different subject.



stage one (2012), there were no clear contacts and connections between the two. Started from stage two (2013-2016), the Chinese government began to increase its awareness on the importance of the ACSSNL. And the two started to work closely. At stage three (2017-now), the Chinese Embassy started to increase its influence in the ACSSNL, especially after the 19th National Congress of the CPC held in October 2017 in Beijing.

On August 13, 2013, the education department of the Chinese Embassy held a forum with the ACSSNL in Utrecht University for listening to opinions from students for the first time. In 2013, the staff members from the Chinese Embassy started to attend the annual meetings of the ACSSNL (no speeches were given in 2013).

The stage between 2016 to 2017 seems to be an important period for China's public diplomacy strategy's change in regard to diaspora groups, especially OCPs groups. Started from 2017 and after the finalising of the CCChague, the annual meeting and election have been moved from universities to the CCChague or the Chinese Embassy in the Hague. The ambassador Wu attended the meetings both in 2017 and 2018, handing letters of appointment to newly elected members of the ACSSNL council and branches and giving speeches. More importantly, there were two new and important events initiated, supported and sponsored by the Chinese Embassy in the Hague, namely the Young Scholars Summit for Celebrating the 45th Anniversary of the Sino-Dutch Ambassadorial-Level Diplomatic Relation in December, 2017 and the Association Forum for Studying the 19th National Congress of the CPC in October, 2017.

### **Case Studies—Key Activities<sup>22</sup>**

Concerning the activities the ACSSNL holds, the most important event is the “Talent Forum and Spring Festival Gala” for celebrating the Chinese New Year. The association holds it annually and started to collaborate with the Chinese government on this event since 2013. According to the interviews with the members of the ACSSNL council, because of the size of this event, many different sponsorships are needed. The sponsorships usually come from both private sectors (mainly the Chinese companies in the Netherlands) and public agencies (such as local municipality halls, universities and the Chinese Embassy). And the Chinese Embassy is only one of the small sponsors of this event because of its tight budget. The purpose of the speech giving by the ambassador is to

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<sup>22</sup> The information of this section “Case Studies—Main Activities” is gathered from the interviews conducted with three key participants. For more information on interviewees, please refer to the Appendix “Data Sources & Interview List”.

draw the distance closer between the Chinese expats and the government. Also, the attendance of the ambassador makes it easier for the association to ask for sponsorships and to gain support from the universities and other stakeholders.

Besides this giant annual event, each branch in different cities also has many self-initiated and relatively small activities. Each branch can receive a sponsorship around 1000 euros per activity from the Education Department of the Chinese Embassy. And it has the full freedom on the kinds, forms, and contents of these activities. Besides the funds, the embassy will also provide other supports if needed.

At the end of October 2017, an unusual event was initiated by the Chinese Embassy. That was the Association Forum for Studying the 19th National Congress of the CPC. This forum was an urgent arrangement declared by the Chinese Embassy. The embassy stated to the Leiden association to attach this forum right after the event which had been organised for one month on the topic of “consular protection with the Chinese students” two days before the actual conduct of the event. During the interview with the President of the Leiden branch, she claims that according to the ambassador Mr. Wu, the purpose of this forum on the 19th National Congress was “to clarify the misunderstandings of this congress caused by the western media and thus to present the correct message”. And it was the ambassador Wu who gave the speech on this forum. Moreover, considering students’ less interest in such kinds of lectures and the time urgency, there were no notices on the holding of such event. All the students (around 150 people) who participated in the previous event on the consular protection had no ideas on the following lecture and were “forced to stay” to listen to the lecture afterwards.

Another important event is “the Young Scholars Summit for Celebrating the 45th Anniversary of the Sino-Dutch Ambassadorial-Level Diplomatic Relation”, which was held on 1st December 2017. According to the President of the ACSSNL, Mr. Ding, this summit was a response to the 19th National Congress of the CPC in regard to its “talent or human resource strategy” and cultural exchange strategy. More than 200 Chinese students and scholars from the Netherlands participated the summit. This summit was jointly held by the ACSSNL, the Wageningen University, and the Chinese Embassy. During the summit, the representatives from the university, embassy and the student association, as well as several business elites shared their experience of self-development and personal strivings. Besides that, specialists and scholars from many fields teamed up with

students in small groups to discuss topics such as career & personal planning, pursuing doctor degrees and etc.

