

2nd Workshop on Europe-China Relations in Global Politics

Strategic Partnership? EU-China Relations under a new Leadership

Title:

Diplomacy from the public? The EU-China High-Level People-to-People Dialogue

Abstract

At the 14th EU China Summit, held in Beijing in February 2012, the European Commission and Chinese leaders agreed on establishing the EU-China High-Level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD) as the third pillar of EU-China relations, complementing to the previous pillars institutionalized in the High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue, and the High-Level Strategic Dialogue.

This initiative mirrors the increasing importance of public diplomacy in both scholarship and practical politics: It is now widely accepted that international actors cannot simply rely on their economic or military power to achieve their goals, but have to try to create a positive image of themselves in order to reach the desired outcomes. People-to-people dialogues are a popular mechanism to pursue this goal.

This paper shall on the one hand give an overview on current theories and models in the study field of public diplomacy (including people-to-people exchanges). In the second part, I will discuss activities planned under the newly established HPPD, looking at the Joint Declaration and speeches which clarify the aims of this new pillar. How do the European Union and China define public diplomacy (and cultural diplomacy)? Can the models discussed above be a helpful tool to analyze their approaches, and if so, how do the EU-China initiatives fit in? Last but not least (and daring to enter the uncertain field of predictions and outlooks), if creating a better mutual understanding is the goal of the dialogues, are these dialogues reaching the right people to result in a multiplier-effect that will eventually touch major parts of the European and Chinese public?

In other words, is it possible to create “diplomacy from below” in EU-China relations in a sense that it “harness(es) the dialogue between different social collectives and their cultures in the hope of sharing meaning an understanding”¹? Could EU-China people-to-people dialogues in the long run create a network that goes beyond public diplomacy as a tool to increase a states (soft) power, thus establishing public diplomacy as “diplomacy from the public”?

Introduction

“When Raymond Williams (1976) called culture one of the most complex words in the English language, he could well have added diplomacy as one of the most complex fields in international relations.”²

Every scholar or student trying to engage with public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy will sooner or later stumble over statements of this sort, statements describing the complexity of

¹Manuel Castells, *The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance* (2008), 91.

² Helmut K. Anheier, *Foundations in the Complex Cultural Diplomacy Environment* (2012), 9.

the topic under discussion – not only does the term “diplomacy” include a variety of meanings, perceptions, and tools; if we add term in the like of *culture* or *public*, it gets even more complicated. What is culture? Who is the public? What do we understand by it? And how is cultural diplomacy connected to public diplomacy, and how is all of that connected to “soft power”?

On the other hand,

“There has never been a better time for studying diplomacy. The United States is rediscovering it. The European Union is reinventing it. The Chinese are inscribing it with their own characteristics. Even the Taliban are thinking about it. And over all, like some vast volcanic cloud, public diplomacy seems to drift, entering every nook and cranny of international life to open new opportunities while causing the old machinery to lose power, seize up, and stall.”³

Public Diplomacy concepts – what are we talking about?

Misunderstandings in scholarship are just as frustrating and misleading as misunderstandings in politics, relationships, or friendships. Unfortunately, and as has been mentioned before, definitions do not come easy in this field. Public diplomacy (as a field of study) cannot be limited to IR – instead, it can be seen as one of the most multidisciplinary study fields in scholarship.⁴ Hence, I shall give a brief overview over current definitions, approaches, concepts and models dealing with public diplomacy.⁵

Public Diplomacy is not new – looking at European history, attempts to engage in exchanges, transport positive images of one’s country to another can be traced back to the Renaissance. The political interest took up pace post World War I, in the 1920s. With the Cold War and, eventually, its end, public diplomacy gained more and more attention from scholarship and politicians alike. During the Cold War, it was driven by similar incentives as in the 1920s – it was mainly state-centred and born out of a constant threat-perception.⁶

The picture changed after the end of the Cold War – while it seems clear that states still are the most dominant actors in international politics, the increasing number of non-state actors, NGOs, international organizations, regional entities, and – last but certainly not least – the immense development of communication technologies, states and governments are not the only ones able to conduct public diplomacy.⁷

Now, each essay should start with a clear definition: Needless to say, *public diplomacy* has many! Often, public diplomacy is seen as the same thing as propaganda.⁸ Other (early) definitions concentrate on goals only, defining public diplomacy “direct communication with foreign peoples, with the aim of affecting their thinking and, ultimately, that of their

³ Paul Sharp, *Diplomats, Diplomacy, Diplomatic Studies, and the Future of International Relations and International Studies* (2011), 717/718.

