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## TAKING CONFUCIUS TO AFRICA

### HOW CULTURAL DIPLOMACY CONVEYS CHINA'S VOICE AND PERSPECTIVES TO THE WORLD

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#### BACKGROUND

Cultural Diplomacy has become an integral part in the foreign relations of modern states. Often described by the terms soft power, smart power or public diplomacy,<sup>1</sup> it has also become an increasingly important concept in emerging nations since the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> One revealing example is the People's Republic of China, which has deployed significant financial resources in an ever-increasing scope worldwide in order to flank its economic and political ascent with cultural policy as well. The most visible symbol of this strategy are the more than 430 Confucius Institutes in more than 100 countries, as well as the establishment of correspondent networks and scholarship programs for students from developing countries.



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- 1 | Joseph S. Nye, "Get Smart – Combining Hard and Soft Power", *Foreign Affairs*, 07-08/2009, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65163/joseph-s-nye-jr/get-smart> (accessed 14 Apr 2015); in the academic field and political consulting in China, the terms soft power (*ruan shili*, 软实力), smart power (*qiao shili*, 巧实力) or public diplomacy (*gonggong waijiao*, 公共外交) are used in the same sense. For a detailed discussion of the concepts soft power and public diplomacy in a Chinese context, see Yiwei Wang, "Public Diplomacy and the Rise of Chinese Soft Power", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, 2008, pp. 257-273. The term smart power is (still) predominantly used in China in terms of the U.S. foreign policy concept that became popular under Obama and Clinton. Yiwu Zhang provides insight into the inner party considerations for the concept of smart power in Chinese foreign relations on the Communist Party of China's website, "*qiao shili, ying shili, ruan shili*" (Smart Power, Hard Power, Soft Power), 2010, <http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/10954545.html> (accessed 14 Apr 2015).
- 2 | For Germany cf. Kurt-Jürgen Maaß (ed.), *Kultur und Außenpolitik. Handbuch für Studium und Praxis*, Baden-Baden, 2009.

This foreign policy tool has a long tradition in Europe: be it through language institutes, organising artistic and cultural exchanges or granting scholarships to promote scientific/educational exchange. In addition to the German Goethe-Institutes, important and internationally renowned institutions include the Alliance française and the Spanish Cervantes Institutes, which focus on language promotion. With its globally active British Council, the British approach is characterised by the promotion of cultural and creative industries, and has thus contributed to the strong international recognition of its pop music and film industries.

What these approaches have in common is the desire to convey the fundamental values of the respective political and societal system using culture, to strengthen the bilateral and multilateral dialogue and exchange between societies and individuals and to ultimately increase the weight and influence of their own nation worldwide.

These efforts are therefore considered part of the concept of soft power, which originated with the American political scientist Joseph Nye. Soft power is defined as the “power of attraction”,<sup>3</sup> referring to the attractive force of cultural norms, symbols and goods. These are created and communicated not only through education and culture, science and innovation, but also well-known brand products. Since the 1990s, this approach has increasingly been incorporated in foreign policies of emerging countries. In contrast to traditional diplomacy, it is not just a nation’s government, but also its respective national public sphere, that are seen as the “target”. In more recent times, if this involves the interaction between government institutions and a foreign public, the term public diplomacy is often used. In Germany, for example, in 2007, the departments of communication and culture of the Federal Foreign Office were merged.<sup>4</sup>

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3 | Joseph Nye, *Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York, 2004, p. 11.

4 | Britt Inga Karten, “Staatliche Imagearbeit: Die Public Diplomacy des Auswärtigen Amtes”, in: Thomas Jäger/Henriette Viehrig (eds.), *Die amerikanische Regierung gegen die Weltöffentlichkeit? Theoretische und empirische Analysen der Public Diplomacy zum Irakkrieg*, Wiesbaden, 2008, pp. 163-190.