## **Analysis**

From the data and information gathered from the investigation and interviews, it is clear that the Chinese government has increased its awareness on the importance of diaspora groups or networks in the Netherlands, especially on OCPs groups, since 2013. The government has set up special policies regulating their activities, even sometimes nominally or formalistically. And the government actively encourages information sharing and knowledge exchanges among members in the OCPs groups by initiating more formal or informal forums or other activities. Furthermore, resources and funds have been put in to facilitate this process. Besides that, other programs related to “domestic sentiments” (D’Hooghe, 2015, p.33), “emotional attachment and political allegiance” (Biao, 2006), such as nurturing patriotism, also have been conducted more often since 2017. During these activities or programmes, Chinese officials often give speeches on the favourable policies on OCPs’ returning back to China and the related benefits. Therefore, through these government-led activities, the Chinese government focuses on whether knowledge exchanges or political allegiance which lies emphasis on “the return” and their potential contribution to the domestic development.

Therefore, the Chinese Embassy has been utilising the informal diaspora network to hold formal events and to spread its political values and ideologies, which leads to the merging or overlap of formal and informal Chinese diaspora networks. Base on the content of these formal events, the Chinese government has been actively encouraging the self-development of professionals through internal knowledge exchanges and advocating its vision of attracting more overseas professionals to return back to China. However, there are no active measures on helping the OCPs to integrate into the global industries which have been considered to be more “sustainable and contribute effectively to China’s development in the long run.” (Biao, 2006, p.65). This may come from the fear of the loss of talents overseas.

Compare with Chinese government’s public diplomacy campaigns with the Dutch public as the target group, China’s diaspora diplomacy campaigns remain the same with the domestic diplomacy or the domestic outreach which the Chinese government practices in China. The number of such diaspora campaigns increases, but the form stays the same. It focuses on giving and spreading

speeches or lectures to enhance the patriotism among Chinese diasporas through a top-down method without increasing the interactive aspects. That is to say, while the Chinese government has been trying and adopting a dialogical way to communicate and connect with the foreign audience, the diaspora diplomacy stays the same as a one-way propaganda which is still the dominant measure to communicate with the Chinese diasporas. This can indicate the objectives the Chinese government has for practising public diplomacy in these two different groups with different needs and interests. With the Chinese diasporas who have already shown certain degrees of obedience towards the CPC and have been used to the top-down approach, the government is looking for allegiance and thus provide ideological propaganda and alluring benefits. While with the Dutch public with contradictory ideologies, questions on CPC's governance and sometimes suspicion of its declarations, it is seeking for understanding and favourability and thus has been consistently changing and improving its strategies to cater for their taste.

### **5. 2. 2 Chinese Digital Diaspora Groups**

During the data collection and investigation, the researcher found out more evidence showing that the Chinese Embassy in the Hague has been actively working with other Chinese diaspora groups which have not been recognised by the Chinese government, especially the digital diaspora communities. In the beginning, one probably won't find a clear trace of Chinese diaspora groups in the big cities in the Netherlands besides catering services. However, the Chinese diaspora groups can be found in various industries, providing all kinds of services to mainly Chinese people in the Netherlands. The fields they cover include tourism, food, cultures, language studies, accommodation, legal advice and employment. More importantly, many of them have actually built a quite big, stable and active community or network connecting permanent Chinese residents, students and short-time visitors. Specifically, Chinese new media groups or companies, namely the Chinese "digital diasporas" stand out by the number of people they connect, the scopes they cover, and the size of the networks they build through digital media. The reason that this research categorises the new media companies as diaspora groups instead of business groups is that it focuses more on the digital network they have built instead of their corporate natures.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For more information on the reason that this research does not include business groups, please refer to the "Limitation and Future Studies in Chapter VI. Conclusion.