⁴ See for example Eytan Gilboa, *Searching for a Theory of Public Diplomacy* (2008), 55.

⁵ Brief and comprehensive overviews on the development of Public Diplomacy Studies, models, concepts and challenges can be found in Gilboa (2008), a historical overview of “modern public diplomacy” is given by Bruce Gregory, *Public Diplomacy: Sunrise of an Academic Field* (2008)

⁶ Gregory (2008), pp. 276

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 275.

governments”, not indicating who is communicating with “foreign peoples”.⁹ Others add content (for example information about values, culture and policies) and actors (in general governments). One of the most renowned definitions comes from Joseph S. Nye in the context with the concept of soft power:

"Public diplomacy is an instrument that governments use to mobilize these resources [culture, values, foreign policies; addition by the author] to communicate with and attract the publics of other countries, rather than merely their governments. Public diplomacy tries to attract by drawing attention to these potential resources through broadcasting, subsidizing cultural exports, arranging exchanges and so forth".¹⁰

Other definitions include elements from PR, as “Public diplomacy and public relations people often pursue the same objective – affect public opinion for the benefit of their client/organization.”¹¹ New terms and concepts pop up: Distinctions are being made between *public diplomacy* (“where state and non-state actors use the media and other channels of communication to influence public opinion in foreign societies”), *media diplomacy* (“where officials use the media to investigate and promote mutual interests, negotiations, and conflict resolution”) and *media-broker diplomacy* (“where journalists temporarily assume the role of diplomats and serve as mediators in international negotiations”).¹² Vickers contributes the concept *New Public Diplomacy*, which can “be characterized as a blurring of traditional distinctions between international and domestic information activities, between public and traditional diplomacy, and between cultural diplomacy, marketing and news management” – a concept so broad that it is incredibly hard to use.¹³ Going even further (and leaving the governments behind, so to speak) Castells provides a definition referring to public diplomacy as not being propaganda or governmental, but being “the diplomacy of the public, that is, the projection in the international arena of the values and ideas of the public.”¹⁴

Models

The previous paragraphs indicated the problems of finding a clear concept (or a definition) of public diplomacy. This paragraph will show that the existing research models and variables to assess public diplomacy are just as diverse.¹⁵ In what follows I will give a couple of examples from several social science disciplines that might be useful to obtain more knowledge about public diplomacy:

An interesting starting point are three models developed by Gilboa (2000, 2001) on the base of five variables (major actors, initiators, goals, types of media, and means and techniques): the *Basic Cold War* model (dominant, as the name suggests, during the Cold War and based on the assumption “that if public opinion in the target society is persuaded to accept a favourable image of the other side, it will exert pressure on its government to alter existing hostile attitudes and policies”), the *Nonstate Transnational model* (“designed to investigate public diplomacy activities of groups, NGOs, and individuals using public diplomacy across

⁹ Malone (1985), 199. In Gilboa (2008), 57. According to Gilboa, the reason for not specifying who is communicating comes out of the assumptions that governments are the only actors pursuing public diplomacy anyway.

¹⁰ Ibid, 59.

¹¹ Benno H. Signitzer and Timothy Coombs, *Public Relations and Public Diplomacy: Conceptual Convergences* (1992), 139.

¹² Gilboa (2008) 58.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Manuel Castells, *The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance* (2008), 91.

¹⁵ Again, a broad overview can be found in Gilboa, 2008

national boundaries”), and the Domestic PR model (where a government uses PR agencies and lobby groups in the target country to submit its message – Gilboa claims this to be the dominating model in present times). Of course, these models are ideal types. But they have the merit of being able to explain the perception of certain policies in the target country. Gilboa uses an interesting example about a pro-democracy campaign in China – while the Chinese government thought that the US government was behind it all (and thus perceived the campaign as basic Cold War public diplomacy), the campaign was in fact organized by oppositional Chinese groups using the global communication networks to gain support for their goals (hence Nonstate Transnational public diplomacy).¹⁶ Therefore, the campaign caused a negative perception of the US government by Chinese officials (however, the models cannot explain if the Chinese would have reacted differently if they had known that the campaign was organized by Chinese civil society groups).

