China invests heavily in policies aimed at improving its image, guarding itself against international criticism and advancing its domestic and international agenda. The Chinese government seeks to develop a distinct Chinese approach to public diplomacy, one that suits the country's culture and authoritarian system. In “China's Public Diplomacy”, author Ingrid d’Hooghe argues that this approach is characterised by a long-term vision, a dominant role for the government, an inseparable and complementary domestic dimension, and a high level of interconnectedness with China's overall foreign policy and diplomacy.

Europe encompasses multiple, potentially conflicting, levels of public diplomacy (subnational, national, transnational, and supranational) and the European Union lacks a structured public diplomacy policy. However, a number of recent initiatives aim to reinforce the link between EU foreign and cultural policies, such as the EC Communication “European Agenda for Culture in a Globalising World” and the creation of a Member State expert group on culture and external relations (taking China as a test case).

As China steps up its public diplomacy efforts, what does this mean for Europe? Can Europe learn from China's approach to public diplomacy? Is there a degree of convergence between Chinese and European public diplomacy practices? Can public diplomacy help overcome stumbling blocks in mutual understanding? How could Europe improve its public diplomacy towards China (and the rest of the world)?

A book launch/lunch-debate with:

- **Ingrid d’Hooghe**, Senior Research Associate, The Clingendael Institute
- **Damien Helly**, Deputy Head of programme Strengthening European External Action, European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM)
- **Ji Rong**, Deputy Director, Press and Communication Section, Chinese Mission to the EU
- **Walter Zampieri**, Head of Unit, Culture policy and intercultural dialogue, DG Education and Culture, European Commission

*Moderated by:*

**Jan Melissen**, Senior Research Fellow, The Clingendael Institute and Professor of Diplomacy, University of Antwerp
SPEAKERS’ BIOGRAPHIES

Ingrid d’Hooghe, Ph.D., is founder of China Relations, a China strategy consultancy, Senior Research Associate of the Clingendael Institute, and Research Affiliate of Antwerp University. Ingrid D’Hooghe is conducting training and research on China’s foreign policy and diplomacy, and advises governments, academic institutions, and companies, on developing and maintaining relations with China. Previously she was a full time research fellow at the Clingendael Institute (2001-2011), and academic staff member at the Sinological Institute of Leiden University (1997-2001). She has worked as Policy Officer at the Netherlands Embassies in Beijing and Washington DC, as guest lecturer at Leiden University (2008-2010), University of Groningen (2014) and Fudan University in Shanghai (2014).

Damien Helly has been a specialist on the cultural dimensions of the external action of the European Union since 2006, which saw his first collaboration with Palmer/Rae Associates. He was one of four independent experts who coordinated the EU Preparatory Action on culture in external relations in 2013-2014. More specifically, he was in charge of managing consultations in the European neighbourhood. In 2012, he published More Cultural Europe in the World, an overarching study for More Europe / External Cultural Relations, framing the debates on the role of culture in the EU’s external action. He also contributed to the EUNIC 2012-2013 Yearbook / Culture Report on culture and conflict. Damien Helly is now Deputy Head of Programme at ECDPM, a think and do tank specialised in European international cooperation while also teaching at the College of Europe as a visiting professor. From 2008 to 2012, he worked at the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) as Senior Research Fellow. Before joining the EUISS, Damien Helly was senior analyst and head of the International Crisis Group office in Port-au-Prince, Haiti (2006-2007), Southern Caucasus (Tbilisi, Georgia 2003-2004). Damien holds a PhD in political science from Sciences Po, Paris.

Ji Rong is the Deputy Director of the Press and Communication Section of the Chinese Mission to the EU. Before taking up her current post, she used to work in The Information and Public Diplomacy Department of Chinese Foreign Ministry, The Policy Planning Department of Chinese Foreign Ministry, The Chinese Embassy to Australia and The Chinese Embassy to Samoa.

Walter Zampieri is the head of the unit for cultural policy and inter-cultural dialogue within the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission. Before taking up his current post, he was deputy head of the coordination unit and assistant to the Director General for education and culture. He also previously held the post of secretariat of the Social Protection Committee.

Jan Melissen 梅理森 is a Senior Research Fellow at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations ‘Clingendael’ in The Hague and Professor at the University of Antwerp. He held various management positions at Clingendael (2001-12) and was previously affiliated with the University of Leicester (UK). He has been a visiting scholar at China’s Foreign Affairs University. He is founding co-editor of The Hague Journal of Diplomacy and editor of the Diplomatic Studies book series with Martinus Nijhoff. Professor Melissen is currently working with several national governments on the subject of change in diplomatic practice. His projects cover diplomacy in the digital age, MFA networking, consular diplomacy, and public diplomacy. In China he has published in a number of leading journals. He co-edited Understanding Public Diplomacy in East Asia (2015) and this will be his fifth book with Palgrave-Macmillan.
Ingrid d’Hooghe began with the words: “the Chinese government has a dream”. It is a dream about prosperity and happiness for each and every one of its 1.3bn people. It is a dream about national rejuvenation and the return to the historical greatness of China, greatness which, in China’s view, lasted until 1815 approximately when foreign powers invaded China and the ‘century of humiliation’ began. China’s dream is also about establishing a harmonious and peaceful world, co-shaped by China and Chinese values and, last but not least, it is a dream in which China is trusted; its political and economic choices are respected; and in which Chinese culture is embraced by the world.