Among them, Hoiand and Gogodutch are the two biggest Chinese news media companies in the Netherlands. They have the mainly online appearance but no offline publications. Gogodutch has more than 300 thousand registered members and around 600 thousand users per month.<sup>24</sup> Hoiand covers almost all of the areas including news, entertainments, shopping, exchanges, accommodation and job markets. They perform not only on regular websites but also on new media, especially social media. On their social media, they update five to seven posts on a daily basis providing all kinds of information. Each of their posts can receive views maximum to few thousands. At the same time, they successfully build the platforms for Chinese people to connect with others and to exchange information.

Compare with these two powerful Chinese media in the Netherlands, the Chinese Embassy in the Hague has a relatively small audience on its website and social media. It does not update its social media regularly. And the Chinese diasporas in the Netherlands won't check it regularly.<sup>25</sup> This is mainly because of the purpose and functioning of the embassy and its website. Thus, the diasporas only check it when it is needed for practical purposes, such as visa application. Thus, because of the popularity of these Chinese media among Chinese diasporas in the Netherlands and the huge online networks they have built, the Chinese Embassy begin to collaborate with them on government-initiated events and advocating governmental news in recent years. Thus, the huge and powerful digital diaspora communities have become the advocators and constituents for the Chinese Embassy in the Hague. This research elaborates this point through a specific case below— The 2018 Flower Parade in the Netherlands.

### **A Case Study—The 2018 Flower Parade**

From 20 to 22 April 2018, the Netherlands held its annual flower parade in Noordwijk. The Chinese government joined it and organised a series of events with the theme of Chinese traditional cultures based on the collaboration with the Dutch government. On 20 April, there was an outdoor event called “The Chinese Hour” which lasted for one hour and contained several performances conducted by Chinese residents. And the analysis below on this event is based on the investigation

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<sup>24</sup> The numbers are gathered from the website of Gogodutch, retrieved 5 April 2018.

<sup>25</sup> This can be told from the views of the posts released by the Chinese Embassy. The views per post on its WeChat platform arrange from 300 to 1000.

and an interview with the project manager from one of the Chinese media companies, Hoiiland, of this specific event, Mr. An.

The Chinese Embassy in the Hague contacted the most popular Chinese media companies in the Hague, such as Hoiiland, for their participation in the Flower Parade events for mainly two purposes. The first one is to ask these media companies to promote embassy's events on their media platforms to attract more Chinese people to come to the events. The second reason is to ask them to recruit performers to join "The Chinese Hour" show. This could be done through posting recruitment posts on media platforms or through the networks the media companies have.

The Chinese Embassy intended to make "The Chinese Hour" show an interactive and vivid performance which contained various kinds of performances created by the Chinese individuals on an almost volunteering basis. On the one hand, the embassy lacks enough budget and proper networks; on the other hand, it would like to provide the Chinese residents in the Netherlands an opportunity to connect with the Dutch community and to transmit the Chinese culture through governmental-initiated channels. And because of the huge networks the media companies have and the people they can reach out to and connect with, the Chinese government asked them to be in charge of the recruitment of performers and promoting the events to a larger Chinese audience. During the recruitment of these media companies, they contacted other local Chinese diaspora groups, such as students associations. There was basically no limitation on the content and form of the performances, and the performers had the full freedom of creating their own presence on the stage. They would be accepted once they were semi-professional and the contents could reflect the Chinese culture.