Approaches on public diplomacy from IR are closely connected to grand strategy and concepts of power. One has already been mentioned: Nye sees public diplomacy as an official tool to yield soft power. *Soft power* is defined as "the ability to get desired outcomes because others want what you want" (in contrast to *hard power*, by which you achieve your goals through threats and/or rewards).¹⁷ Other approaches are *Noopolitik* (a value-based counterpart to hard power driven *Realpolitik* by Arquilla/Ronfeldt, 1999), equations of public diplomacy and propaganda (Mor, 2006), and Nye’s adaptation of soft power into smart power (a strategy that aims at cleverly combining hard and soft power elements).¹⁸ Enlightening and interesting as these concepts may be (not only for scientists but also – maybe even more – for political decision makers), they offer little help of successfully assessing public diplomacy. In Bruce Gregory’s words: “How should we assess soft power in the narrow sense in which it is wielded by governments and in the broader sense in which it is gained and lost by societies through their cultures, values, and practices?”¹⁹

Communication studies have a lot to offer as well: In contrast to IR, scholars of this field are focussing on media and public opinion, and rightly so as public diplomacy is undoubtedly closely connected to the relations of governments, media and publics. Many studies have been conducted on the CNN effect (which suggests “that the media determine the national interest and usurp policy making from elected and appointed officials”, especially in cases of humanitarian disaster).²⁰ Promising concepts for public diplomacy studies are *framing*, *priming*, and *agenda setting*. Entmann (2004) developed his cascade activation model, which connects media, government and public opinion and can be used to explain how *framing fighting* works. So far, however, it has only been applied on the domestic level.²¹

Signitzer and Coombs have argued that public diplomacy and PR have a lot in common. It does not come as a surprise, then, that the field offers rather promising concepts and models as well. Some particularly intriguing models have been invented by Grunig (1993, 1997); it is based on two dimensions, purpose (symmetrical versus asymmetrical) and direction of

¹⁶ Ibid. 59/60.

¹⁷ Robert Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence in the Information Age*, (1998), 86.

¹⁸ Gilboa (2008), 60-62.

¹⁹ Gregory (2008), 284.

²⁰ For an overview on media effects and foreign policy see: Matthew A. Baum and Philip B.K. Potter, *The relationship between mass media, public opinion, and foreign policy: Towards a theoretical synthesis* (2008) Baum and Potter find that research results on the CNN effect are contradicting each other. Furthermore, “the implication seems to be that the CNN effect, to the extent it ever existed, was a temporary phenomenon made possible by the co- incidental confluence of new technology and the absence of a coherent geopolitical threat. These arguments likely combine to explain why the CNN effect seems to have had a significantly less transformative effect than early scholarship anticipated.” 53.

²¹ Gilboa (2008). 62-65.

communication (one-way versus two way). It has to be said, however, that we are once more dealing with ideal types, which tend to overlap in real life.²²

Last but not least, techniques and strategies from marketing studies have gained more importance in the study and pursuit of public diplomacy, first and foremost *branding*. States increasingly employ branding techniques to create a certain image of themselves and promote characteristics peoples from other states will think of when hearing about a certain country – Germany and cars and engineering, Sweden and design, Italy and fashion and style and so forth. Ham (2002) tried to connect branding and constructivism, thus trying to build a connection between public diplomacy, branding and communication. However, it has to be noted that while there are certain intriguing similarities between branding and public diplomacy, “public diplomacy (...) has to deal with complex and multifaceted issues, must provide appropriate context to foreign policy decisions, and cope with social and political impetus not easily understood abroad. In short, public diplomacy cannot be reduced to slogans and images”.²³

With all this various ideas, approaches, concepts and models at hand, how can a promising research framework that helps us to assess current EU-China people-to-people exchanges be structured?