**The German organisations for cultural policy include the Goethe-Institute, the German Academic Exchange Service, the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations, the Humboldt Foundation, Deutsche Welle and German schools abroad.**

The German Foreign Cultural and Educational Policy (AKBP) is based on an “expanded concept of culture”<sup>5</sup> and is used alongside traditional diplomacy and foreign economic policy. Here, a pluralistic approach is undertaken, which institutionally is characterised

by numerous intermediary organisations and a broad number of program approaches. These include the Goethe-Institute, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations, ifa), the Humboldt Foundation, *Deutsche Welle* (DW) and German schools abroad. The German AKBP’s aim is to provide the foreign public with a realistic image of Germany in a courtship of “trust and values”.<sup>6</sup> The aim is to foster long-term common values and interests with these foreign multipliers. From a German perspective, these activities should be based on the Federal Republic of Germany’s core foreign policy objectives and fundamental values, yet should not impinge upon the autonomy of these host institutions in their specific implementation.

## CHINESE CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

The political field of cultural diplomacy only became an important cornerstone of foreign policy in the People’s Republic of China around the turn of the millennium.<sup>7</sup> This timing was not coincidental: the backdrop was formed by the global debate about what role China would play in tomorrow’s world given the impressive increase in its economic and political importance. Whilst academics like Richard Bernstein, Ross Munro and Martin Jacques identified China as a threat to the world as a whole or the Western world

5 | The “expanded concept of culture” introduced into the debate on foreign cultural policy by the German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf goes beyond the understanding of culture in the narrower sense, instead placing the term in the context of social life and social exchange. Cultural exchange and the principle of relations on an “equal footing” thus became the focus of foreign cultural policy.

6 | Cf. Foreign Ministry, “16. Bericht der Bundesregierung zur Auswärtigen Kultur- und Bildungspolitik 2011/2012”, foreword, p. 5, [http://auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/634528/publicationFile/175854/130109\\_16.pdf](http://auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/634528/publicationFile/175854/130109_16.pdf) (accessed 11 May 2015).

7 | The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the State Council and supporting academic institutions play a coordinating role at the central level. Cf. Culture in EU external relations, “China Country Report”, 2014, p. 14, <http://cultureinexternalrelations.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/country-report-China-20.05.2014-bis.pdf> (accessed 20 Apr 2015).

in particular (China threat)<sup>8</sup>, the communist leadership under Hu Jintao in Beijing emphasised the peaceful nature of this ascent (*heping jueqi*, 和平 崛起). It is against this backdrop that current Chinese cultural diplomacy can be seen as part of the unresolved challenge of how the People's Republic will position itself within the structure of global regimes and whether it can decisively influence its future design.



Strong international criticism on former US President George W. Bush's foreign policy induced the Chinese government to focus particularly on soft power. | Source: Chris Beckett, flickr ©①③②.

### **The discourse on cultural diplomacy in China and its ideological assumptions**

The political leadership in Beijing and the academic elite were (and are) very aware of these reservations about the rise of China. Chinese academics intensively grappled with the debate on the importance of soft power and its impact on the role of their country.<sup>9</sup> They came to the conclusion that China would not be able to match the U.S. in terms of hard power in the coming decades, but the United States would face deficits in its soft

- 8 | Cf. Richard Bernstein/Ross H. Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China*, New York, 1997; Martin Jacques, *When China Rules The World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order: The Rise of the Middle Kingdom and the End of the Western World*, New York, 2012.
- 9 | For a good overview on the Chinese discourse on soft power cf. Hongying Wang/Yeh-Chung Lu (2008); Joel Wuthnow (2008); Sheng Ding (2008).

power.<sup>10</sup> In addition, Beijing registered strong international criticism of U.S. foreign policy under George W. Bush<sup>11</sup> and concluded that a (potential) comparable criticism of China would enormously impede the peaceful rise they sought. Hu Jintao's report to the 17<sup>th</sup> National People's Congress in 2007 therefore explicitly held fast to the goal of "culture as part of the soft power of our country".<sup>12</sup> How important then is soft power to China? And what role does this foreign cultural policy instrument play? Is it (still) not so much a matter of influencing other countries and societies on the basis of a country's own attractiveness, as Nye had once formulated, or is it instead a matter of protecting one's own soft ascent? Is China's primary goal therefore "to get the outside world to accept its rising power"?<sup>13</sup>

### **The Chinese understanding of "foreign", "culture" and "diplomacy"**

It is not just the current political-ideological framework that is critical to fully understand the cultural diplomacy of the People's Republic of China. The culturally specific and historically deep-rooted notions of "domestic" and "foreign", "other" and "self" considerably influence concepts and instruments of modern Chinese foreign cultural policy. Whilst a clearly visible division between "self" and "other" can be drawn in the West, the traditional Chinese understanding of "domestic" and "foreign" is rather more diffuse. Chinese culture has developed its own way of dealing with outside influences. The far-reaching sinicisation of foreign rulers, such as the Mongols (Yuan Dynasty) and the Manchu (Qing Dynasty) on the one hand, and the adoption of Buddhism on the other, show typical forms of both assimilation and the inclusion of foreign values. At the same time, however, Chinese culture traditionally lacks the typical Western tendency of highlighting their own culture in a

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10 | Cf. Joshua Kurlantzick, "China's Charm: Implications of Chinese Soft Power", *Policy Brief 47*, 2006, pp. 1-8.