## **Analysis**

The Chinese diaspora groups in the Netherlands maintain a stable and good relationship with the Chinese government, which means that there is no obvious anti-CPC organisations and no speeches that are clearly against the Chinese government. These digital diaspora communities not only promote cultural activities of the Chinese Embassy in the Hague, such as the flower parade event, but also other news and information on political issues. However, they don't have a strong political voice and they have no intentions of joining the political activities or having an influence on the governance. They simply state the news that reflects a positive Sino-Dutch relation. On the political

front, they cover topics such as diplomatic visits between China and the Netherlands and Chinese ambassador's speeches. On economic issues, they cover contents such as the development of the Chinese companies in the Netherlands. Moreover, they also post important news from the homeland every now and then. In this sense, the Chinese Embassy in the Hague realises the importance of the Chinese digital diasporas in its capacity of providing support for "technical assistance", personnel mobilisation and useful networks (Brinkerhoff, 2005). Thus, it utilises them for building its legitimacy among the Chinese diasporas and making its public diplomacy campaigns which focus on the Dutch public more effectively.

Concerning their impact, these digital diaspora companies or communities are merely limited to the sense of facilitating communications at this moment. They are still premature when it comes to political and security issues, such as "promote governance reforms" and express "human rights concerns" (Brinkerhoff, 2005). That is to say, even though these digital diaspora groups provide platforms for the Chinese diasporas to exchange information and ideas, there is no strong opinions have been cultivated to touch upon more important and sensitive issues, such as democratic values. Above all, this finding verifies the first hypothesis that the Chinese government has increased the involvement of non-state actors in order to realise its public diplomacy objectives. In the case of the Netherlands, the Chinese Embassy in the Hague has increased the involvement of non-state actors, namely digital diaspora communities, to build legitimacy and effectiveness on its government-initiated public diplomacy campaigns. And as the globalisation and digital age go on, this kind of interaction between business communities and diplomatic agencies will definitely increase.

### **5. 2. 3 Conclusion**

According to the analysis on diaspora groups above, the Chinese government in the Netherlands has begun and increased its collaboration with non-traditional non-state actors to realise its public diplomacy goals and to overcome certain difficulties which include its lack of the access to informal networks. These non-state actors are completely independent actors without initiative ties with the government, however, the ties may have been developed gradually after the groups have become bigger. Thus, it is the fast growing and development of the Chinese diasporas themselves and the arrival of the digital and information age that increase the diversity of the non-state actors utilised by the Chinese Embassy.

However, due to the elementary development of such Chinese diaspora groups, they have certain limitations. The Chinese civil groups or diaspora communities, especially student associations are relatively inward-looking groups and are thus merely focusing on connecting Chinese diasporas with each other but neglecting connecting them with the locals. Although the ACSSNL states that transmitting Chinese culture and connecting Chinese students with Dutch people are one of its missions, they are still staying at the stage of only connecting Chinese among the network and enhancing their identity. According to the interviewees, they attempted to hold certain events for both Dutch and Chinese students, but the participation of non-Chinese is basically zero. Similarly, the powerful digital diaspora companies are still focusing on providing services to overseas Chinese. But surprisingly, they have begun to connect with local Dutch communities through multiple activities, such as accepting interviews from other Dutch news media on the topic of Chinese entrepreneurship (NOS News).

Compare with Chinese diaspora groups, the Japanese and Korean diaspora communities in the Netherlands are relatively out-ward looking and have begun to actively engage with the Dutch public. This may due to the fact that China has such a huge population and are thus self-sufficient in many ways. Such as the Chinese pop culture and modern art, they have enough audience and the push to go out is relatively weak. While Korea and Japan, as relatively small countries, have to develop an outward-focused economy and also exported pop culture to survive (Wang, 2013).

Last but not the least, besides the Chinese diaspora groups, namely the representatives of the students, companies and artist groups mentioned above, there is no clear evidence that there are other fully independent and active non-state actors who have been involved in China's public diplomacy in the Netherlands. Unlike in the US, there are no outstanding Chinese cultural ambassadors and celebrities, such as Yao Ming in the NBA sports field and Jackie Chan in the film industry, participating in the public diplomacy in the Netherlands initiatives and actively. The Chinese national leaders still maintain as the main and solo delegation of outstanding figures in this process.



