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## The Emergence of Citizen Diplomacy in European Union–China Relations: Principles, Pillars, Pioneers, Paradoxes

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### ABSTRACT

This analysis considers the phenomenon of citizen diplomacy in European Union [EU]–China relations. It begins by engaging with the global discourse about “new” diplomacy and outlines how society-centric citizen diplomacy differs from state-centric public diplomacy. After revealing that European policy-makers are only reluctantly acknowledging the role of laymen in foreign policy-making *vis-à-vis* China, it shows that whilst citizen diplomacy may be a new concept in EU–China relations, it is actually not a new practice. The empirical part of the exegesis traces the experiential learning amongst 12 European citizen diplomats who have engaged China in the activity fields of disability; psychoanalysis; non-governmental organisation twinning; human rights; climate change mitigation; welfare of orphans, abandoned disabled children and young people; youth dialogue; public participation; animal welfare; and inclusive performing arts. The final part makes use of the newly developed hexagon of intercultural communication and collaboration competence to reveal how the European citizen diplomats have managed to navigate the sometimes-treacherous political-administrative landscape in mainland China. European citizen diplomats have made manifold and often surprising contributions to China’s multifaceted development.

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

Dwight D. Eisenhower, 34th President of the United States<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, we have had some recent successful experiences in the participation of laymen in foreign relations... . Just as we can say that a citizen army can be a top-flight instrument of war, we now can add that there is evidence that a citizen diplomacy is a promising implement of peace.

James Marshall, United States National Commission, UNESCO<sup>2</sup>

Scholarship on EU–China relations traditionally focuses on trade and investment and emphasises the importance of government-to-government

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ties.<sup>3</sup> However, a sustainable partnership between Europe and China needs to go beyond commercial and geopolitical interests of their respective governments and requires the strengthening of civil society exchanges and collaborative people-to-people relations.<sup>4</sup> Light needs shedding on the under-researched phenomenon of European citizens who have—consciously or not—put the idea of citizen diplomacy into practice. Citizen diplomacy means an alternative problem-solving strategy underpinning the role that non-state actors may play in mitigating difficult interstate relations and helping resolve deep-rooted conflicts that political leaders and the private sector cannot solve alone. Society-centric citizen diplomacy, emphasising people-to-people exchanges, is particularly well suited to engage with what could be termed “unofficial” China. It complements rather than replaces state-centric institutional diplomacy,<sup>5</sup> which will continue to be the dominant means for European member-states to engage in government-to-government relations with “official” China.

Since the beginning of China’s so-called reform and opening up period after 1978 and until the early years of the Xi/Li administration—with the issuing of Document No. 9 in 2013 marking a possible turning point<sup>6</sup>—European citizen diplomats have made manifold and often surprising contributions to China’s multi-faceted development. They were active participants in a “slow-motion revolution,” a process in “China where, from year to year, there would be fewer limits on what one could talk about, and more ways to expose official malfeasance and gain redress for basic grievances.”<sup>7</sup> The work of Ludwig Weitz—a professional from Bonn, Germany with more than 23 years of experience in organisational development, moderation, training, and coaching—in mainland China can serve as a revelatory case that elucidates the reach and significance of European citizen diplomacy in China.<sup>8</sup>

In October 2010, Weitz facilitated a three-day workshop at the Central Party School in Beijing. Together with Chinese Communist Party [CCP] cadres, he jointly explored how bottom-up participatory approaches can help reduce conflicts in Chinese communities. It was not the first time that Weitz came to China. His China engagement began with an invitation to an international conference on “Development of Grassroots Democracy through Public Participation” in Beijing in December 2005. Weitz’s presentation on citizen participation in German communities captured the imagination of Chinese conference participants. In 2006, he started to work with the Beijing-based government-organised non-governmental organisation [GONGO], the China Association for Non-governmental Organisation Co-operation [CANGO], and its member organisation Shining Stone Community Action [SSCA], a civil society organisation that aims for more inclusive forms of community governance in China. During annual capacity building workshops—supported by German and

American funders and facilitated with the help of either CANGO or SSCA —Weitz subsequently introduced participatory big-group moderation techniques to Chinese civil society practitioners working in the field of social development and environmental protection. During these workshops, which usually lasted from one to three days, participants learnt from Weitz how to understand and apply participatory methods with imaginative titles such as “Future Search Conference,” “Open Space,” “Appreciative Inquiry,” “World Café,” and “Mediation.”<sup>9</sup>

Weitz subsequently gained a reputation that soon extended beyond the confines of Beijing’s civil society. In 2010, Professor Jin Wei, deputy director of the Teaching and Research Office of the Social Development Theory Institute under the School of the Central Committee of the CCP, started to take an interest in his work and joined one of his Open Space capacity building workshops for Chinese civil society practitioners. Jin, an expert on Xinjiang and Tibet, had developed a professional interest since 2001 in strengthening human immunodeficiency virus prevention.<sup>10</sup> She understood that only radically different forms and methods of public engagement would allow her and her colleagues to have a greater impact at the grassroots level. Encouraged by personal recommendations from Chinese civil society practitioners, she decided to invite Weitz to work with her co-workers in autumn 2010. This willingness to take political risks when employing the German facilitator paid off: after three days of dialogue and deliberation, the workshop ended with an emotional round of participants providing positive feedback and a cultural event in the evening, where workshop participants sang German and Chinese songs. News about the successful conduct of the workshop soon started to spread within Beijing’s development aid scene. Development practitioners subsequently asked Weitz the same question repeatedly: how was it possible to conduct a highly participatory workshop on the issue of conflict prevention on behalf of China’s Central Party School? They were puzzled. Could foreigners, as outsiders, play a critical and constructive role in China’s social and political development after all?<sup>11</sup> Whilst it remains an open question whether or not such European civic activism in China can continue under the conditions of Xi Jinping’s hard authoritarianism since 2012, this analysis takes stock of the principles and practices of citizen diplomacy that have emerged in EU–China relations over the past 35 to 40 years.

This research draws on a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including foreign policy documents as well as academic literature in the fields of diplomacy, EU–China relations, cross-cultural communication and collaboration, and psychoanalytical anthropology. It also employs an ethnographic research approach comprising participant observation during project work in China over a 13-year period—2003 to 2015. There is also

a series of in-depth interviews with 12 Europeans citizen diplomats, both in person and via Skype, over a three-year period between 2014 and 2017.

This analysis explains how citizen diplomacy situates in the discourse about “new” diplomacy and discusses to what extent European policy-making towards China has already integrated the concept of citizen diplomacy. European citizen diplomats have a long track record of working with mainland Chinese partners in the activity fields of disability; psychoanalysis; non-governmental organisation [NGO] twinning; human rights; climate change mitigation; welfare of orphans, abandoned disabled children and young people; youth dialogue; public participation’ animal welfare; and inclusive performing arts. The work of these European citizen diplomats in the various distinctive and yet interrelated activity fields is best understood through the newly developed analytical lens of the hexagon of intercultural communication and collaboration competence. European China engagement is at its best when enlightened about its own goals and Europeans are willing and able to engage with Chinese citizens in a politically and culturally sensitive way. Can policy-makers leverage citizen diplomacy or does any kind of instrumentalisation of citizen diplomats undermine their ability to facilitate emergent impacts? How does “genuine interpersonal interaction that is independent of any state agenda”<sup>12</sup> help Europeans and Chinese citizens go beyond the narrow trade and investment interests of their respective governments and jointly reimagine an EU–China relationship that also takes shared humanitarian, cultural, and ecological concerns into account?