The application of time dimensions to public diplomacy strategies might be useful. While traditionally public diplomacy aimed at achieving long-term results, the fast distribution of information all over the world (due to the revolutionary developments in communication technology, world-wide news channels like CNN, Al Jazeera and BBC, and the Internet) quite frequently leads to situations, where public diplomacy tools have to be applied ad hoc. Gilboa suggests to distinguish between immediate, intermediate and long term time ranges (George 1979) and combines these with variables developed by Leonard (2002).²⁴

Figure I:

Range	Immediate	Intermediate	Long
Time	Hours/Days	Weeks/Months	Years
Purpose	Reactive	Proactive	Relationship
Media/public opinion	News management	Strategic Communication	Building favourable conditions
Government	Closely linked	Partly linked	Remotely linked ²⁵
Public diplomacy (PD) instrument	Advocacy; international broadcasting; cyber PD	International public relations; corporate diplomacy; Diaspora PD	Cultural diplomacy; exchanges; branding

Another idea potentially interesting for my purposes here comes from Geoffrey Cowan and Amelia Arsenault (2008). Cowan/Arsenault are working on the lines of the already mentioned

²² Ibid. 65-67.

²³ Ibid. 67/68

²⁴ Ibid. 72/73. See also Mark Leonard, *Diplomacy by other Means*, (2002)

²⁵ In building long-term relations, foundations play a critical role. Interesting models of their work, their relations to their respective governments, their goals and ways of communication can be found in Anheier 2012.

Grunig. In their assessment of successful means of communicating in public diplomacy, they distinguish between certain ways of communication in public diplomacy: Monologue (one-way) and dialogue (two-way). Furthermore, they add a third layer, collaboration. In their essay they analyze all three layers and clarify their respective strengths and weaknesses:²⁶

Monologues, often criticized as being mere propaganda and too much one-way communication, can, in certain situations, play a fundamental role in shaping a positive image of a country. To explain why a country does a certain thing, adopts a specific policy etc., monologues (in form of governmental addresses, speeches or strategy papers) might be the best way to go. The same holds true for reactions in critical situations (like Obama's speech condemning the Koran burnings of the fundamental Christian pastor Terry Jones). John F. Kennedy's famous sentence "Ich bin ein Berliner" had an impact that could hardly have been achieved by other means.²⁷

The definition of *dialogue* is a central part of many social and humanist sciences. Habermas (1987) and others define dialogue as a way of communication in which information is exchanged in reciprocal and multidirectional ways. Buber (1958) makes a distinction between *technical* and *true dialogue*: In a *technical dialogue*, "ideas and information are exchanged, [in] a *true dialogue* (...) participants willingly and openly engage in true relationship-building exchanges in which feelings of control and dominance are minimized."²⁸ While monologue-approaches to public diplomacy are often criticized, dialogues become more and more important. The "human desire to be heard" plays a fundamental role. Dialogues between officials, scholars, students, through social networks and media programs, can help to fulfil this need. As a tool with symbolic meaning on the one hand, and a tool that can help to overcome stereotypes, find "proper" ways to communicate, to agree or disagree, dialogues are of crucial importance.²⁹

Finally, Cowan and Arsenault argue that *collaboration* should be added as a third layer of public diplomacy. "Collaboration as a form of public diplomacy refers to initiatives in which participants from different nations participate in a project together."³⁰ In contrast to dialogues (which are necessarily included in collaboration), these initiatives have a clear goal and time frame, which help the participants to build a long lasting relationship – examples for collaborative initiatives include building a school together or performing in a joint concert.³¹

Where do EU-China people-to-people exchange programs fit in? The authors cited above all point out that most these concepts and models have not been sufficiently tested yet. This is what I intend to do rather briefly in the upcoming paragraph, using initiatives under the pillar of the newly created EU-China High-Level People-to-People dialogue as case study. As this pillar has just been launched, I will concentrate on Joint Declarations and speeches specifying the aims of this new pillar in EU-China relations. How do the European Union and China define public diplomacy (and cultural diplomacy)? Can the models discussed above be a helpful tool to analyze their approaches, and if so, how do the EU-China initiatives fit in? Last but not least (and daring to enter the uncertain field of predictions and outlooks), if creating a

²⁶ Geoffrey Cowan and Amelia Arsenault, *Moving from Monologue to Dialogue to Collaboration: The three Layers of Public Diplomacy*, 2008, 11.

²⁷ Ibid. 13-16

²⁸ Ibid. 18.

²⁹ Ibid. 18/19. Cowan and Arsenault argue that dialogue is especially important for the US, as they (still) are the only superpower. It is therefore on the one hand important that US-policies are understood, on the other hand people have a higher "desire to be heard" by the US as well. (p.20)

³⁰ Ibid. 21.