# VI. Conclusion and Future Research

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## **6. 1 China's Public Diplomacy in the Netherlands: A Connected and Collaborative Network**

In general, the Chinese government maintains two distinguishing approaches in its public diplomacy in the Netherlands. One approach which is focusing on the Dutch public has been evolving according to the contemporary public diplomacy theory regarding aspects such as increasing the diversity of non-state actors and maintaining a dialogic way of communication. While another approach which is focusing on the Chinese diaspora groups has remained the same regarding the fact that it still keeps a top-down propaganda way to connect with diasporas.

As the investigation goes deeper, the researcher realises that these actors alone are not very unique and even have certain limitations of themselves if comparing with similar actors of other Asian countries. However, the network they have been building together is fascinating and is an important support of China's public diplomacy campaigns in the Netherlands. Most of these non-state actors are highly connected with each other in different degrees with the Chinese Embassy as the centralised power. No matter traditional non-state actors set up by the government, or the modern diaspora groups which evolve on their own, have been further connected by and utilised by the Chinese government. Informal networks are thus merged with formal networks, and individual Chinese expats are introduced to the Chinese officials. Furthermore, they are able to overcome the limitations of themselves if they collaborate with other actors. For instance, the Confucius Institutes and the Chinese Embassy utilise the informal networks of the ACSSNL for its strategic outreach. While the ACSSNL utilises the reputation and supports from the Chinese Embassy for carrying out more activities. Without this network, many public diplomacy campaigns, whether focusing on the diaspora groups or the Dutch public, would not happen. However, since the Confucius Institutes in the Netherlands are not under the direct instruction of the Chinese Embassy in the Hague, they are relatively separated from the network regarding cultural exchanges. But because of their strong academic profiles, especially in Chinese language training, they remain a fundamental actor in this process.

With respect to civil diplomacy specifically, these Chinese non-state actors mentioned in this research have a limitation or shortage which they cannot overcome by themselves at this moment. That is their relatively inward-looking nature and characteristic. As stated above, its large community and relatively self-sufficient system result in the consequence that they rarely reach out to the foreign community. This greatly imposes restrictions on transmitting Chinese cultures in a more natural and organic way at the civic level without the push from the government. Besides, the Chinese diaspora groups in the Netherlands mentioned in this research still maintain at a budding and development stage, which means that they don't have a fully independent ideology and an advanced system structure. On the one hand, this may limit their capability in cultural exchanges; on the other hand, this actually provides the Chinese government with more convenience in giving instructions and orders, as well as mobilising them. Compared with them, business agencies who have to adopt an outward-looking strategy to expand their market shares and to look for more cooperations are relatively more independent and mature. They have the strong drive and resources to build the bridge.

The role of the network is indeed important, however, without the assistance and support of the Chinese government in the case of China's public diplomacy in the Netherlands, this network won't be fully collaborative. Regarding the role of the Chinese Embassy in the Hague, the researcher kept a very critical mind and approach at the beginning of this investigation. Based on a mass of the critical voices both from the western and Chinese scholars, the researcher was not expected to find out so many evidence to confirm the hypotheses. Surprisingly and unexpectedly, according to the examination and interviews, the Chinese government has been actively changing its public diplomacy approaches in regard to the involvement of non-state actors.

The Chinese Embassy in the Hague is pivotal in facilitating this network which contains state and non-state actors to function. Not only it provides its reputation as an embassy, the formal network, and sometimes financial support to these non-state actors, but more importantly, it listens to non-state actors and invites them to be the active and valid participants in its public diplomacy campaigns. According to its practices, it understands that the multi-hub nature of the collaborative diplomacy and thus is not afraid of granting the non-state actors more freedom to realise their own wills.

The Chinese Embassy has been adopting a collaborative approach which identifies various roles of non-state actors and the potential benefits they can contribute to the network in order to achieve a collaborative goal. In the sense of information flow, the Chinese Embassy fully understand the importance of broadening its information horizon in the field through non-state actors no matter individually or collaboratively. Therefore, with the assistance of diaspora groups, especially the digital diaspora groups and the internet, the embassy is able to reach out to a larger audience, to make its public diplomacy campaigns more effective, and to connect with weak ties on the ground.