The concept of citizen diplomacy is not new. James Marshall, a law professional who worked for a wide range of United States-based national and international public sector organisations after the Second World War, first articulated it.<sup>13</sup> In his landmark essay, “International Affairs: Citizen Diplomacy,” he reflected on his work for the United States National Commission for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. He bemoaned that “we have not democratized foreign affairs”<sup>14</sup> and that “[they] are still the business of technicians. They remain the preserve of foreign offices.”<sup>15</sup> Marshall argued that diplomacy needed to open up to the public domain to regain democratic legitimacy: “Not until there is broader participation in the planning, the development, and the execution of foreign policy can it be said that the people take part in their own foreign relations.”<sup>16</sup> Throughout his essay, he fervently made the case for the inclusion of laymen in foreign policy-making and vented his frustration against “the political technician and the bureaucrat [who] simply treat the layman as one who lives on the wrong side of the tracks of wisdom.”<sup>17</sup> Marshall, who died in New York City at the age of 90 on 11 August 1986, was ahead of his time. Only throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the concept of citizen diplomacy gradually gained currency amongst both international relations experts and foreign policy-makers. The integration of laymen into

foreign policy making does not signify a departure from the state-centric nature of official diplomacy. Instead, it signifies the desire amongst foreign policy-makers to leverage the networks of highly connected individuals to serve official foreign policy goals.

Paul Sharp has argued

revolutions in information and communication technologies, together with the worldwide rise in democratic expectations to which both revolutions contribute so much, have greatly strengthened the plausibility of the claim that the era of the ordinary person has finally arrived in international relations. In response to these changes a new series of hyphenated diplomacies (citizen-diplomacy, cyber-diplomacy, field-diplomacy, track two-diplomacy, public-diplomacy) has emerged to which the professionals must become hep [sic] or fade into irrelevance.<sup>18</sup>

John Robert Kelley similarly argues, “the age of diplomacy as an *institution* is giving way to an age of diplomacy as a *behaviour*.”<sup>19</sup> He observed that

[as] the state continues to cede more ground to the empowered nonstate actor, five principal features of the future of diplomacy are unfolding. The current state of diplomatic institutions can be characterised as fragmenting, dividing its powers amongst a broad range of state and nonstate actors and institutions. At the same time, diplomacy is becoming more public: the “global public domain” is integrating social and technological networks to harness its developing diplomatic capabilities. New diplomacy possesses an advantage in its agility, relies on grassroots mobilisation, and highlights the relevance of policy entrepreneurs. Official diplomacy is and shall remain superior in areas of accountability and legitimacy, continuing to capitalise on its close proximity to policymakers. New diplomats are competing with government action as well as compensating for government inaction.<sup>20</sup>

A recent conference report commissioned by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office and published by Wilton Park with the support of the East West Institute suggests foreign policy-makers are indeed warming up to the inclusion of non-state actors in diplomatic affairs. The conference rapporteur, James Pamment, acknowledges that “[diplomacy] is too important to be left to diplomats”<sup>21</sup> and asks “[how] should the formal hierarchies of governments and their diplomatic institutions respond to ad-hoc networks driven by tremendous expertise, legitimacy and capacities to influence?”<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Pamment outlines that “[many] actors have the ability to impact upon diplomatic issues”<sup>23</sup> and that “[the] new ‘normal’ for diplomacy is complex, multi-faceted campaigns conducted in multiple arenas with multiple partners.”<sup>24</sup> Whilst the conference report’s rhetoric suggests a major departure from conventional state-centric diplomacy, a closer look reveals a continued emphasis on enhancing a nation’s soft power through public diplomacy. In words of the originator of the term, Joseph Nye, “soft power—getting others to want the outcomes that you want—co-opts people rather than coerces them.”<sup>25</sup> A core objective of new diplomacy is to

strengthen diplomacy as an institution.<sup>26</sup> Such an understanding suggests that “new” diplomacy remains a government-directed effort, in which private citizens as laymen are supposed to complement but not replace institutional diplomacy.

In stark contrast, Marc Gopin, a former Orthodox rabbi, turned scholar and practitioner in the United States, has called for a society-centric citizen diplomacy that operates more independently from institutional diplomacy. In his view, “[citizen] diplomacy is an activity that is much larger than merely religion and conflict resolution. It refers to a whole variety of ways in which individual citizens across the planet are engaged in efforts to reach out to civilizations and countries that may be in conflict with their own.”<sup>27</sup> The case emerges for bottom-up “citizen diplomacy as a cornerstone of the new global social contract, a path to weaving together a new human civilization, even in the hardest places on earth.”<sup>28</sup> For Gopin,

[citizen] diplomacy is often at the frontier of exposing radicalized and cloistered populations to the idea of a global community. The more sealed off a citizenry is from the rest of the world due to an authoritarian regime, the more potential do citizen diplomats have to make a difference where no one else can. A good citizen diplomat with the right connections can often enter into situations where NGOs and formal international projects are uninvited.<sup>29</sup>

Weitz’s 2010 workshop on conflict resolution at China’s Central Party School is a good example of Gopin’s conception of society-centric citizen diplomacy. By contributing to administrative reforms within the party-state, Weitz opened up new spaces for Chinese citizens to engage with cadres in a more egalitarian and open-ended way. Participatory big-group moderation techniques such as “Future Search Conferences,” “Open Space,” and “Appreciative Inquiry” facilitate the inclusion of key stakeholders ranging from community-based organisations, consumer groups, disabled self-help groups, educational organisations such as schools and universities, local authorities, migrant organisations, social and environmental NGOs, and women’s groups to youth volunteer organisations. They allow organisers actively to involve reform-minded cadres, civil society practitioners, public intellectuals, educators, journalists, lawyers, urban community residents, and rural migrants in egalitarian and action-oriented dialogue.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, how does such citizen diplomacy exist in the wider context of EU–China relations? Is it an outcome of a purely private initiative of a committed European citizen or can it be an intended consequence of European foreign policy-making towards China?

Mirroring the highly gradualist opening of institutional diplomacy to non-state actors, European policy-makers concerned with China policy similarly have only reluctantly started to acknowledge the central role of laymen in

EU–China relations. However, to what extent can one speak of a *European* China policy? One argument is that

looking at the sum of the multitude of different forms of relations that are conducted between the EU and China, it *can* be claimed that there *is* a China policy of the EU. This policy is determined by a variety of interests, from the governments of the EU member states, from interest groups, from the EU institutions (the European Commission, the Council and the European Parliament) and from the legal framework of the EU/EC treaties.”<sup>31</sup>

The proliferation of European China policy papers—six between 1995 and 2013—couched in the political rhetoric of strategic partnership, interests, competition, challenges, and responsibilities supports this view.