Ingrid d’Hooghe stressed however that the reality of China’s position and image in the world is very different. China’s image in the world, and particularly in the West, is of a country with a rapidly developing economy. It is seen as a country that has worked very hard to reduce poverty within its borders, but it is also a country that is criticised for its human rights situation, that is suspected of seeking global hegemony, and that is often criticised for seeking dominance in Africa so that it can plunder African resources.

Ingrid d’Hooghe indicated that favourability rates in Africa and Asia are not too bad, but in many Western countries and in the EU the rates are below 50%. The UK has the highest favourability rate, at 48%, but in other European countries the rate is far lower. Ingrid d’Hooghe explained that the Chinese government is very aware of this negative image. In fact, in her opinion, few countries in the world are as sensitive about its global image as China is. Face, prestige and recognition all matter in China and in the affairs of state. She also indicated that China feels misjudged by the international community, and misrepresented or even demonised by foreign media. Consequently, the Chinese leadership wants to improve the foreign perception of China and it does so through the carrying out of public diplomacy.

According to Ingrid d’Hooghe, improving international perception of China is not just a matter of appearance for the Chinese leadership. Perceptions are important because they are believed to influence the behaviour of foreign governments towards China. A country that is seen as an aggressor is dealt with differently to a country that is seen as a benignly rising power. Ingrid d’Hooghe went further: as long as Chinese values are not understood or appreciated China will not be able to play an important role in global rule-setting and rule-making and this is ultimately what China aspires to do. In Ingrid d’Hooghe’s opinion, it is important that the second largest economic power in the world plays a role in international affairs and is welcomed to do so. For these reasons, public diplomacy has become an essential part of China’s foreign policy and diplomacy and the country has invested a lot of time and energy in developing public diplomacy instruments and activities.

Although it is difficult to find exact statistics about the amount of money invested in such, in Ingrid d’Hooghe’s opinion, it is a safe bet that China has invested considerably more in public diplomacy than any other country in the world. Further, public diplomacy is extensively studied in China, every serious university has a department working on it and the same is true for Chinese think tanks. Some Chinese scholars claim that China is developing its own type of public diplomacy, a so-called ‘public diplomacy with Chinese characteristics’. If this is the case, how do they differ and what factors shape and explain this Chinese approach? Ingrid d’Hooghe explained that these points are the basis of her book. The broader question considered for the presentation is: what does this mean for the European Union and what can the EU learn, or not learn, from China in this respect?

Ingrid d’Hooghe briefly explained the concept of public diplomacy. In her view, the primary aim of a country or an entity’s public diplomacy is to exert influence on how the relevant public views said country, entity or policy. The objective is to win their sympathy and support. Public diplomacy includes daily
communications; official statements; press conferences; long-term strategic communications often focused on a specific topic, for example sustainable development; and relationship building. Its instruments are manifold and include the various types of media: newspapers, journals, TV and radio as well as social media. Public diplomacy also includes events such as the Olympic Games, the World Expo and the World Cup, but also the march in Paris on Sunday. It encompasses people and institutions as well as the trips leaders take abroad. Its instruments include materials, publications and video clips: China once hired time on the video billboards in Times Square in New York to show a 60 second video clip which was shown 50 times per hour for one month. Public diplomacy can also be something less costly and very simple, for example, Chinese New Year celebrations being held around the world in various cities and promoted by the Chinese government via their networks of overseas Chinese organisations and people. Ingrid d’Hooghe argued that the Chinese approach to public diplomacy has many specific characteristics that distinguish it from the public diplomacy of other countries. Chinese public diplomacy is, of course, inspired by that of other countries in particular the United States. However, China carefully selects certain instruments and adapts them to its own situation and to its own context. According to Ingrid d’Hooghe, China is also increasingly developing its own new instruments.

First, China has a very different political system and a political system is what defines how public diplomacy is organised and what roles state and non-state actors may play. Second, it is because of Chinese culture. Culture is fundamental to the way people think and to the way they communicate. Public diplomacy is communication and so as a result culture always influences public diplomacy. Ingrid d’Hooghe went on to say that the characteristics can be summarised into three major features of Chinese public diplomacy. The first is how much importance the Chinese government attaches to public diplomacy as an instrument to enhancing its comprehensive power. The second is the high level of state centeredness. The third is the long-term strategic and holistic approach to public diplomacy.