11 | Cf. Lai Hongyi, "China's Cultural Diplomacy: Going for Soft Power", in: Lai Hongyi and Yiyi Lu (eds.), *China's Soft Power and International Relations*, New York, 2012, p. 83.

12 | Hu Jintao, "Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive for New Victories in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in all Respects", *Report to the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China on Oct. 15, 2007*, <http://china.org.cn/english/congress/229611.htm> (accessed 14 Apr 2015).

13 | Cf. Wang, n. 1, p. 267.

somewhat missionary fashion, an implication of the universalist claim of their own values. China has instead always opted more towards projecting its own cultural appeal, or as the intellectual Zhao Tingyang puts it in terms of the Confucian mindset: "Look for self-transformation in attempts to convince or convert others."<sup>14</sup>

However, China was and is unwilling to move away from the self-proclaimed central role it plays within human culture and civilisation. In this respect, what the West calls the rise of China is merely a renaissance from a Chinese perspective – a return to its legitimately respected position in the world order. The reason for this self-perception is China's strong pride in its own history and its erstwhile cultural, technical and economic (alleged) prominence over the rest of the world. It is against this backdrop that aggressive "(cultural) diplomacy" directed towards the foreign public is largely uncharted territory for China. The first decades after the communist takeover and internationalist propaganda notwithstanding, public diplomacy played a merely subordinate role in the foreign policy of the PR China before the new millennium. However, this has since changed with the new Chinese FCP strategy.<sup>15</sup>

## **ACTORS AND STRUCTURE OF CHINA'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY**

Two key instruments in China's cultural diplomacy are in the focus of the following analysis: the Confucius Institutes and the China Cultural Centers on the one hand and

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the internationalisation of Chinese media on the other.<sup>16</sup> Unlike countries like Germany, China's cultural diplomacy is as yet almost exclusively under the control of State actors. This leads to a great deal of political control and consistency with regard to the agenda on the one hand, but also to numerous problems on

14 | Cf. Zhao Tingyang, *Tianxia System (All Under Heaven): Introduction of the Philosophy of World Institutions*, Nanjing, 2005.

15 | Cf. Wang, n. 1, p. 259 ff.

16 | These foreign cultural policy instruments were first mentioned explicitly in the 11<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (2005 to 2010): Year of Chinese Culture celebrations, Chinese culture weeks, Chinese film weeks, Chinese art weeks, book exhibitions, film festivals, art exhibitions, expos, scientific exchanges, tourism and sports (cf. Lai, 86). The internet has played an increasingly important role in recent years. See: Nele Noesselt, "Internationale Dimensionen des 'chinesischen' Internets", *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen* 21, 1/2014, pp. 161-177.

the other, not least because these institutional responsibilities are rather fragmented.<sup>17</sup>

### **Confucius Institutes: controversial stars of China's cultural diplomacy**

**Since the first opening in Seoul in 2004 Confucius Institutes expanded rapidly. In 2014 already 436 Institutes have been operating.**

The Confucius Institutes<sup>18</sup> are the most important, most visible and financially most important instrument of Chinese cultural diplomacy.<sup>19</sup> These facilities have expanded rapidly since the first such institute was opened in Seoul in 2004. There were already 436 Confucius Institutes and 646 Confucius Classrooms in more than 100 countries and all regions of the world by early 2014 (an institute was opened every five days in the first four years on average).<sup>20</sup> By 2020, the government aims to have built 1,000 institutions.<sup>21</sup> This ambitious project is possible only through joint ventures, usually with foreign universities, in rarer cases with other foreign public or social organisations or even companies.<sup>22</sup>

17 | The "power of diplomacy", as Yiwei Wang calls it, is not centralised in China. Individual party and government bodies share responsibilities. The Ministries of Education and Cultural Affairs are in charge of core initiatives of China's cultural diplomacy. The State Council and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are more involved in media diplomacy; the Central Committee of the Communist Party handles party-to-party diplomacy with other countries; the Confucius Institutes are administered by a separate institution called *Hanban* (see above). Cf. Wang, n. 1, pp. 264 ff.