In 2009, John Fox and François Godement, two political thinkers, issued a scathing critique of European China engagement. In a widely cited policy paper, “A Power Audit of EU–China Relations,” they critiqued Europe’s efforts to shape China in its own image. Positing that “China’s foreign and domestic policy has evolved in a way that has paid little heed to European values, and today Beijing regularly contravenes or even undermines them,”<sup>32</sup> they argue that Europe’s unconditional engagement with China has led to a situation where the CCP has learned “to exploit the divisions among EU Member States.”<sup>33</sup> Yet, whereas Fox and Godement seek to improve European China policy through more co-ordination amongst member-states, an alternative problem-solving approach exists. Instead of increasing centralised command and control mechanisms, European foreign policy-makers could also devolve more power to European and Chinese societies. Some of the reasons for the disappointing performance of the rather young EU–China strategic partnership until now refer not only to policy co-operation but also to broader societal dimensions. These include a low level of trust between the respective political elites as well as between both societies; the “conceptual gaps” of a shared, mutual understanding and partly diverging cultural values due to different historical journeys; and positioning in the international system. Citizen diplomacy has to make essential contributions to generate inter-cultural trust and develop a deeper mutual understanding including shared but differentiated narratives of global and bilateral issues.

Convinced of the need for fundamental change to improve the EU–China relationship, Eberhard Sandschneider, the former director of the German Council on Foreign Relations (2003–2016), echoes these views. He points out that a

lack of trust and mutual respect characterizes Western-Chinese relations to such an extent that it impairs core strategic interests on both sides. Despite hundreds of delegations and thousands of exchange students, both China and the West are far



from reaching a level of mutual understanding necessary for enduring and sustainable bilateral relations.<sup>34</sup>

In his view, “[cultural] diplomacy could be the best, and may be the only, instrument to help bridge these gaps of mutual misunderstanding. Cultural diplomacy is therefore not only an integral but also an extremely important element of foreign policy. It fulfils the significant function of bringing people together who are living in different cultural worlds, using different codes of communication and different sets of rules.”<sup>35</sup> The former German ambassador to China, Volker Stanzel (2004–2007), shares this assessment: “Governments on their own can only achieve so much. This then is the field of civil society and the day-to-day encounters in shared experience. Only the innumerable actors that constitute a ‘civil society’ have the combined potential to initiate an exchange of knowledge on values, philosophies, and visions that may come to constitute a robust basis upon which political and economic leaders can build.”<sup>36</sup>

Despite pleas from German China experts and diplomats to do more to include European and Chinese citizens, geopolitical concerns and commercial interests continue to loom large in EU–China relations. The “EU–China Dialogue Architecture,” drawn up by the European External Action Service, is a case in point. It distinguishes between a first pillar of political dialogue and a second of economic and sectoral discussion. Only in April 2012, a third concerning people-to-people dialogue was established. People-to-people exchanges are “a longstanding notion underpinning any action aiming to enhance international understanding and friendship through educational, cultural and humanitarian activities involving the exchange of ideas and experiences directly among peoples of different countries and diverse cultures.”<sup>37</sup> Horst Fabian, the EU–China Civil Society ambassador, has criticised the High Level People-to-People Dialogue as “rather vague.”<sup>38</sup>

The “EU–China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation” best illustrates the lack of strategic vision and ambition for people-to-people exchanges between Europe and China.<sup>39</sup> In this joint declaration, adopted alongside the 16<sup>th</sup> EU–China Summit in Beijing on 21 November 2013, the fourth and rather short final part relates to people-to-people exchanges. Here, European and Chinese policy-makers are remarkably unimaginative and limit their support to culture, education, and youth as well as to the facilitation of people-to-people exchanges primarily in the field of tourism. Addressing the under-utilisation of citizen diplomacy, Fabian has suggested that the third pillar should “be accompanied by an agreement among leading European and Chinese umbrella civil society organisations. In terms of political-administrative procedures there should be routine screening procedures in every new and continued EU–China cooperation project to ascertain the possible space for civil society cooperation.”<sup>40</sup> The discussion about the

under-developed third pillar suggests that perhaps rather than the Chinese party-state's intransigence, it appears that the reluctance to experiment with Europe's new China engagement approaches renders it equally culpable. What European foreign policy-makers seem to lack is what Brazilian educator Paulo Freire has referred to as "faith in people."<sup>41</sup> Shortcomings in European China policy-making stand in great contrast to the evolving practices of European citizen diplomats in China.

The discussion of "new" diplomacy as well as the critique of the current state of EU–China relations has shown that International Relations experts and diplomats increasingly see a role for laymen in foreign policy-making. The increasing use of political rhetoric ranging from people-to-people exchanges, cultural diplomacy to citizen diplomacy supports this view. But whilst citizen diplomacy may be a new concept in EU–China relations, it should be noted that it actually is not a new practice.

A historical perspective can help to compare and contrast how individual European individuals have engaged China both past and present. In his seminal work, *To Change China*, the American historian, Jonathan Spence, portrayed the work of 16 Western advisors in China, many of whom were from Europe. Spence observed that "their cumulative lives [had] a curious continuity. They experienced similar excitement and danger, entertained similar hopes, learned to bear with similar frustrations, and operated with a combination of integrity and deviousness. They bared their own souls and mirrored their own societies in their actions, yet in doing so they highlighted fundamental Chinese values."<sup>42</sup> Whilst empathising with his protagonists to some extent, Spence also fiercely deprecated Western advisors for their apparent sense of superiority. Concluding his study by stating, "[on] balance... the story of these men is more a cautionary tale than an inspirational tract,"<sup>43</sup> he outlined negative personal attributes such as "arrogance, impatience, intolerance, tactlessness, or stupidity that at different times turned the Chinese against their advisors."<sup>44</sup> Sinologists and contemporary Chinese studies scholars regularly mention Spence's treatise as a cautionary against outsiders trying to influence China's development trajectory.

While Spence explored the lives of 16 Western advisors "from the 1620 through the 1950s,"<sup>45</sup> this analysis hones in on the China engagement of 12 Europeans between 1980 and 2017. The five female and seven male individuals began their China engagement in the 1980s, 1990s, or 2000s by either starting to learn Mandarin Chinese or visiting mainland China. The author met eight of the 12 in China. Based on participant observation during project work in China over a 13-year period between 2003 and 2015 on which the analysis in these pages finds basis, plus in-depth interviews carried out between summer 2014 and summer 2017, none of these interlocutors fit into Spence's characterisation of out-of-touch cultural imperialists hell-bent on changing China against her will. European citizen diplomats exhibit high

degrees of inter-cultural communication and collaboration competence. What explains this great dissimilarity of research findings? The protagonists of this study no longer suffer from the “tyranny of distance.”<sup>46</sup> Whilst Western advisors featured in Spence’s study often had to travel to China for weeks if not months, the revolution in transportation sees a journey from Europe to China now counted in hours. Similarly, the revolution in communication technology has enabled millions of European and Chinese citizens to communicate in real-time regardless of their physical location.<sup>47</sup>

The pioneering European citizens featured in this research took advantage of China’s opening to the outside world after the Cultural Revolution. They either were invited or reached China on their own volition. Together with their mainland Chinese partners, they have engaged in 11 activity fields of disability, psychoanalysis, NGO twinning, human rights, climate change mitigation, welfare of orphans, abandoned disabled children and young people, youth dialogue, public participation, animal welfare, and inclusive performing arts. The length of individual China engagement ranges from six to 38 years—see [Table 1](#). Together, they boast 266 years of practical China experience. In some cases, this engagement has already ended, which hints at the temporality of citizen diplomacy, an aspect further discussed when reviewing findings from the in-depth interviews.