Expounding on the first characteristic, Ingrid d’Hooghe explained that she believes that China had embraced the idea of soft power and public diplomacy to an extent that is not often seen in China with regard to foreign political concepts, and that China has decided to give high priority to developing these instruments of public diplomacy. According to Ingrid d’Hooghe, the Chinese government believes in public diplomacy, it believes that power does not solely stem from hard power, for example from the ‘barrel of a gun’ (Mao Tse-tung) but that it stems just as much from soft forces of power, for example the country’s ancient culture; Chinese values; China’s economic success; the dazzling show during the 2008 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony; and even elegant First Lady Peng Liyuan who brings charm and a soft side to President Xi Jinping’s overseas trips. Further, Ingrid d’Hooghe indicated that the Chinese government also believes that public diplomacy is indispensable in the fight for China’s right to speak and to coexist with the liberal and international world with its own political model. China uses public diplomacy to project a counter image of the country, an image which, in the Chinese view, does more justice to the reality, namely China as a trust worthy, cooperative, peace loving, developing country. Ingrid d’Hooghe noted that she has taken from this that public diplomacy should boost China’s international standing and advance its agenda. It should make China’s economic and political rise acceptable to the world, it should contribute to the international recognition of Chinese values and Chinese policies and it should also increase the government’s legitimacy. For the Chinese government, the more foreign people know about the country the better they will understand it, and the better they understand China the more they will accept the country and its policies. Ingrid d’Hooghe pointed out that the fact that international opinion polls show that experts, for example in the US, are less

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1 11th January 2015 – Charlie Hebdo march
worried about China’s economic rise than the general audience supports the view that more knowledge about China reduces threat perceptions. Ingrid d’Hooghe reiterated that China invests a lot of money and energy in developing the instruments of public diplomacy and it carries it out all over the world. In fact, there is no country in which China does not conduct public diplomacy. For Ingrid d’Hooghe, this cannot be said of any other country. China even carries out public diplomacy in the countries that do not recognise Beijing but that recognise Taiwan.

Ingrid d’Hooghe did note that some people are very worried about China’s public diplomacy. Joshua Kurlantzick, an American think tanker, writes about how China appears to be using its soft power to push Japan, Taiwan and even the United States out of regional influence. Others, for example magazines like Der Spiegel, have written that China is using soft power to conquer the world. China’s investments in public diplomacy have prompted policymakers in the US, India and Japan to renew their own investments in public diplomacy and in particular towards developing countries in Asia and Africa because they are scared that China’s influence is becoming too great in these regions. Ingrid d’Hooghe indicated that China believes that its growing strength in the domain of hard power has pushed the United States and Western countries to attempt to dominate and contain it in the area of soft power and to use public diplomacy as an ideological instrument to bring about ‘peaceful evolution’ in China. This perception in China has grown particularly in the wake of the Jasmine Revolution in 2011. This threat prompted the previous Chinese President Hu Jintao and current President Xi Jinping to write articles calling for vigilance against ideological and cultural infiltration by hostile forces from abroad. As a result, China also regards public diplomacy as a competition in that respect.

**Does the EU need to fear China’s public diplomacy?**

For Ingrid d’Hooghe the answer is no because China’s public diplomacy strategy is predominantly defensive in character. It seeks to defend China’s policies and political system and it promotes acceptance of China and its position in the international order. It is not aimed at proselytising.

The second characteristic Ingrid d’Hooghe mentioned is state centeredness. This means that the government dominates the development and execution of public diplomacy policies. This is the case in many countries, but what sets China apart is the extent to which this is happening in the Chinese context. Scholars and practitioners call for a stronger involvement of non-state actors and they all understand and know that in order to develop successful public diplomacy they have to give civil society more room for expression. However, they struggle with this and they do not know how to manage the process in a system in which civil society is not supposed to be politically active. Ingrid d’Hooghe provided an example as to how the government interferes in public diplomacy in recent developments with regard to the Confucius Institute. In many countries, people are discussing whether or not universities should continue hosting the Confucius Institute because they are afraid the Chinese government will interfere too much in the institute’s programmes and debates. Some Confucius Institutes have even closed, for example the Confucius Institute at Stockholm University closed in December. This was due, in large part, to the events in Portugal last summer where the Chinese government ordered the organisers of a conference to remove pages of the programme that were prepared by Taiwanese participants. The news went viral and discussion on this topic is ongoing all over the globe. For Ingrid d’Hooghe, the Confucius Institutes are, in principle, a wonderful instrument of public diplomacy and she expressed hope that the Chinese government manages to deal with the problems that seem to surround it, and withdraws from interfering in such institutes.