³¹ Ibid. One of the most famous examples that can be defined as collaboration is the (Jewish-Muslim) Divan Orchestra, conducted and organized by the Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim and the US-Palestinian writer and critic Edward Said. (Ibid. 25.)

better mutual understanding is the goal of the dialogues, are these dialogues reaching the right people to result in a multiplier-effect that will eventually touch major parts of the European and Chinese public?

Despite the ongoing discussion about what kind of entity the EU is and whether or not it has *actorness*, I will, for the purpose of this essay, take the European Union as an actor as European institutions issued strategy papers and initiated common programs with China.

EU-China People-to-People exchanges and the EU-China High-Level People-to-People Dialogue

At the 14th EU China Summit, held in Beijing in February 2012, European and Chinese leaders agreed on establishing the EU-China High-Level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD) as the third pillar of EU-China relations, complementing to the previous pillars institutionalized in the High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue, and the High-Level Strategic Dialogue. Obviously (and luckily), people-to-people dialogues between the European Union and China did not start just then. Since 1975, EU-China relations got more and more diverse, leaving behind the times of sole economic cooperation. Over 50 sectoral dialogues have been established over the years, ranging from dialogues on various issues of economic cooperation (under the Economy and Trade Pillar), and – under the Strategy Pillar – regular meetings between party groups, talks on human rights etc.. Sectoral dialogues under the new 3rd pillar are the policy dialogue on education and vocational training affairs (including a dialogue on multilingualism), the policy dialogue on cultural affairs, and the policy dialogue on youth affairs.³²

I will concentrate on initiatives that fit under the People-to-People Pillar. This does not mean to neglect the other dialogues, or deeming them as less important. Certainly, every dialogue is a people-to-people meeting, and all of them have been created to increase understanding and to find a common ground for negotiations. However, the 3rd pillar not only (symbolically?) underlines the importance of dialogues, but also the importance of culture, education, and youth.

Applying the time-purpose framework (Figure 1), the dialogues under the 1st and 2nd pillar can be placed within the intermediate (strategic communication and dialogues), whereas the dialogues under the 3rd pillar seem to be a long term approach, designed to build favourable framework conditions for further interaction³³.

Initiatives under the HPPD will be structured under three focal areas: education and vocational training affairs, cultural affairs and youth affairs. The following objectives are clarified in the *Joint Declaration on the First Round of the “EU-China High Level People-to-People Dialogue”*:

“The “EU-China High Level People-to-People Dialogue” is expected to set the basis for an ongoing process to drive the bilateral relationships forward and provide a forum for exchanging information and identifying common objectives and strategies. Its general objectives are:

- To contribute to the knowledge and common understanding between the EU and China, through the enhancement of contacts between the peoples of both sides;

³² See http://eeas.europa.eu/china/docs/eu_china_dialogues_en.pdf for an overview of the sectoral dialogues and http://eeas.europa.eu/china/docs/chronology_2012_en.pdf for a chronology of EU-China relations.

³³ Leonard *ibid.* 50.

- To open a new channel for the informal discussion of strategic societal issues of common interest to the EU and to China, through informal contacts;
- To identify opportunities for cooperation based on mutual interest and reciprocity, to trigger concrete actions based on the full exchanges of information and to support the positive evolution of our societies through concrete actions in the full respect of our highly valued diversity.”³⁴

This statement makes a placement in the long term section of figure 1 even more reasonable: The aim to “contribute to the knowledge and common understanding” goes beyond proactive intermediate strategic dialogues or reactive immediate actions (like reacting to a sudden diplomatic crisis). Instead, it can be assumed that the two parties aim at creating a broader common ground for the bilateral relationship and negotiations. Of course, this might be a reaction to the increasing difficulties in bilateral negotiations. Furthermore, both China and the EU realized that despite their vast cultural resources the mutual knowledge about these remains comparatively low (and one-sided). Therefore, the HPPD can on the one hand be seen as a way to increase mutual understanding to create a better base for diplomatic actions to take place.³⁵ On the other hand it is part of a larger strategy to finally tap the (soft power?) potential the Chinese and European cultures hold.