But when European citizen diplomats engage China, how does their engagement differ from institutional diplomacy? In the following, it is clear that the China engagement of the protagonists transcends what is commonly referred to as “track one” or “track two” diplomacy. “Track one” can be understood to mean “[a]n instrument of foreign policy for the establishment and development of contacts between the governments of different states through the use of intermediaries mutually recognized by the respective parties.”<sup>48</sup> “Track two,” on the other hand, has been defined as “an unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations that aims to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organize human and material resources in ways that might help to resolve their conflict... . [It] is a process designed to assist official leaders to resolve or, in the first instance, to manage conflicts by exploring possible solutions out of public view and without the requirements to formally negotiate or bargain for advantage.”<sup>49</sup>

One telling view is that neither “track one” nor “track two” on its own can bring about lasting change. Instead there exists “multi-track diplomacy,” which includes up to nine different and yet interlinked tracks. For this analysis, this conception of “track 4” is of particular relevance. It relates to “Private Citizen, or Peacemaking through Personal Involvement,” including “the various ways that individual citizens become involved in peace and development activities through citizen diplomacy, exchange programs, private voluntary organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and special-

**Table 1.** European citizen diplomats: Their activity fields and duration of China engagement.

<b>Stephen Hallett (1980-)</b> Disability																																							
80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	38
<b>Alf Gerlach (1983-)</b> Psychoanalysis																																							
80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	35
<b>Nicola Macbean (1984-)</b> Human rights																																							
80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	34
<b>Nora Sausmikat (1985-)</b> NGO twinning																																							
80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	33
<b>Patrick Schroeder (1996-)</b> Climate change mitigation																																							
80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	22
<b>Jacqui Shurr (1997–2016)</b> Welfare of orphans, abandoned disabled children and young people																																							
80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	20
<b>Flora Sapiro (1997-)</b> Bridge building																																							
80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	21
<b>Horst Fabian (2000-)</b> Bridge building																																							
80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	18
<b>Phil Entwistle (2004-)</b> Youth dialogue (2010–15)																																							
80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	14
<b>Ludwig Weitz (2005-)</b> Public participation																																							
80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	13
<b>Joy Leney (2006-)</b> Animal welfare																																							
80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	12
<b>Dave Carey (2012-)</b> Inclusive performing arts																																							
80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	6

**Notes:** Author's own table.

**Table 2.** Comparison between diplomats and citizen diplomats.

	Diplomat	Citizen diplomat
Preferred mode of operation	Government-to-government (G2G), either bilaterally or multilaterally	People-to-people (P2P), often supported by transnational NGOs and their networks
Core interest	Pursuit of national interests	Pursuit of bilateral or international public goods
Qualification	Generalist with foreign language competency	Generalist or specialist with foreign language competency
Admission	Highly hierarchical, competitive application process	Self-organised and self-selected group
Remit	Subject to directives	Subject to individual's vision, mission and value orientations
Legal status	Diplomatic immunity	Foreign citizen diplomats need to be invited, demanded, appreciated or at least tolerated
Overseas engagement	Secondments overseas typically last between three to five years	Between short-term and life-long engagement with partner country

**Notes:** Author's own table.

interest groups.”<sup>50</sup> As Table 2 shows, citizen diplomats perform different roles and functions in comparison to institutional diplomats.

For diplomats, the preferred mode of operation is government-to-government either on a bilateral or multilateral level. They are to pursue national interests. In terms of their qualifications, diplomats tend to be generalists with foreign language competencies; they enter the diplomatic corps through a highly competitive application process. Regardless of rank, their remit is subject to directives from higher-ranking officials. During their stay abroad, they enjoy diplomatic immunity, and secondments to foreign countries typically last between three and five years.

Citizen diplomats, on the other hand, operate on a people-to-people basis. Transnational NGOs and their respective networks often support their engagement. Citizen diplomats pursue bilateral and global public good ranging from ecological to social and cultural concerns. In terms of their qualifications, they are either generalists or specialists and often have foreign language competency. In stark contrast to diplomats, there is no formal admission process for citizen diplomats: they are a self-organised and self-selected group. A citizen diplomat's remit is also not subject to directives but based on an individual's vision, mission, and value orientation. When working abroad, citizen diplomats do not enjoy diplomatic immunity. Their overseas engagement can last from a couple of years to a life-long engagement with the partner country.

When European citizen diplomats carry out activities in China, they require CCP officials to provide at least tacit approval, which can be withdrawn at any time. Not enjoying diplomatic immunity, citizen diplomats need to avoid crossing red lines—both visible in the form of laws and regulations, as well as more invisible ones in the form of a host country's

political culture as well as societal norms and values.<sup>51</sup> Hence, the importance of structure—the need to have permissive conditions for citizen diplomacy. At the same time, they need to be mindful of political and cultural sensitivities amongst their Chinese co-operation partners as well as the Chinese public at large. This highlights the importance of agency—the ability of individual Europeans to circumnavigate political cliffs and engage with Chinese partners in culturally sensitive ways (Table 4).

During the previous discussion of citizen diplomacy principles, John Robert Kelley, from the University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy, suggested that in the twenty-first century, diplomacy is increasingly a form of “behaviour.”<sup>52</sup> To put the demanding concept of citizen diplomacy into practice, individuals thus need to develop a variety of skills and competencies to play the role of a citizen diplomat well. A defining aspect of all featured European citizen diplomats is that they are not only “China watching” but also “China practicing”—see Table 3.<sup>53</sup> For these individuals, China is not just an abstraction but also an activity field. Table 3 informs about the engagement profiles of the European citizen diplomats, painting a complex picture of “China watching”-related epistemological competencies and “China practicing”-related professional skills. It reveals that less than one-half of the protagonists have studied contemporary China as part of their higher education. Similarly, the citizen diplomats’ Chinese language competencies range from almost non-existent to fluent to near native. One of the striking similarities of the European citizen diplomats is that repeated visits and prolonged stays in China allowed them to build their knowledge and understanding of all things Chinese.