Although public diplomacy is very state centred, according to Ingrid d’Hooghe, that is not to say that there are no non-state actors involved in China’s public diplomacy. On the contrary, the number and variety of non-state actors has expanded and they
have brought with them new dynamics and fresh ideas for public diplomacy. However, Ingrid d’Hooghe went on to say that the room for these types of voices is decreasing in China, especially in the past few years. As a result, the legitimacy that these non-state actors bring to public diplomacy is very limited. For example, the Chinese government expects Chinese NGOs and academic institutions to act in accordance with Chinese policies and their goals. Therefore, people’s exchanges never stray far from the official narrative. For Ingrid d’Hooghe, the government’s strong role hampers the development of public diplomacy not only as far as academic and people-to-people organisations are concerned but also as regards culture. She indicated that in spite of all the cultural events that China is organising all over the world, the country is not seen as a cultural power, particularly in comparison to other countries in the region. It is no match, for example, to South Korea. Ingrid d’Hooghe referenced the global popularity of South Korean singer Psy and his song ‘Gangnam Style’ which led to strong debate in China as its young people asked why China could not generate a similar viral buzz. Ingrid d’Hooghe noted that the question was, of course, rhetorical because in China’s cultural expression people are not free. Cultural projects should serve moral and political goals and China rejects such products that only focus on entertainment. The result therefore is that China neglects and restricts independent artists operating outside official programmes. These artists are often successful abroad and win international acclaim for their work. Two famous examples are artist Ai Weiwei and film director Jia Zhangke, the latter of whose films have won awards in Venice and Cannes but are not screened to China’s public. Furthermore, Ingrid d’Hooghe explained that there is also a lack of press freedom. In Beijing, a small demonstration was held on 11th January after the Charlie Hebdo attack. The demonstration was instigated by foreign reporters and they were joined by Chinese reporters. The government did not interfere but they closely monitored events. For Ingrid d’Hooghe, this is a positive example of how Chinese citizens also show their engagement with what is happening in the world. However, the Chinese press reacted differently. Ingrid d’Hooghe quoted Xinhua: “Many religions and ethnic groups in this world have their own totems and spiritual taboos. Mutual respect is crucial for peaceful coexistence. Unfettered and unprincipled satire, humiliation and free speech are not acceptable”.

Ingrid d’Hooghe noted that the third characteristic of China’s strategic and holistic approach to public diplomacy stems from China’s political system and from its culture. The characteristic can be explained by looking at the long-term character of China’s public diplomacy policies and by the holistic approach in the sense that China’s foreign and domestic dimensions of public diplomacy are one whole, they are equivalent, complimentary and, for China, inseparable elements of public diplomacy. Ingrid d’Hooghe suggested that this is a very interesting area for the EU to consider as it also needs to concentrate more on domestic public diplomacy.

China is very active in its public diplomacy in the European Union and, according to Ingrid d’Hooghe, it needs to be because EU-China relations are developing quite well at a practical level. However, it is her view that there is room for improvement at the political level with regard to building mutual trust and developing a strategic partnership. Public diplomacy can help in this respect. Ingrid d’Hooghe expressed her satisfaction at the fact that a third pillar, the people-to-people pillar, exists in the EU’s relationship with China and that many public diplomacy activities take place under this umbrella. For example, student exchange programmes and cultural programmes. There are Chinese companies like Huawei that are very active in this area, they often financially support meetings. Up until 2008, China’s public diplomacy primarily focused on building political trust by improving the image of the country’s political system and of its human rights situation as well as of its foreign policy. However, since 2008 the attention has moved to economic issues, this is not only because of the financial crisis but also because European businesspeople have become more outspoken about
the problems they encounter when doing business in China. They had been silent for a long time with regard to the, often invisible, trade barriers for European countries. This has prompted China to be more attentive to economic issues in their public diplomacy. Ingrid d’Hooghe also underlined that many activities take place in the context of cooperation between China and the EU. Chinese embassies in European capitals are very active and they translate overall goals into more detailed public diplomacy strategies. Ten years ago, a Chinese diplomat would not have been seen attending a debate or writing articles in newspapers however in various cities Chinese ambassadors are on television discussing specific issues, they write op-eds in newspapers and they attend debates and engage with other speakers. This is a new and very successful step that China has made. Further, since 2007, there has been an expansion of Chinese media organisations abroad especially in Africa but also in Europe. This additionally contributes to the debate between Chinese and European audiences.

Ingrid d’Hooghe pointed out that a lack of knowledge in the EU about China is hampering Chinese public diplomacy in the EU, although this is something which the EU is working to address. She suggested that in high schools programmes more emphasis should be placed on Chinese issues in order to right the many misconceptions that still exist. Ingrid d’Hooghe stressed that as the world is changing so much, the younger generation will grow up in a world where China is a major player and therefore they should have a better understanding of China.

Ingrid d’Hooghe noted that the second aspect hampering Chinese public diplomacy in the EU is the enormous gap between European and Chinese ideals and values. This is a factor that Chinese policymakers in the ministries in China often fail to grasp, even if Chinese diplomats stationed in Europe are aware of this difference. The policymakers do not realise how deep European societies are permeated with the values of democracy, human rights and rule of law, as well as fundamental principles such as freedom of speech and freedom of demonstration, even if the governments of European societies are willing to take a more pragmatic approach towards China to ensure the country’s material interests. Both sides often talk about issues such as multipolarity, multilateralism and democratisation but their understanding of the concepts is very different and they have different meanings in China and in Europe. Ingrid d’Hooghe explained that the Chinese have a realist and very state-centric understanding of the concept of multilateralism whereas in Europe it denotes sharing sovereignty.