18 | Confucius merely plays the role of its famous namesake, however, and is in no way indicative of the specific content of the institute.

19 | The China Cultural Centers are the proper, official cultural institutions operated exclusively by the Chinese abroad (in Germany: Berlin). In return, the Federal Republic of Germany operates a Goethe Institute in Beijing and a Department of Culture and Education of the German Consulate General in Shanghai. Its status was contractually established in 1988 and once again regulated in the agreement on cultural cooperation concluded between Germany and China in 2005. Nevertheless, the Confucius Institutes are generally much more often the subject of worldwide interest due to their much larger number. For this reason they are addressed in greater detail here.

20 | Cf. Hanban, "About Confucius Institutes, 2014", [http://english.hanban.org/node\\_10971.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_10971.htm) (accessed 14 Apr 2015); Zhe Ren, "The Confucius Institutes and China's Soft Power", *IDE Discussion Paper* 330, 2012, p. 1.

21 | Cf. Gong Yidong, "Confucius Institute: promoting language, culture and friendliness", *Xinhua*, 19 Sep 2006, <http://www.china-botschaft.de/det/jj/t272620.htm> (accessed 11 May 2015).

22 | Cf. Zhe, n. 20, p. 5 ff.



Confucius Institutes, which are present worldwide, are usually sustained by the Chinese government and foreign organisations, companies or universities, as depicted here. | Source: Scott C. Soderberg, University of Michigan, flickr ©①③③.

The Confucius Institutes are overseen by Hanban (Office of Chinese Language Council International, 汉办), which manages not only the institutes, but is also responsible for Chinese language policy as a whole, including teaching materials, teaching staff, teaching quality, evaluation and the Chinese language proficiency test, HSK. Hanban officially operates as a non-profit organisation, but is under what amounts to close political control and is directed by a committee that represents the State Council, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education, the latter of which takes the leading role. A total of twelve ministries are involved. The partnerships between the Confucius Institutes and local institutions are based on standard agreements between Hanban and the foreign partner, which generally span an initial period of five years.<sup>23</sup>

The distribution of financial responsibilities follows a specific principle: in most cases, Hanban provides seed funding for the first five years, including staff salaries and funding for teaching materials. The foreign partner institution pays for the physical facility and bears the administrative and infrastructure costs.<sup>24</sup> The financing is thus split in a 1:1 ratio, and Hanban initially bears all costs in developing countries. Funding by Hanban is discontinued

23 | Don Starr, "Chinese Language Education in Europe: The Confucius Institutes", *European Journal of Education* 44, 1/2009, p. 71.

24 | Cf. *ibid.*, p. 71.



after the first five years, and the institutions are then meant to fund themselves through cultural and language services. Although no exact figures are available, the initial financing made by China probably amounts to anywhere from 100,000 to 400,000 U.S. dollars per institute per year.<sup>25</sup> With a total budget of around 145 million U.S. dollars per year, these institutes are still considerably less financially equipped than the German Goethe Institutes or the British Council, for example, whose annual budgets amount to 217 million and three billion U.S. dollars, respectively.<sup>26</sup>

**The global demand for Chinese language education undoubtedly continues to increase, with some 40 million people currently learning Chinese. This trend is largely a result of China's growing economic importance.**

Programmatically, the Confucius Institutes are comparable to the Spanish Cervantes Institutes, as both place a strong focus on language instruction.<sup>27</sup> The global demand for Chinese language education undoubtedly continues to increase, with some 40 million people currently learning Chinese. This trend is largely a result of China's growing economic importance. Furthermore, the institutes offer a range of events on Chinese culture, such as exhibitions, lectures, film screenings, intercultural training sessions, business seminars, tea ceremonies, calligraphy events, tai chi classes and Chinese painting.<sup>28</sup> Their main target audience is therefore a rather broad segment of the public that is less familiar with China.