In addition, all of the citizen diplomats have actively engaged in bridge building activities.<sup>54</sup> Depending on their specialisation, they also belong to sector-specific communities of practice, which are both China-based and transnational in nature, facilitated by online and offline activities, and include both European and Chinese participants. According to an important assessment:

[communities] of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope. In a nutshell: Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.<sup>55</sup>

The overview also reveals that organisational support by Europe- or China-based NGOs/GONGOs is crucial for European citizen diplomats to conduct capacity building trainings in China. Such NGO/GONGO support is also key for conducting local pilot initiatives and engaging in

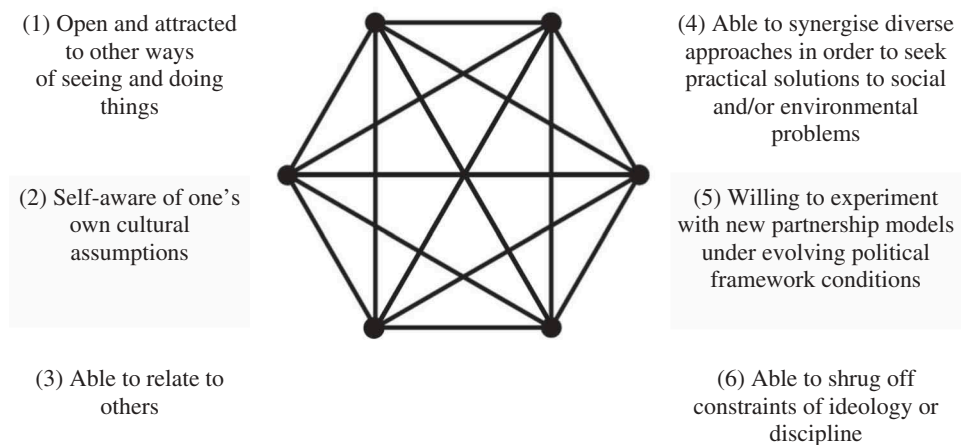
**Table 3.** Engagement profiles of European citizen diplomats.

Name of citizen diplomat	China watching (Epistemic community of China watchers)				China practising (Sector-specific communities of practices)					
	Cont. Chinese studies	Mandarin Chinese speaker	Published research on China	Public talks and media engagement	Stay in China*	Bridge building activities	NGO/ GONGO support	Capacity building trainings	Local pilot initiatives	Collective policy entrepreneurship**
Stephen Hallett (1980-)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Alf Gerlach (1983-)			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nora Sausmikát (1984-)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nicola Macbean (1992-)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Patrick Schroeder (1996-)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Jacqui Shurr (1997-16)			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Flora Sapio (1997-)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Horst Fabian (2000-)			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Phil Entwistle (2004-)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Ludwig Weitz (2005-)					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Joy Leney (2006-)					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dave Carey (2012-)					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

**Notes:** Author's own table.

\* "Stay in China" includes short holidays, business trips as well as prolonged periods of language studies and secondments of European citizen diplomats in China.

\*\* "Collective policy entrepreneurship" is understood to mean the work of European and Chinese policy entrepreneurs "who work from outside the formal governmental system to introduce, translate, and implement innovative ideas into public sector practice" (Nancy C. Roberts and Paula J. King, "Policy Entrepreneurs: Their Activity Structure and Function in the Policy Process," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, J-PART, 1/2 (1991), 152).

**Table 4.** Hexagon of intercultural communication and collaboration competence.

Adopted from Irene Oehler's "four basic requirements or competencies for intercultural cooperation": quoted in Hellkötter, Verstraete, Wen, Oehler, and Qilan, "Project Process," 136; and "Ten Characteristics of Successful Social Entrepreneurs" in John Elkington and Pamela Hartigan, *The Power of Unreasonable People. How Social Entrepreneurs Create Markets that Change the World* (Boston, MA, 2008),).

collective policy advocacy in China. With this overview of the engagement profiles of the featured Europeans, it is necessary to document how they engaged in experiential learning and demonstrate how their process of China engagement has contributed to the impact on the individual, organisational, and policy level.

The in-depth interviews over the period 2014 to 2017 showed that the 12 European citizen diplomats have been able to navigate the sometimes-treacherous political-administrative landscape in mainland China thanks to a high degree of inter-cultural communication and collaboration competence. Due to the public nature of their philanthropic work in China, much of it reported in the English and Chinese media, European citizen diplomats interviewed agreed to waive their anonymity. The newly developed hexagon with its six key criteria below helps capture personality traits and trace formative biographical experiences of the interviewees—see Table 4. It also helps explain some of the paradoxical experiences of European citizens in China, for example, the state of being excluded and included in Chinese society at the same time as well as being self-aware of one's own cultural assumptions. The hexagon is an innovative new heuristic device that enables researchers to better understand citizen diplomacy. Whilst employing the hexagon in the context of this research about citizen diplomacy in China, it also has application to scrutinise citizen diplomacy in other political and regional contexts. The following presents key findings devolving from the interviews based on six criteria.



The first criterion relates to the citizen diplomats' curiosity and willingness to enhance their knowledge and understanding of all things Chinese, including history, politics, economics, culture, society, and language. When asked about their motivation to engage China, only a minority of interviewees avowed a professional interest in China to be their key initial reason. Instead, they mentioned the attractiveness of the Chinese language, evolving friendships with Chinese people, and positive personal experiences in China during short holidays, business trips, and prolonged periods of language studies. Interviewees frequently referred to their initial China engagement based on luck, chance, circumstance, coincidence, or serendipity. For some interviewees, their initial contact with China led to a lasting personal and professional engagement. A case in point is Jacqui Shurr.<sup>56</sup> Her journey started in 1997 when adopting a Chinese girl named Abigail Yan Le from Xinjiang. When receiving their daughter, Jacqui and her husband, Jeff, witnessed how the adoption of a Chinese girl by another British family ran into major complications. In response, Shurr set up the British-based Good Rock Foundation in the same year. From 1997 onwards, she and her Chinese partners "committed [themselves] to improving the welfare of these orphans and abandoned disabled children and young people."<sup>57</sup>

The second criterion is self-awareness, "about becoming aware of one's own 'cultural baggage': our assumptions, our preferred way of communicating, as well as awareness about how our—preferred—way of doing things may be perceived by others."<sup>58</sup> During the interviews, European citizen diplomats spoke at length about how they perceived—and more importantly dealt with—cultural differences during their China engagements. A recurring theme during the interviews was the challenge of expectations for Europeans to play a largely ascribed role of a "foreign expert" in China. A recent op-ed by the Canadian China-based scholar, Daniel A. Bell, on his desire to assimilate fully as a Chinese, has put this debate in perspective.<sup>59</sup> Without exception, interviewees doubted that Europeans could fully assimilate into mainland Chinese society. At the same time, none had a colonial attitude. Whilst Italo-British commentator Gabriele Corsetti has criticised the widespread popular belief amongst many mainland Chinese that foreigners "are always going to be a transient 'guest' with one foot back in your own country who can never really hold a stake in Chinese society,"<sup>60</sup> many interviewees were less fazed about this ambiguity. Whilst perfectly aware that the label of "foreigner" set them apart from an imagined category of "the Chinese," they did not necessarily object to this process of "otherisation."<sup>61</sup> And whilst the majority of interviewees did not necessarily consider themselves "expert," they mostly considered this label as an inspiration to perform particularly well in inter-cultural encounters with their Chinese partners.