The Chinese discourse on democratisation focuses on responsibility, responsiveness and government accountability while in Europe it is seen as a very broad system involving free media, independent judiciary rule of law and full respect of civil rights. These gaps in understanding cannot be explained away and they cannot simply be narrowed down by providing more information about China. According to Ingrid d’Hooghe, it calls for more educational exchanges, even more than exist currently, and more focus in schools on what is going on in China. The media can, in principle, play an important role in this process. However, in Ingrid d’Hooghe’s opinion, the Chinese media are not yet very effective communicators in Europe.

Ingrid d’Hooghe concluded by asking what the EU can learn from China’s public diplomacy. In her view, the financial investment made by China cannot be matched by the EU but the attention and the priority that China and the Chinese government puts on public diplomacy could serve as an example for the EU. People, at all levels in China, believe in and try to participate in or initiate public diplomacy activities. Ingrid d’Hooghe indicated that this could inspire Europe and European policymakers and officials. As for the holistic approach to public diplomacy, China is concentrating on informing its domestic audience about its foreign policies and, for Ingrid d’Hooghe, this is also something the EU can learn from. Ingrid d’Hooghe noted that China has an enormous capacity for listening and learning and she indicated that this
was an area in which the EU could also improve. She explained that people often say that China does not listen because when the country is criticised it seemingly ignores this criticism. She pointed out however that often, after some time has passed, China can be seen revisiting the issue and slightly adapting certain policies. **Ingrid d’Hooghe** finished by indicating that it is clear from her research that China will keep investing in and expanding its public diplomacy. China’s public diplomacy is therefore a topic that will merit a lot of attention from scholars and policymakers in the coming years.

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**Damien Helly** began by briefly touching upon the definitions and terms of public diplomacy. He preferred to use the term ‘cultural relations’ instead of public diplomacy, which indicates a less state-centred dimension. He explained that he would attempt to explore this non-state centred dimension of the relations between Europe and Europeans and China and its people more deeply. **Damien Helly** stressed that he was attempting to address the key questions of the day concerning learning, convergence and stumbling blocks. He went on to say that **what Europe can learn from Chinese practices** can be useful for Europe’s future relations with China, but also for its relations with other countries and societies as well as for its own public diplomacy and cultural relations.

**Damien Helly** then raised the question as to which, if any, Chinese or European models are being discussed. He explained that experts might talk about the very notion of the Chinese dream, but in recent years in various European debates, he has not heard mention of a ‘European dream’. Talking about ‘intercultural dialogue’ between Europe and China presents the risk of hiding internal cultural diversity on both sides, and the challenge is to value cultural differences both within and across borders. In his view, there is a need to return to the rough, complex and sometimes even uncomfortable diversity in order to enrich discussions. There is some potential in this area and this is what was learnt from the preparatory action on culture in external relations².

**Damien Helly** went on to discuss the reality and the artefact of people-to-people contact. He agreed that it was good to have this umbrella in EU-China relations but he also noted that at the same time it may remain too formal and quite elite-driven. He spoke of experts, for example French scholar Stephanie Balme who emphasised, in a paper written two years ago, the importance of Chinese underground soft power. **Damien Helly** asked how and to what extent this underground soft power related to the official one.

According to **Damien Helly**, EU-China cooperation is impressively expanding and deepening, especially in the field of research and innovation. However, he asked whether this cooperation could be culturally deeper. The history of sinology as a discipline in Europe and the United States shows that there have been back and forth movements in the ways Europeans have analysed, categorised and understood schools of thought in China. He added that the work currently carried out in Europe by philosophers and Chinese experts in philosophy could be extremely useful for mutual understanding if it is then relayed to larger parts of society through, amongst others, education programmes. It could help reshape and enhance the ‘alterity’ debate, the debate about whether and why the two sides are supposedly so different, and for example the ‘orientalist’ attitude towards China. He indicated that the idea of internationalised, capitalist China is now becoming more obvious and not so problematic for Europe. **Damien Helly** also raised the idea of a ‘Chinese-ised’ world: in the same vein as there is an Americanised world he asked whether there is a trend towards a ‘Chinese-ised’ world. He suggested this fear needed to be deconstructed to understand what Europe is afraid of and why. **Damien Helly** mentioned Anne Cheng to underline that in the past there had been various ways – one of the being “Eastern humanism” of presenting Confucius and his thinking in European academic

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² [http://cultureinexternalrelations.eu/](http://cultureinexternalrelations.eu/)
literature. It is probably not by chance that Confucius was chosen to be main brand of today’s contemporary Chinese public diplomacy. According to Damien Helly, for all it may sound very academic there are direct bridges between these academic debates and contemporary relations between European and Chinese societies and institutions.