The institutes generally design their programs independently. However, conflicts are known to arise from the Hanban constitution and by-laws. According to these by-laws, institutions must "abide by the laws and regulations of the countries in which they are located, respect local cultural and educational traditions and social customs, and they shall not contravene concerning the laws and regulations of China".<sup>29</sup> Falk Hartig notes a "delicate balance" in practice here:<sup>30</sup> the balance the institutions must strike between issues that are controversial discussed in the West but sensitive for China is often difficult to achieve.

25 | Cf. Falk Hartig, "Konfuzius-Institute – Stars der chinesischen Kulturdiplomatie", in: Helmut K. Anheier/Bernhard Lorentz (eds.), *Wege der Verständigung. Wie Kulturdiplomatie mehr Vertrauen zwischen China und dem Westen schaffen kann*, Essen, 2012, p. 106.

26 | For the figures cf. *ibid.*, p. 106.

27 | Cf. Zhe, n. 20, p. 18.

28 | Cf. Hartig, n. 25, p. 106; also to the following.

29 | Constitution and By-Laws of the Confucius Institutes, [http://english.hanban.org/node\\_7880.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_7880.htm) (accessed 14 Apr 2015).

30 | Cf. Hartig, n. 25, p. 107.

## The China Cultural Centers

The Confucius Institutes undoubtedly form the center of Chinese language and cultural education. However, they are not the first Chinese cultural institutions to be located abroad. Since the end of the 1980s the PRC has maintained official cultural representative offices around the world with its nine China Cultural Centers (*zhongguo wenhua zhongxin*, 中国文化中心). Much like the Confucius Institutes, the Cultural Centers offer extensive programs in language and cultural education, organise exhibitions, readings and performances by artists, writers and theatre groups from China and about China. However, they do not consider themselves to be educational institutions, which are meant to maintain and intensify exchanges between universities. They instead focus primarily on cultural exchange and cooperation with creative artists and the public in their host countries<sup>31</sup> and are intertwined with the state cultural institutions in China to a greater extent.<sup>32</sup> This enables them to feature current domestic programs and exhibitions more quickly abroad. This can and should represent the work and diversity of the contemporary Chinese cultural scene to audiences abroad. This objective is also served by the increasing promotion of the cultural and creative industries in China, providing increasingly attractive resources for the country's external image from and for the contemporary art and cultural scene. A crucial point is that these available cultural "products" can be developed into a credible brand.<sup>33</sup>

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The Cultural Centers also play an important role during visits by government officials. For example, the Cultural Center in Berlin often receives visitors, including the highest-ranking Chinese officials. It is currently unclear how and whether a strict division between the Cultural Centers and the Confucius Institutes can be

31 | Cf. "Cultural Centers and Confucius Institutes help promote understanding between China and the world" (*wenhua zhongxin he kongzi xueyuan you zhu cengjin zhongguo he shijie renmin liaojie*, 文化中心和孔子学院有助增进中国和世界人民了解), 12 Mar 2009, [http://china.com.cn/news/2009-03/12/content\\_17432834.htm](http://china.com.cn/news/2009-03/12/content_17432834.htm) (accessed 14 Apr 2015).

32 | There are nine China Cultural Centers in Mauritius, Benin, Cairo, Paris, Malta, Seoul, Berlin, Tokyo and Ulan Bator, cf. <http://berlin.cccweb.org> (accessed 14 Apr 2015).

33 | Cf. Zhu Legeng, "Chinas Kultur der Welt präsentieren", 23 Mar 2011, <http://munich.china-consulate.org/ger/whjy/t808944.htm> (accessed 14 Apr 2015).

achieved.<sup>34</sup> Domestic inter-ministerial competition over responsibilities and resources likely plays a major role here.



Hu Jintao's state visit to the USA in 2011: The former Chinese Head of State complained several times that the Chinese view is not represented enough in the global media landscape. | Source: Gregory Jones, U.S. Army, flickr ©📷.

### **Chinese media, or how China makes its voice heard internationally**

The internationalisation of Chinese media is another key objective of China's cultural diplomacy. Former head of state and Communist Party general secretary Hu Jintao lamented in 2008 that far too little attention was paid to Chinese opinion in the global media landscape, evidenced in the reporting on the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.<sup>35</sup> An expansion of China's public diplomacy efforts should therefore particularly enable an expansion into the "international ideological and cultural markets"<sup>36</sup> and establish a direct channel of communication with foreign populations. It is on this basis that the Chinese government has invested some 8.7

34 | For example, the Cultural Center in Paris is closely intertwined with the local Confucius Institute.