What explains the willingness amongst European citizens to play the role of "foreign expert"?<sup>62</sup> Whilst this role constrains the ability of European

citizen diplomats to integrate fully into Chinese society, it also shields them from assimilationist pressures, for instance, the expectation for the “foreign expert” to think and behave like a Chinese. In the words of Chinese law expert Flora Sapio, “it is a category that can make you a lot richer, because it enables like a 360 degree expansion of your views.”<sup>63</sup> The experiences of the German psychoanalyst, Alf Gerlach, best illustrate the paradox of a perception as “the other” and simultaneously being sufficiently included to gain deep insights into Chinese society. He first visited mainland China in the early 1980s. When starting to offer psychotherapy training in 1997, he conducted self-experience talks with his Chinese trainees. During his interview, he recounted how the role as a transient guest also opened up opportunities to engage in new and novel ways: “it triggered a fantasy. ‘Now I can speak,’ with a very idealised foreigner, who is here, and who opens a space, who can keep it confidential.”<sup>64</sup> As a complete outsider, Gerlach thereby gained deep insights into the psyche of mainland Chinese psychiatrists and psychologists, who at the ages of 30 to 35 years were still suffering from the traumata of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976).

The interviews demonstrate that the European citizen diplomats view their relationships with Chinese partners—both on the individual and organisational level—as “an end and not only a means toward some other end.”<sup>65</sup> Stephen Hallett OBE, chair and co-founder of the British-based disability NGO China Vision, exemplifies their ability to empathise with Chinese people. He describes himself as someone whose “partial sight has helped give him a clearer insight into the lives of disadvantaged people in China.”<sup>66</sup> Citizen diplomat emphasis on a shared humanity should not become what Francois Jullien has called “a weak universality, reduced, lazy, limiting itself to a single experience”<sup>67</sup>; nor is it a form of cultural relativism.<sup>68</sup> An organisational, applied, psychoanalytic, and medical anthropologist, Howard Stein, has described the ability of citizen diplomats to avoid taking sides, and their openness to integrate conflicting points of views as a form of “emotional inclusiveness.”<sup>69</sup> Citizen diplomats have “a passionate disinterest in search of deeper realities” and exhibit tolerance “for ambiguity, together with a realistic appraisal of similarities and differences between groups ... [which] must also be accompanied with an ability to examine one’s own ideals, expectations, and disappointments that regulate self-esteem.”<sup>70</sup>

The qualities that Stein calls for in citizen diplomats were on display in the interview with Phil Entwistle, a former visiting fellow at Berlin’s Mercator Institute for China Studies. Reflecting on the effect of immersing himself in Chinese culture and society, he observed that “being involved in the Chinese culture for so long, I think it has lost its exoticism, its romanticism. I see all its faults as well as its very many lovely things.”<sup>71</sup> Patrick Schroeder’s work on climate change mitigation in China can serve as another good instance of “emotional inclusiveness” described by Stein. In the interview, he explained,

in terms of climate change, the Chinese emissions have been soaring. To save the global climate, you need to do something about China. Let me put it that way. With the Germans, this is a kind of national obsession to be concerned about global commons, like the climate, or the rain forest or coral reefs. But concerns about these does not mean necessarily a concern about the people in Brazil, or people in China. Or fishermen who depend on coral reefs for their livelihood. So then, the next stage is they want to protect these global commons but by being there and trying to find some solutions, you develop relationships with people in these contexts. And, then it not only becomes the global commons, the climate, it is not the only motivation. Because then you also become concerned about the people. You develop these relationships. And these are often very good relationships. And then what comes to this in China, is of course also the issue of air pollution. So by living in Beijing through the smog crisis, which has been particularly bad over the past five, six, seven years, so basically you breathe the same air as the average person on the street. It is the same problem we are trying to address from a different perspective. And then everybody becomes concerned about health. There is not a difference now between “the other” and yourself.<sup>72</sup>

The fourth criterion relates to citizen diplomat ability to collaborate with local partners critically, creatively, and constructively. Stein has argued that the “empathic capacity for temporarily extending oneself into another, and or briefly incorporating another into oneself in order to look more closely—whilst remaining secure enough to remain oneself and to be capable of transcending that very self—is what in citizen diplomacy is both most necessary and most difficult to do.”<sup>73</sup> So what have European citizen diplomats experienced in their open-ended engagement processes? And to what extent have they been able to synthesise European and Chinese practices?

During their conversations, none of the interviewees withheld their judgments about particular problems that China faces. At the same time, they also expressed the need to suspend such judgments in inter-cultural encounters with Chinese people. Interviewees considered the suspension of judgment not in tactical terms—a diplomatic way to avoid antagonistic conflicts—but as a pedagogical and pragmatic necessity. In the words of animal welfare activist Joy Leney, “everything really boils down to educating people, creating awareness and letting them find their own compassionate path. I fear that hammering people over their head and being openly critical and shaming and embarrassing is not a very pleasant route to go down. I don’t think it is a very sensible route to go down... . I tend to think that through education one would hope that individuals and societies evolve. The route we would hope they would evolve is to be more caring, humane, compassionate, call it what you like. But I don’t think any of us really like to be told we should or we shouldn’t do this or that.”<sup>74</sup>

A recurring theme throughout the interviews was the need for critical pedagogy in an individual’s China engagement, which avoids the pitfalls of a unilateral and paternalistic imposition of pre-conceived ideas and practices

on Chinese counterparts. Nicola Macbean, founder and director of the London-based human rights organisation, The Rights Practice, revealed that she similarly subscribes to a developmental and improvement-oriented approach to China.<sup>75</sup> When reflecting about her own practical experiences with inter-cultural communication and collaboration when implementing the project “High Speed Urbanization in China-Architecture, Art and Culture,” the German Sinologist and academic, Nora Sausmikat, suggested, “it was not the different culture of the countries but more the different culture of European and Chinese professionals which triggered challenges. Cognitive, emotional or aesthetic approaches needed to be combined—national cultural differences became more and more irrelevant.”<sup>76</sup>

European practitioners such as Dave Carey, from an inclusive British theatre company, and Weitz recalled how working in China helped them reflect upon and refine their professional practices. Carey recalled a theatre workshop with Chinese children in Shanghai that did not go as planned, an experience that motivated him to thoroughly redesign a workshop in Zhuhai: “I improved as a practitioner more in those twenty four hours than in the previous ten years, without a doubt.”<sup>77</sup> Weitz similarly found the China experience to be transformative: “Working in China has led to changes in my professional practice. But not entirely. In some aspects, the China experience has also confirmed some of my deeply held convictions... . In our later workshops we have of course addressed the issue of methodology. And yet we have also increasingly discussed the issue of attitude. Then we are dealing with the question what I am doing as a facilitator, where I suggest, don’t interfere too much, do less. We have been working much more on the process side of things. This is very exciting. I never felt that I am a kind of guru who has to deliver and gets nothing in return. I have learned a lot in China.”<sup>78</sup>

The discussion so far has mostly focused on the interviewees’ individual attitudes, inter-cultural communication styles, and reported professional practices. None of the European citizen diplomats, however, would have been able to sustain their China engagement over time without some form of organisational support. Three distinctive pathways exist in terms of their China engagement. Four interviewees engaged China primarily in their individual capacity as highly trained professionals. A second and slightly bigger group of six established their own China-related NGO as a form of institutionalised bridge between Europe and China. A third and final group of three worked in their professional capacity for existing European or Chinese NGOs or GONGOs.