The diverse non-state actors definitely bring challenges to the Chinese government at the same time, especially the fully independent actors who are not legally under the supervision of the Chinese government. As they grow bigger and are able to raise their voices in the global dialogues, the government is facing the urgent task to understand this new dynamic. And more importantly, whether the tool of collaborative public diplomacy can be successfully used or not mainly relies on the relevant local public diplomacy participants.

## **6. 2 Limitations of This Research & Further Studies**

Even the research covers the area of Chinese companies in the Netherlands, however, the scope it covers is relatively limited. The Chinese multinationals are becoming increasingly important in the global market, which inevitably raises their voice in the policy-making process in hosting countries and China's overseas public diplomacy strategies building. Moreover, the Chinese government has been expressing its intention for greater economic cooperation in an open market with major European countries. However, this research only studies the digital diaspora companies in China's public diplomacy network and didn't go deeper and further in the topic of business agencies' roles and influences. This is first because the business actors are dominant in the economic cooperation areas instead of cultural exchanges which are the key issue in this research. Secondly, considering the fact that they are relatively mature and complex entities, more issues covering other topics will occur if the researcher includes them in the research, which definitely demands more space for discussion. The researcher believes that a separate study should be completely devoted to discussing the role of the business groups in China's public diplomacy strategies as the relatively mature non-state actor. Therefore, this limitation of the research asks for further study on the specific role of business actors in the collaborative public diplomacy.

In addition, the Chinese government has increased its use of media communications, even social media in the case of the Netherlands. After ambassador Mr. Wu took office, more speeches and press releases have been given, together with a relatively active status on its social media account. During this process, more local Dutch news media companies have been involved. Since this research is more about the cultural exchanges, this part is excluded. However, one can clearly witness the change occurring in this media communications part too. Therefore, more studies on the changes of Chinese government's use of media are also needed for further exploration. Lastly, due to the time limitation, the researcher was only able to reach to a limited number of interviewees. And the researcher believes that the more relevant participants she could reach, the more insights the research will be able to gather. Therefore, the researcher asks for further studies on this topic with more explorations.

## VII. List of Acronyms

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ACSSNL	Association of Chinese Students and Scholars in the Netherlands
CCChague	China Cultural Center in Den Haag
CPC	Communist Party of China
EU	European Union
IO	International Organisations
IWC	International Women's Contact The Hague
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCPs	Overseas Chinese Professionals
PRC	People's Republic of China
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

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## IX. Appendix

**9. 1 Table 2: Data Sources & Interview List**

Related Actors	Online Sources	Interviewees	Interview Acceptance & Form
Confucius Institutes	The official websites of the Confucius Institutes at Leiden University and Groningen University	Dutch director of the Confucius Institutes at Leiden University, Prof. Maghiel van Crevel	Face-to-Face; 30 minutes
	Facebook Account	The Chinese director of the Confucius Institutes at Groningen University	Email response
	The official websites of Hanban Office		
The CCChague	Its official website	Director, Mr. Yang Xiaolong	No responses; However, his interviews conducted by other medias were found through internet.
	Facebook account of the Chinese Embassy in the Hague		
	Facebook account of the Confucius Institutes at Groningen University	Chinese artist, Mr. Wei Liangfu	Telephone; 30 minutes
The ACSSNL	Its official website	President of the ACSSNL council, Mr. Ding Ding	Telephone; 30 minutes
	Its official social media account on Wechat	President of the Leiden Branch, Ms. Wang Xuesong	Face-to-Face; 60 minutes
		Activities Secretary of the ACSSNL council, Ms. Huang Tianyi	Telephone; 30 minutes
Hoiand	Its official website	Project manager of the 2018 flower parade, Mr. An Xuanran	Telephone; 30 minutes
	Its official social media account on Wechat		

Chinese Embassy in the Hague	Its official website	The Department of Education and Culture	Rejected
	Facebook Account		
Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Its official website	Asia and Oceania Department   East Asia and Mekong Division   China and North Korea, Senior Policy Officer, Mr. Remy Cristini	Email response