35 | Cf. Wang Dandan, "Das westliche Meinungsmonopol knacken", *Kulturaustausch. Zeitschrift für internationale Perspektiven*, 3/2012, [http://cms.ifa.de/index.php?id=magazin&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=16253](http://cms.ifa.de/index.php?id=magazin&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=16253) (accessed 28 Jan 2014).

36 | Quoted in Anne Nelson, *China's Grand Strategy for Media? A report to the Center for International Media Assistance*, 22 Oct 2013, p. 17, [http://issuu.com/cima-publications/docs/cima-china\\_anne\\_nelson/3?e=3797659/5326397](http://issuu.com/cima-publications/docs/cima-china_anne_nelson/3?e=3797659/5326397) (accessed 14 Apr 2015).

billion U.S. dollars in the *CCTV* television channel, international broadcaster *Radio China International* (CRI) and the English-language newspaper *China Daily* (with several regional editions) since 2009.

*CRI* covers 43 languages. Plans are in place for the Xinhua news agency to serve some 80,000 customers with 1,000 foreign correspondents in 180 offices by 2020. *China Daily* has published an American edition since 2009, a European edition since 2010 and an African edition since 2012. *CCTV* currently airs in English, French, Spanish and, since 2009, in Arabic and Russian as well. The newly created *CCTV America* format has a main Washington studio, with seven other sub-offices in North America.<sup>37</sup> *CCTV* also has seven news offices in South America. It is the only foreign channel in Cuba that provides the population with (official) access to foreign news.<sup>38</sup>

***China Daily* has published an American edition since 2009, a European edition since 2010 and an African edition since 2012. *CCTV* currently airs in English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian.**

### **China's media involvement in Africa**

China's media strategy is particularly well illustrated in Africa. Similar to its major infrastructure projects, China is filling a (media) gap in Africa after many Western news agencies have withdrawn. *CCTV Africa's* main studio has been situated in Nairobi, Kenya since 2012. It also sees itself as a global voice for the African continent, aiming to change its media presence to also highlight potentials and solutions to problems and crises, and not only simply presenting them.<sup>39</sup> State news agency *Xinhua* ran more than 20 news offices in Africa in 2012. The government is increasingly establishing investment incentives in Africa for Chinese telecommunications companies, is offering the African media sector technical expertise and has been inviting African journalists to training programs in China since 2004. This intensification of media coverage in Africa is accompanied by China's increasing economic involvement in the continent. As Africa's largest trading partner, the trade volume between China and Africa exceeded 200 billion U.S. dollars for the first time in 2013.<sup>40</sup>

37 | New York, Toronto, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Houston and Miami. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 25.

38 | Cf. *ibid.*, p. 25.

39 | Cf. Mark Masaai, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 26.

40 | "Chinas Regierungschef sagt Afrika Partnerschaft auf Augenhöhe zu", Reuters, 4 May 2014, <http://de.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idDEKBN0DK06Z20140504> (accessed 14 Apr 2015).



The headquarters of *CCTV* in Beijing: For several years the largest Chinese TV station has had a new head office and now broadcasts in the six official languages of the United Nations. | Source: Jamie Barras, flickr ©1133.

Along with the quantitative growth of international reporting, the format of programming has also changed. *CCTV* has been able to hire local and foreign journalists and presenters from well-known news agencies and television stations; the number of foreign correspondents has multiplied, and particularly young foreign trained junior journalists are promoted. Unlike in domestic broadcasting, critical interviews, debates between experts and the involvement of public opinion help to strike a new tone at *CCTV News*, the English-language news channel. The channel airs under the banner of “objective reporting”. It seems that foreign programming is subject to a lesser degree of political control than those in China itself. The uprisings in Tahrir Square in Cairo, the student protests in Turkey, secession demands in eastern Ukraine: issues of territorial integrity and the questioning of the social and political order are no longer taboo subjects – as long as they do not concern China directly. So far, China’s international radio and television broadcasting are focusing on economically important markets.