In order to explain his point about exploiting gaps and spaces between languages, Damien Helly made reference to François Jullien, a French philosopher and an expert on Chinese languages and thinking, who insists on the need to invest or reinvest in translation and interpretation, and to revisit and rediscover the meaning of the differences between languages. Damien Helly noted that China is still very inaccessible to Europeans because of the language barrier. He indicated that it is important that this is officially acknowledged and efforts are made to rectify the situation. There is a high risk of asymmetry in the translation capacities between Europe and China as there are many more Chinese translators currently at hand than European translators. In that respect, there is also a power challenge in the translation relationship between Europe and China. Damien Helly highlighted the China Cultural Compass produced by EUNIC³, which compiles a comparative and commented glossary of key notions in English and Chinese only. He suggested that such a glossary also includes various other European languages in addition to English.

Damien Helly then pointed to Bruno Latour, a French philosopher, and his concept of composition. Damien Helly explained that this notion of composition is extremely useful for adjusting and adapting the China-Europe relationship so that various Chinese and European elements can be used to jointly compose new ideas and to co-create and also to co-work to find new categories. Damien Helly referred to one example from the EUNIC Cultural Compass glossary. The glossary explains that “propaganda sounds quite negative to Westerners, especially to Germans, due to the role of political propaganda during the Third Reich”. Damien Helly also quoted a Chinese communication agency, “though during the Cultural Revolution propaganda used to be very much associated with politics, in contemporary China it has become a rather neutral expression, many state institutions feature a department of marketing and public relations”. Damien Helly indicated that this is just a simple and basic example of all the work that needs to be done in order to work our way out of the gaps in different languages and bridge them up.

Damien Helly remarked that it is difficult to know what the Chinese government’s agenda is despite all the official messages. He opined that in these types of regimes the work of foreign and independent experts is to interpret, reinterpret and try to decode and understand what is written between the lines or what is behind the official rhetoric. This therefore requires constant investment. However, it then raises various questions. Does Europe have enough capacity to do this? Does Europe need to pull joint forces on this? Is Europe part of the American world, as Robert Cooper recently said in a recent conference? If Europe is part of an American and Western world, the Chinese propaganda for domestic consumption will probably use it in order to find practical scapegoats for when things go wrong. Damien Helly suggested that there is a discussion to be had amongst Europeans as regards their image as part of the American world and the West. Does Europe want to be something different than ‘just-the-West’? According to Damien Helly, it is not just about NATO, it is also about culture and about how to engage with others. He also asked if there is still hope for a European narrative to be heard beyond the horizon of capitalism and modernism, quoting again Latour’s work.

Bringing his presentation to a close, Damien Helly identified the key messages found in the EU preparatory action on culture in external relations. This preparatory action was worked on in 54 countries in the world including China and including EU strategic partners. It conducted dialogues with key stakeholders from the cultural, public diplomacy and policymaking

³ European Union National Institutes for Culture, the network of national cultural institutes of Europe
fields. The summary of what they found is that there is a huge potential of enhancing European influence and attraction, there is a lot to be done and there is also demand for more Europe not just externally but from within Europe as well. There is a need for better EU cultural relations with the rest of the world. Damien Helly went on to say that the issue is that there is no European cultural relations strategy and so far there seems to be no intention of drafting one. He explained that a number of principles are acknowledged to be the foundation of such renewed common engagements in the cultural field but they would require resources and most likely some experimental projects carried out by the EU and its Member States. In terms of concepts and strategies, Damien Helly defines the EU as an enabling power having clear added value in comparison to Member States acting individually. Damien Helly reiterated the finding of the preparatory action that there is a need to invest in a common European knowledge of the world and in particular China. Damien Helly indicated that the widening gap in the number of Chinese students in Europe and of European students in China, mirrors the widening gap in terms of investment in cultural relations. It provides an idea of what needs to be done to try to engage as much as possible. Damien Helly encouraged European Member States to join forces as there is too much competition in the cultural field between them. There needs to be less bureaucracy and more compositions.

Damien Helly concluded by providing two ideas. The first idea is to invest in the EU institutions’ strategic communications, for example, using Chinese images, sayings and translations more systematically in EU public statements about and towards China. Damien Helly’s second idea is to apply the principle of subsidiarity to European cultural and external relations. This is the idea of working together with more cities and local authorities, the latter of which are extremely powerful both in Europe and China.

In Damien Helly’s opinion, there is potential for Europeans to invest more to become an enabling power, an interpreter and a composer but for this the EU has to act as a bloc and use subsidiarity. It also needs to invest in exchanges and it needs to start thinking about a European foundation for external cultural relations, with enough room for manoeuvre to engage people and maybe to develop people-to-people contacts further down the line.