Let’s now take a look the actions planned to be undertaken within the focal areas of the HPPD³⁶:

1. Education:

The “EU-China Higher Education Platform for Education and Exchange” shall be created. On the one hand, it is seen as vital to help identifying common interests and strengthening the exchange of information and best practices. Secondly, it shall “support and promote” the existing EU-Chinese joint universities (“China-Europe International Business School” (CEIBS), “China-EU School of Law” (CESL), “China-EU Institute for Clean and Renewable Energy” (ICARE)). In addition, China will promote study centres on European, national and regional studies in China.

Both sides agreed to invest more funds in scholarships to strengthen student and scholar exchanges. These efforts include a “EU Window” in the Chinese Government Scholarship Program and another “China Window” in the Erasmus Mundus Program (or it’s follow-up, Erasmus For All). Now, most people who studied abroad at some point had to face the crude reality that credits made in one country are worth nothing in the other, that educational standards are differing widely etc. – the EU and China are therefore planning to lower the constraints and remove barriers, based on the joint study *EU-China “Tuning”*.

The promotion of multilingualism is a goal of both partners as well, as it seen as the essential tool to gain knowledge about different cultures. In consequence, increasing funds shall be given to language learning programs for both students and officials.

2. Culture

In the focal area “culture”, actions are planned in three fields: Firstly, exchanges between the respective cultural and creative industries shall help to foster and reinforce cooperation. Secondly, lessons learnt from the 2012 EU-China Year of Intercultural Dialogue will be reviewed and embodied. Thirdly, the scope of the EU-China High Level Culture Forum, a

³⁴ *Joint Declaration on the First Round of the “EU-China High Level People-to-People Dialogue”*, 2. (Accentuation by the author)

³⁵ Leonard and others: Public diplomacy should come first!

³⁶ *Follow-up Actions Of The First Round of the EU-China High Level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD)*

forum enabling the exchange between intellectuals and policymakers since 2010, shall be extended.

3. Researcher mobility

Existing programs (like Marie Curie) will be further promoted and extended, new avenues (mainly on the Chinese side) will be explored.

4. Youth

The 2011 EU-China Year of Youth helped to establish contacts between Chinese and European youth organizations. The potential of these organizations shall be further strengthened through the HPPD. Actions include a joint seminar and youth dialogue on youth entrepreneurship in 2013, and the strengthening of existing partnerships and networks to foster sustainable cooperation and exchange (by 2013, 500 youth organizations will have been part of such projects). It is hoped that more joint projects of youth organizations will be established and that more and more civil society groups will be integrated in the projects. One already existing example is the annual China-Europe Symposia on Youth Work Development, organized by the All-China Youth Federation and the European Youth Forum. Last but not least, web portals such as the European Youth Portal shall be established and reinforced.

If we now try to apply the definitions of *dialogue* (as reciprocal and multidirectional way of information exchange, including the distinction between *true* and *technical dialogue* by Buber) and *collaboration* outlined in Cowan/Arsenault, the mutual actions planned under the HPPD include major elements of all parts.

Firstly, putting the HPPD on the same level with the Strategic Dialog (1st Pillar) and the Economic and Trade Dialogue (2nd Pillar) is a strong symbol expressing the importance given to the topic. Secondly, its creation seems to indicate that China and the EU perceive dialogue and people-to-people exchanges as a tool that can help to overcome stereotypes and misunderstandings, find better ways to communicate, common grounds but also ways to agree or disagree. Furthermore, both sides seem to agree that it is of crucial importance to go beyond the *technical* level (which certainly can be found in all sectoral dialogues between the EU and China). Instead, forms of *true* dialogue (where “participants willingly and openly engage in true relationship-building exchanges in which feelings of control and dominance are minimized shall be established”³⁷) shall be established. While most actions are classic cultural diplomacy tools (people-to-people exchanges et al.), the focal area “Youth” holds promising efforts in terms of *collaboration*. Projects between European and Chinese youth organizations fulfil the collaboration-requirement of working towards a goal and being set within a clear time frame – according to experts one of the best ways to decrease mistrust and establish long-lasting friendships and relations.