Economic engagement and intensive media relations as well as student exchange programs complement each other here.<sup>41</sup>

China is being increasingly heard and is on the way to become an influential competitor in the international media world. However, the lack of real political independence remains a major stumbling block in being able to compete with Western news agencies and global programs, such as *CNN* or *BBC*.

### **CHINA'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY: A STUDY IN CONTRADICTIONS**

Numerically speaking, the expansion of foreign cultural policy institutions and programs by the PRC is rather impressive. The country has become a major global player in the field of cultural diplomacy within a short

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period of time. The well-attended language courses at the Confucius Institutes in particular demonstrate that this expansion has been a response to an increasing demand. However, the institutes are sometimes faced with fierce criticism: as being instruments through which China is conveying its communist propaganda to the world<sup>42</sup> and which are intended to influence research on China worldwide to suit the ruling Communist Party.<sup>43</sup> The former criticism can often be regarded as excessive. Yet controversial issues, such as the situation in Tibet and relations with Taiwan, remain ignored by the institutes. Instead, the traditional culture of ancient China is to be used to create a positive image of the modern People's Republic, as the media and creative scene in modern China remains less significant when compared with Japan, Korea or even Taiwan.

If modern cultural diplomacy is intended to be an open and critical dialogue between societies and not an instrument of interest-driven politics of a single state, it must reflect a nation's entire pluralistic spectrum. However, this plurality must be "verified", both institutionally and in terms of content. An image of a nation presented as universal by the government contradicts this. Joseph Nye rightly warns that "information that appears to be propaganda [...] may [...] turn out to be counterproductive if it undermines

41 | Cf. Nelson, n. 36, p. 26.

42 | Cf. Hartig, n. 25, p. 107.

43 | Cf. *ibid.*, p. 108.

a country's reputation for credibility".<sup>44</sup> China's de facto social pluralism must therefore also be present in its cultural diplomacy. Only then can China counter any suspicion of attempting to generate soft power exclusively through State power.



South African President Jacob Zuma with Chinese Head of State Xi Jinping 2013 in Durban: Chinese cultural diplomacy, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, goes hand in hand with development aid, which is allegedly without preconditions. | Source: Siyabulela Duda, GCIS ZA, flickr ©①②.

This underlines the domestic dimension of public diplomacy in China. Soft power is used here for more than just foreign policy objectives. It is also intended to foster domestic social cohesion in terms of culture and national identity. In China, broadcasting the country's strengths (*zonghe guoli*, 综合国力) abroad supports the legitimacy of Communist Party rule. China's current vision of a "harmonious society" was expanded under the new leadership of Xi Jinping to include the "Chinese dream" (*zhongguo meng*, 中国梦) as new national ideal.

Nevertheless, the PRC's current State-oriented cultural diplomacy strategy has proven quite successful. This is especially true in developing and emerging countries.<sup>45</sup> This is part of a systematic approach, particularly in Africa, in which foreign and development policy objectives are synchronised, integrated and pursued with "hard" and "soft" measures: (seemingly) unconditional

44 | Joseph Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, Jan 2008, pp.100-101.

45 | Cf. Kurlantzick, n.10.

development aid, especially in the infrastructure sector and in terms of commodity agreements, is flanked by an increasing presence in the form of cultural projects, Confucius Institutes and Chinese media.<sup>46</sup> China's media presence is perceived as a counterweight to that of the West in Africa – especially as their common role as developing countries is highlighted.<sup>47</sup> Tens of thousands of young Africans are now studying at Chinese universities thanks to State scholarships. In doing so, Beijing is deliberately seeking to embrace future young elites from developing countries. Despite all these efforts under the framework of cultural diplomacy, the Chinese engagement is not entirely beyond dispute. For instance, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang was forced to respond to increasing criticism from Africa shortly before starting a multi-day trip to Africa in early May 2014. In this context he stated that China “will not pursue a colonialist path”.<sup>48</sup>

Despite considerable efforts financially and personnel-wise, the impact of China's cultural diplomacy will also in the future reach limits. The exclusive character of its own culture will likely be an obstacle to a cultural dialogue held on an “equal footing”. The high degree of attractiveness and connectivity of Western culture, is not least originating from its openness to foreign cultural influences, but also by its claim to represent universal values. China's cultural diplomacy currently aims to essentially cushion global concerns and fears regarding the rise of China. In fact, worldwide public opinion polls show a mixed picture: although soft power is difficult to measure directly, various investigations point to regionally divergent views on the general issue of the positive influence of a country. The Pew Global Attitudes Project shows a significant gap between a largely positive public image of China in Africa and Latin America and a significantly more negative image in