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Ji Rong agreed with Ingrid d’Hooghe’s point that China has attached great importance to public diplomacy in recent years. As for why this is, Ji Rong stressed three important points that echo Ingrid d’Hooghe’s analysis. First, strategically-speaking, it is about building soft power, establishing a good image and increasing comprehensive national strength. Second, there are many misperceptions about China and Ji Rong explained that as a result China hopes to use public diplomacy to minimise the misunderstandings and to establish an objective and a comprehensive view of China that allows the world to better understand the country’s history, culture, and domestic and foreign policy. Third, public diplomacy is considered a very important component and an inseparable part of modern diplomacy as China believes that public opinion has a strong influence on a country’s foreign policymaking. Ji Rong explained that, as a result, China does not only seek to promote cultural relations between countries through traditional, official diplomacy but the country also seeks to focus more on promoting people’s friendships and mutual understanding in the belief that this will lay solid foundations for the relations between China and other countries.

Ji Rong noted that public diplomacy is something that China had learnt from the Western world, but China also believes that when it conducts public diplomacy it should have its own special features. Ji Rong underlined three points. First, China’s public diplomacy is guided by China’s unique theories, such as the ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’ and the strong belief in peace, development and win-win cooperation. These notions and principles define the nature, the orientation and the rules of China’s public
diplomacy. Second, as Ingrid d’Hooghe rightfully pointed out, China approaches public diplomacy from both domestic and international perspectives. It is believed that growing interactions between China and other countries have blurred the distinction between domestic and international issues. Therefore, in addition to ensuring that people around the world gain a fair and better understanding of China, it is necessary for Chinese people to also gain a better understanding of the global situation as well as China’s foreign policies and international goals. In this respect, both domestic and international perspectives complement each other. Ji Rong’s third point relates to the integration of Chinese culture with other cultures. She explained that, on the one hand, China is very proud of its civilisation which spans over 5000 year’s history, something which, it is believed, grants them the source of the wisdom that enriches China’s public diplomacy. She also acknowledged Ingrid d’Hooghe’s point that more needs to be done in order to tap into this potential. On to say that, on the other hand, China is also open to absorbing and integrating the strengths of other cultures. China has increased the number of dialogues and exchanges it has with other cultures in recent years and public diplomacy is viewed as an important vehicle for promoting interactions between the Chinese culture and other cultures of the world.

With regard to Ingrid d’Hooghe’s findings, Ji Rong indicated that she agreed with the finding that public diplomacy is strategic and holistic and she asserted that China does see it from a long-term perspective and from a strategic viewpoint. She further explained that it is believed to cover a variety of areas such as education, culture, media and sports. As to whether public diplomacy is defensive Ji Rong affirmed that it is somewhat due to the many misperceptions. She indicated that the hope is to change these perceptions and to safeguard China’s dignity. She additionally noted that Chinese public diplomacy is also defensive in the respect that China has no intention of exporting its ideology and values to any other country. Moreover, Ji Rong remarked that China is, and will continue being, more proactive than it was before as it has gained more confidence and it feels more comfortable in the world and less sensitive to outside world criticism. As to Ingrid d’Hooghe’s finding regarding ‘state centeredness’, Ji Rong explained that the government is indeed very important in promoting public diplomacy as a whole and it is believed that public diplomacy is everybody’s business and responsibility. That is to say, civil organisations, think tanks and research institutes, amongst others, should be more involved. Ji Rong did indicate, however, that China believes balance needs to be pursued in this field so as to give more vigour to non-state actors. Nevertheless, at the same time China wants to ensure that the messages that are conveyed are consistent. No government would want to see its foreign diplomacy efforts undermined by inconsistent messages relayed by different actors.

Ji Rong commented that in recent years, the Chinese Mission to the European Union has explored many new avenues in order to conduct public diplomacy. It has organised events like the ‘China open day’ and co-sponsored events to promote mutual understanding. Ji Rong indicated that the Mission keeps in close contact with think tanks and the media and it also encourages Chinese diplomats to be more open and active by engaging with the European public. The Mission also makes use of social media sites, for example last year a Twitter account for the Mission was set up.

With regard to how Europe could improve its own public diplomacy towards China, Ji Rong explained that successful public diplomacy requires that a country knows its audience better. It is only then that better and more improved work can be carried out.

Walter Zampieri firstly noted that he does not particularly like the term ‘soft power’ that has been used in the presentations because it reminds him more of a chess game and that is not what the term means exactly. He indicated that there are many
definitions of soft power and he prefers the definition that explains that there are three ways of trying to affect people’s will: coercion, inducement and attraction. He underlined that ‘attraction’ is the method that yields the longest-lasting effects and it is also the one that is best suited to the EU, with the exception of the EU trade agreements which would involve ‘inducement’.