At the end of this paragraph I want to emphasize another important element expressed in the Joint Declaration, the Follow-Up, and in a speech given by Androulla Vassiliou, European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth at the signing ceremony of the HPPD in April 2012: diversity. Both sides stress the importance of diversity as a major part of their respective culture. In the words of Vassiliou,

“What sets worlds in motion is the interplay of their differences, their attractions, their plurality. The main result we want to achieve today is to learn a bit more about each other and, as a consequence, become more open-minded and tolerant. Our common ambition is that – while preserving our own cultures and traditions – we and particularly our children, who will constitute our future generations, open ourselves up to other

³⁷ Cowan/Arsenault, 18.

realities. This can only be possible if we educate our young people to respect and appreciate diversity.”³⁸

Or, as the Chinese state councillor Liu Yandong puts it,

“Due to our differences in history, culture, development stage and social system as well as inadequate exchanges, there is still some lack of mutual understanding, and even some misunderstanding and estrangement in certain areas between China and Europe. Both sides need to work tirelessly to gradually increase mutual understanding, mutual trust and friendship through long-term, extensive people-to-people exchanges. This is a must if we want to advance our comprehensive strategic partnership.”³⁹

These statements make clear that the EU and China left behind the utterly unrealistic belief of being able to agree on everything – instead, they accepted that this will not be possible, but that understanding each other (although not necessarily agreeing with each other) has a true value for itself.

Outlook and Closing Remarks

Obviously, a brief analysis of joint declarations and speeches will not tell us anything about the potential impact of the HPPD. Statements of good will and strategy paper are one thing – if the reality can keep up with the hope expressed is written on another page. And of course the HPPD holds a close connection to policy strategies on both the Chinese and the European side – to increase their respective soft power, strengthen the cultural and creative industries, gain leverage in negotiations through a better mutual understanding.

Still, the creation of the HPPD as the 3rd Pillar of EU-China relations is a promising sign in the right direction. It seems clear that both sides realized the urgency of increasing mutual understanding while decreasing mutual distrust. The fact that they are not necessarily belief in the possibility of being always of the same opinion should not be seen as a bad sign. Instead, this kind of realism can only help to establish trustful relationships. The emphasis on diversity is only natural when two diverse and culturally rich entities like the EU and China meet each other and agree on terms to deepen cultural relations. Who would expect on of the two to give up their cultural heritage?

The activities in the youth-sector look the most promising in terms of collaboration. In contrast to individual student exchanges, the participants will be embedded in groups and have access to the networks of their organizations. This provides them with the unique possibility to not only meet and work together with participants from other cultures (because any foreign student has the chance to do that as well), they can also use the provided networks and communication tools to share their experiences and establish best practices.

Trying to assess the impact of activities that just started can be called a “mission impossible”. We can try to look at recommendations made and hope expressed by experts, and see if the HPPD meets some of the basic conditions. Leonard holds the view that successful public diplomacy has to reach a broad public and go beyond intellectuals – is that the case? The activities under the HPPD focus on intellectuals but might have the potential to go further, at least in some areas (again, “Youth” pops in ones head). The cooperation in the sector of the

³⁸ Speech by Androulla Vassiliou, *EU-China High Level People to People Dialogue*, held on April 18th 2012, Brussels.

³⁹ Speech by Liu Yandong, *Bridging the Hearts of People in China and Europe*, held on April 18th 2012, Brussels.

cultural and creative industries is a second area that might contribute to reaching more people. However, the most important feature to reach a wide public is the media. Chinese have long been complaining that European media delivers a one-sided picture of China, while the EU in the Chinese media is often connected to the Euro-crisis and not presented as a political actor of great value⁴⁰ – here, the European member states are dominating. If it was possible to articulate positive experiences of Europeans in China (and vice versa) more openly in the respective media, a broader public would be reached.

Finally, can EU-China people-to-people dialogues under the HPPD in the long run create a network that goes beyond public diplomacy as a tool to increase a states (soft) power, thus establishing public diplomacy as “diplomacy from the public”? To answer this question seems truly impossible. Still, the suggested activities have the goal and the means to bring more people from Europe and China together. Networks will be created, thoughts will be exchanged. Will these networks eventually result in a “diplomacy from the public” that has an impact on actors like the EU and China? Let’s face it, even liberal democracies sometimes have a hard time listening to what the public wants. However, they will, over time, lead to a better understanding of each other and already that is a great achievement.

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⁴⁰ Of course this is highly debateable anyway. Whatever the truth, the EU wants to be perceived as a major actor in international politics.

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