**The exclusive character of China's own culture will likely be an obstacle to a cultural dialogue held on an “equal footing”. The high degree of connectivity of Western culture is not least originating from its openness to foreign cultural influences.**

46 | Cf. *BBC Online*, “Ying mei: Zhongguo dui Feizhou meili waijiao bingfei zhi wei ziyuan” (English media: China's charm diplomacy towards Africa is not just about resources), 30 Apr 2013, [http://bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/simp/pressreview/2013/04/130430\\_press\\_china\\_africa.shtml](http://bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/simp/pressreview/2013/04/130430_press_china_africa.shtml) (accessed 14 Apr 2015); cf. Markus M. Haefliger, “Chinas Soft Power in Afrika”, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 4 Jan 2013, <http://www.nzz.ch/aktuell/international/uebersicht/peking-bringt-den-afrikanern-chinesische-kultur-bei-1.17919726> (accessed 14 Apr 2015).

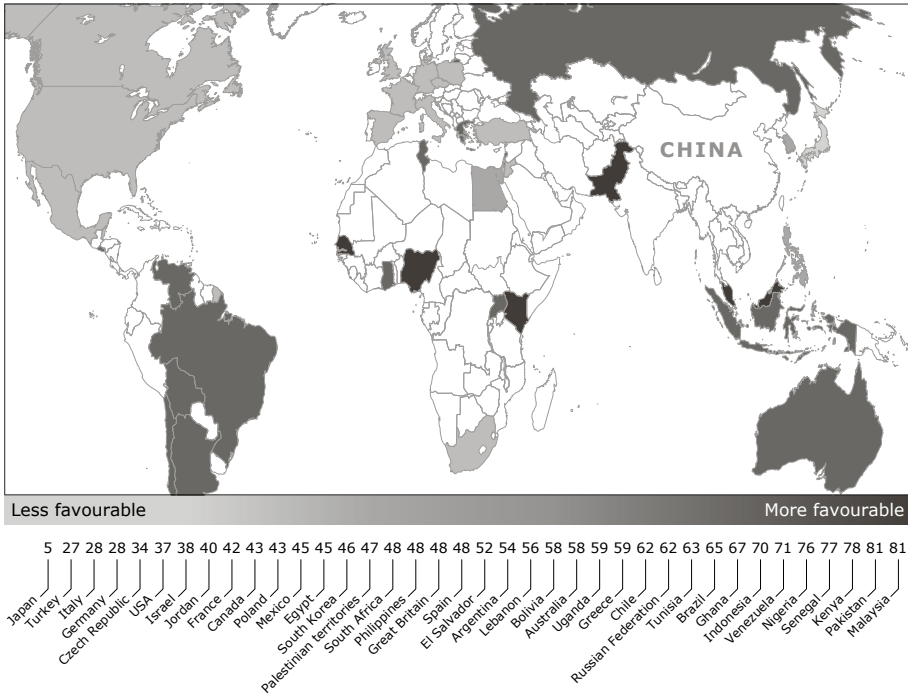
47 | Cf. *BBC Online*, n. 46.

48 | “Chinas Regierungschef sagt Afrika Partnerschaft auf Augenhöhe zu”, Reuters, 4 May 2014, <http://de.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idDEKBN0DK06Z20140504> (accessed 14 Apr 2015).



Western countries.<sup>49</sup> China’s growing geopolitical importance and its intense cultural relations efforts have therefore not yet resulted in a distinctly positive image of the country to the desired extent.

Fig. 1  
**International Image of China**  
**Per cent of those who have a favourable view of China**



Source: Own illustration based on: Pew Research Center, n. 49.

Europe should take this development seriously and scrutinise its own instruments of cultural diplomacy critically. We cannot afford that a continent like Africa is increasingly turning away from Europe. At the same time, however, Europe must actively represent fundamental values towards China. An appropriate cultural diplomacy strategy is a key resource to this end.

49 | Cf. Pew Research Center, “Global Image of the United States and China”, 18 Jul 2013, <http://pewglobal.org/2013/07/18/global-image-of-the-united-states-and-china> (accessed 14 Apr 2015).