Whilst the three organisational pathways have provided these citizen diplomats with engagement opportunities, their experiences following each of the three pathways remain mixed. Working in China primarily in his individual capacity, Carey had to engage with a number of Chinese grassroots NGOs before realising that Chinese corporate partners might be more

suitable for his London-based theatre company to extend its reach to China. Weitz, on the other hand, pointed out that in his view, the ultimate goal of a capacity builder is to make oneself superfluous. His role in recent years has increasingly transitioned from workshop facilitator to coach or mentor for Chinese civil society practitioners. For Europeans more invested in China due either to their China-related education and professional experience or the fact that they founded China-related NGOs, the temporality of citizen diplomacy can be more of a challenge.

Seeing the recently enacted Chinese *Overseas NGO Law* as too big a hurdle to overcome, Shurr decided to dissolve the Good Rock Foundation on 31 December 2016. She had previously operated projects and programmes in Xinjiang province for almost 20 years. Not all challenges, however, relate to party-state interference. Another European citizen diplomat, who agreed to an interview on the condition of anonymity, talked about societal resistance. The interviewee complained about the lack of solidarity between Chinese civil society organisations and foreign NGO start-ups, pointing out, “if you represent an organisation that can be competitive on a fundraising level, they will just completely not engage with you, even on the individual level.” The China Britain Youth Association, co-founded by Entwistle, on the other hand, dissolved due to domestic resource constraints. Other Europe-based NGOs like China Vision, the German–Chinese Academy for Psychotherapy, The Rights Practice, and Stiftung Asienhaus so far have been able to maintain their China-presence by collaborating with Chinese government organisations, GONGOs, and academic as well as grassroots organisations. The open-ended nature and unpredictability of some Europe–Chinese partnerships suggests that European citizen diplomats have been willing to take on considerable risks when experimenting with new partnership models under evolving political framework conditions. The considerable length of their China engagement, ranging from six to 38 years, is a testament to their tenacity. Yet a final question remains, how do they view the outcomes or impact of their often decades-long work in China?

Given the complex challenges that citizen diplomacy in China entails, a sceptic could wonder about the overall impact of this particular form of China engagement. When asked about their greatest achievement during their China engagement, interviewees were both confident and also very humble about their various contributions, which they often attributed to their Chinese partners. Mindful of the difference between attribution and contribution,<sup>79</sup> interviewees told the author how in their view they have contributed to a better understanding of contemporary China. This occurred through open-access publications, engagement in bridge building, building up human capital amongst Chinese individuals, strengthening China-based civil society organisations and networks through capacity building training and local pilot activities, and engaging in collective policy entrepreneurship—for more details see [Table 5](#).

**Table 5.** Reported achievements by European citizen diplomats active in China.

Open-access publications	(B) Bridge building	(C) Capacity building workshops	(D) Local pilot initiatives	(E) Collective policy entrepreneurship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blog on psycho-analytical film interpretation.</li> <li>• Interviews and op-eds for the Italian media.</li> <li>• Changing China.</li> <li>• Country status report within the political and social context.</li> <li>• Human rights reports.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scholarship funding for individual Chinese blind teachers to study in the UK.</li> <li>• EU-China Civil Society Dialogues in Europe and China.</li> <li>• Charity shop in Leyland, Lancashire.</li> <li>• China-Britain Youth Dialogues in the UK.</li> <li>• Juvenile justice study visits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training workshops for blind radio producers in China.</li> <li>• Psychotherapy training workshops in China.</li> <li>• Intercultural communication and cooperation workshops in Europe and China.</li> <li>• Juvenile justice workshops in China.</li> <li>• Prevention of torture workshops in China.</li> <li>• Sex education and self-awareness workshops in China.</li> <li>• Summer camps for caregivers in China.</li> <li>• Workshops on participatory methods for social and environmental activists as well as government officials in China.</li> <li>• Humane education workshops in China.</li> <li>• Workshops for veterinarians in China.</li> <li>• Workshops for young people on consumerism in China.</li> <li>• Training workshops on inclusive performing arts in China.</li> <li>• Summer camps on inclusive performing arts in the UK.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supported employment for persons with disabilities.</li> <li>• External monitoring of detention facilities.</li> <li>• EU-China NGO twinning programme.</li> <li>• Collaboration with seven orphanages in Xinjiang province.</li> <li>• Establishment of therapy centre, community special education centre, and bakery workshop in Xinjiang.</li> <li>• Inclusion of "Caring for Life" curriculum into moral education lessons in more than 130 Chinese schools, more than 1,300 teachers have been trained by ACTAsia as Caring for Life Educators.</li> <li>• Inclusive performing arts performance in Changsha, involving children of all abilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for Chinese civil society networks involved in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).</li> <li>• Advise Chinese policy-makers involved in the drafting of China's Mental Health Law, Criminal Procedure Law, Law on Maternal and Infant Health, as well as Animal Protection Law.</li> <li>• Support for Chinese civil society networks involved in the lobbying of Chinese policy makers to sign the Paris Agreement.</li> <li>• Foreign policy advice for Italian Senate and European Commission.</li> </ul>

**Notes:** Author's own table.

Another remarkable finding was how China engagement affected the European citizen diplomats themselves. For many interviewees, their experiences not only provided deep insights into China but also helped refine their own worldviews and ideology. Sausmikat, Fabian, Entwistle, Sapio, Schroeder, and Shurr suggest that European citizen diplomats have not only contributed to China's development, but also that their engagement had a profound and transformative effect on their own personal development. Commenting on the advantages of being not just critical *vis-à-vis* China but also western countries, Sausmikat commented that it "helps a lot to deal with the frustrations. If you look at it from a very long-term perspective and question your own role, when you question the role of the West, this helps you to eat crow... . What would be useful is to have a fundamentally self-critical perspective on ourselves."<sup>80</sup> When placing European experts in Chinese civil society organisations during his work for the Centre for International Migration and Development, Fabian learnt from his Chinese counterparts "the art of negotiation and the ability to think more in terms of process categories."<sup>81</sup> Entwistle described how his engagement made him re-evaluate his previously held political views: "I think the whole China experience has made me a lot more liberal ... a lot more anti-authoritarian, both when it comes to economics and politics."<sup>82</sup> Sapio highlighted how she learnt to shrug off constraints of ideology and discipline: "I changed my ideological perspective a lot over the years as well"; she considered "the ability to translate concepts and ideas across systems" as one of the key benefits from years of researching and engaging practically with China.<sup>83</sup> Schroeder described how his experience made him understand the virtue of combining theory with practise and how his interest in climate change mitigation led to a desire to make a positive contribution to China. In his words, "you can approach China as an academic subject and write about it. And you can do that very well from the distance. But what you are writing will then always be within the kind of, like, Western discourse on China, I think. So, yes, the question is if you want to ... if it is in China as a place, if you are interested in China as a culture, if you are interested in the people who live there, of course you will have to spend some time living there. This way you run in[to] the tension between East and West, or dichotomies, and thinking of 'the other.' All of this ... experience of being in China, the dichotomies are diluted to some degree."<sup>84</sup> For some citizen diplomats, the China experience has sharpened their sense for the severity of some of the challenges China's society is currently facing. Looking back on her now-concluded engagement, Shurr reflected on the need within Chinese society to tackle thorny and unresolved issues such as child abuse.<sup>85</sup>

Society-centric citizen diplomacy is not just part of the global discourse about "new" diplomacy; it is also gaining traction as a new concept in European foreign policy-making towards China. By documenting the experiential learning of these citizen diplomats and whilst citizen diplomacy may be a new concept in EU–China relations, it has already been practised in China since the early 1980s. Making use of the newly developed hexagon of inter-

cultural communication and collaboration competence, European citizen diplomats have managed to navigate the sometimes-treacherous political-administrative landscape in mainland China.