Walter Zampieri asked as to how ‘attraction’ can be produced. Firstly, he explained that it is said that one needs a culture capable of attracting others. Secondly, an effective and credible communication strategy is needed. Walter Zampieri asserted that the EU is more effective when it shows that it can work together because the attraction that the EU can generate is the idea of 28 Member States that can work together towards the same purpose. He went on to say that the EU proposing a common European action is an example of public diplomacy; it is cultural diversity in action. In Walter Zampieri’s opinion, this is the EU’s best argument.

Given that the EU’s perception of China and the Chinese has already been discussed, Walter Zampieri asked how the Chinese perceive Europeans. Referring to the findings of various surveys, Walter Zampieri related that Chinese people consider Europeans more trustworthy than Americans and Japanese and overall they like Europeans. Broadly-speaking, the Chinese enjoy many aspects of the EU’s culture, for example football, fashion and design, amongst others. The surveys also found that what the EU considers culture, that is to say cultural heritage and the arts, figure lower down in the ratings. Walter Zampieri then asked what Chinese resentments were. According to the surveys, they resent the patronising and lecturing tone the EU adopts. They also resent the EU playing the role of a normative power and this latter point is the real issue. Walter Zampieri explained that although the EU might not feel that it has a lecturing tone when dealing with China, it is the biggest economic bloc in the world and it does have an interest in extending its norms and standards. If public diplomacy is about communicating the ideals and values of a nation and of a system to the rest of the world then culture is at the heart of it all because cultural efforts are the best vehicles to show, express and communicate values.

Walter Zampieri agreed that in China the state plays a much bigger role compared to the role of the state in Europe. However, the EU believes that the state is more credible when it acts as the facilitator of cultural exchanges and ensuring that the networks and the proper dynamic are there. Walter Zampieri acknowledged that the EU does not have a cultural strategy but he indicated that all the different elements of this are works in progress, in close collaboration with the Council, the Member states and the EEAS.

Walter Zampieri then noted that the EU-China High-Level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD) is very bureaucratic and it is also part of the EU’s relationship with the Chinese state. Walter Zampieri had suggested that there must be a shift away from the showcasing of specific cultural activities towards working together with others, which is the best way to champion and implement European values, while respecting others’ sensitivities.

In practical terms, the EU has appointed a focal point in its Delegation in Beijing, in charge of cultural relations and of working with the Member States, EUNIC and all the cultural attaches, in order to network with the stakeholders and help them carry out their work and come up with common European ideas. Walter Zampieri indicated that the EU institutions are very much concerned with not overstepping the boundaries, in particular as regards what the Commission’s role is and what the Member States can do on their own. During the second HPPD dialogue in Beijing in September 2014, the EU Member States were all very keen on the European Commission doing more and not less, to optimise the use of scarce resources, but also being aware of the advantages of dealing with the Chinese and other third countries as a bloc.
In terms of cultural diplomacy, Walter Zampieri indicated that the next generation of EU foreign policy instruments will include a specific strand for public diplomacy with strategic partners and, in conjunction with the EEAS, DG EAC is working on the basis of various principles for public diplomacy, including exchanges, co-creation, involvement of cities and emphasis on the EU added-value compared to Member States. Walter Zampieri pointed out that the EU has its own instruments, for example Erasmus+ and the Marie Curie actions, which are hugely popular in China, however the EU has no hope of matching China’s level of investment in scholarships and exchanges. Walter Zampieri concluded that, although the EU is unable to provide the same resources as are available in China, the steps the EU has taken so far definitively show positive development.

CONCLUSIONS

Ingrid d’Hooghe indicated that in her view cooperation should be wider and deeper. It should be wider in the sense that more people should know more about China and it should be deeper in the sense that, at the very least, a considerable group of people should have deep knowledge and understanding of China. For Ingrid d’Hooghe, translation programmes, looking at concepts and at the differences in interpreting them, as well as co-working, are a necessity. She explained that she has been working on China since 1985 and she speaks the language, yet still when she cooperates with Chinese colleagues she runs into new issues and points that she did never realised that make China different.

Ingrid d’Hooghe went on to say that the EU should be more open-minded towards China. She indicated that there is often a default mode used even by the press when referring to China. This default mode focuses on a lot of the problems and neglects any other developments going on in China. Europe should seriously look at what these Chinese values mean.

Ingrid d’Hooghe concluded talking about China’s public diplomacy in difficult environments. For example Japan’s favourability rate of China is 5% which is the lowest around the globe and yet China does conduct public diplomacy in Japan, mostly in the form of trilateral “people public diplomacy”, typically between South Korea, Japan and China. As a result, it is easier for Japan and China to come together. Some of these meetings take place in South Korea but also in Japan and China. There are Chinese people in Japan, who are not necessarily directly supported by the Chinese government, who work together with Japanese people to keep the dialogue going. Ingrid d’Hooghe gave the example of a Chinese who publishes a little magazine in the Japanese language and who organises weekly meetings in the park. When governmental relations are quite strained, people’s initiatives can make the difference.

This event was held on occasion of the launch of the book “China’s Public Diplomacy” (I. d’Hooghe, Brill Nijhoff, 2015)

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