During the interviews, European citizen diplomats were asked how their work in China could be better supported. To some surprise, very few interviewees made suggestions about how European governments could support their activities. One key takeaway has been that none of the interviewees expressed a particular desire to act on behalf the EU or any of its member-states. This finding suggests that society-centric citizen diplomacy in China appears as complementary to institutional diplomacy and not its replacement. Yet, this does not mean that European foreign policy-makers should ignore the manifold contributions that citizen diplomats have made to China's development process.

It is important to caution against any attempt to instrumentalise citizen diplomats. Reflecting on the debate in Britain about soft-power projection, Timothy Jenkins, from the University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy, argued that "(most) BBC World Service journalists do not see themselves as soft power assets. UK University lecturers do not set out to create an Anglophile network of world leaders; and UK musicians and actors do not press the Hollywood flesh out of a sense of duty to communicate their country's cultural superiority. Regardless of intent, these individuals and institutions speak volumes about UK governance, culture, and values and can create the right conditions to convert goodwill into global influence. Direct government control over activities or institutions that positively influence foreign publics often invites suspicion. Soft power activity is quickly undermined if it comes across as lacking in authenticity or as government propaganda."<sup>86</sup>

What could be done, however, is for the EU and its member-states to continue with what the former German foreign minister and current president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, has called a process of "intertwining and integration" with both neighbouring and far-flung countries.<sup>87</sup> For this work on an institutional level, the EU would most likely have to put money where its mouth is. To strengthen the rather weak and underdeveloped third pillar of EU-China relations—the High Level People-to-People Dialogue—the European Commission should consider the establishment of an EU-China People-to-People Dialogue Support Facility. Here the established protocols of the EU-China Policy Dialogue Support Facility II could provide a useful reference.<sup>88</sup> As the Dialogue aims to "help build mutual trust and consolidate intercultural understanding between EU and China,"<sup>89</sup> it could be given a remit to promote grassroots-level dialogue between Europe and China in the eight fields of education, environment, culture, civil society, public sector reform, disability, gender and LGBT, and youth. By linking European and Chinese civil societies,



there would be more opportunities for European and Chinese citizens to engage with one another. Private foundations should similarly support bridge building activities between Europe and China.

To a certain extent, however, the success or failure of such efforts to include laymen in EU–China relations will depend on the future trajectory of China’s political development. As Fabian warns, “[a] last challenge relates to the way the Chinese government will position itself towards EU–China citizen diplomacy in the future. The credibility of citizen diplomacy presupposes that the states involved loosen their control. States can promote citizen diplomacy and build state-society alliances. But if they try to control citizen diplomacy activities in an authoritarian way the credibility of these are questioned and finally damaged.”<sup>90</sup> Conservative members within China’s party-state may indeed object to citizen diplomacy, but such resistance should not be exaggerated. Whilst China’s “slow-motion revolution has been stopped in its tracks” by the current Xi/Li administration,<sup>91</sup> European citizen diplomacy in China has already survived fairly dramatic political downturns such as the crackdown on China’s country-wide anti-corruption and pro-democracy movement in 1989. This is why—if history is any indication of the future—European citizen diplomacy will continue to thrive in EU–China relations regardless of the vicissitudes of Chinese domestic politics.

## Notes

1. “Understanding Citizen Diplomacy,” *The Center for Citizen Diplomacy*, 25 October 2017, <https://www.centerforcitizendiplomacy.org/about-us/understanding/>.
2. *Ibid.*
3. See François Godement and Abigaël Vasselier, “China at the Gates: A New Power Audit of EU–China Relations” December 2017, [http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/china\\_eu\\_power\\_audit7242](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/china_eu_power_audit7242); Zhongqi Pan, ed., *Conceptual Gaps in China-EU Relations. Global Governance, Human Rights and Strategic Partnerships* (Houndmills, 2012); David Shambaugh, Eberhard Sandschneider, and Zhou Hong, eds., *China-Europe Relations. Perceptions, Policies and Prospects* (London, NY, 2009); Stanley Crossick and Etienne Reuter, *China-EU. A Common Future* (Singapore, 2007).
4. See Joëlle Hivonnet and Kolja Rabe, “‘Good governance’ and the role of civil society organisations in reform processes and EU–China diplomatic relations,” in *China and EU: Reform and Governance*, ed. Jing Men and Annika Linck (NY, 2017); Andreas Fulda and Horst Fabian, “Reinvigorating the EU–China Strategic Partnership,” in *Civil Society Contributions to Policy Innovation in the PR China: Environment, Social Development and International Cooperation*, ed. Andreas Fulda (NY, 2015); Nora Sausmikat and Klaus Fritsche, eds., *Civil Society in European–Chinese Relations. Challenges of Cooperation* (Essen, 2010).
5. Christer Jönsson and Martin Hall, *Essence of Diplomacy* (Houndmills, 2005), 25–26 defines diplomacy “as an institution, understood broadly as a relatively stable collection of social practices consisting of easily recognized roles coupled with underlying norms and a set of rules or conventions defining appropriate behavior for, and governing

relations among, occupants of these roles.” They argue that whilst “the terms ‘institution’ and ‘organization’ are frequently used interchangeably,” one should “conceive of diplomacy as an institution at the level of international society as a whole, foreign ministries as organizations at the level of individual states.”

6. Document 9 is a *communiqué* issued by the General Office of the CCP in November 2013. This document identifies the promotion of western constitutional democracy, universal values, civil society, neoliberalism, the West’s idea of journalism, historical nihilism, the questioning of reform and opening, and the socialist nature of socialism with Chinese characteristics as direct threats to the authority of the party-state. See also “Document 9: A ChinaFile Translation. How Much Is a Hardline Party Directive Shaping China’s Current Political Climate?” *ChinaFile*, 13 October 2017, <http://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>.
7. “China’s ‘slow-motion revolution’ has stalled,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 October 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0604-cheekwasserstrom-china-june-4-20150604-story.html>.
8. According to Robert Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA, 1994), 41, a “rationale for selecting a single-case rather than a multiple-case design is that the investigator has access to a situation previously inaccessible to scientific observation. The case study is therefore worth conducting because the descriptive information alone will be revelatory.”
9. For an overview of participatory methods in public engagement activities, see Caroline W. Lee, *Do-it-Yourself Democracy. The Rise of the Public Engagement Industry* (Oxford, 2015); James L. Creighton, *The Public Participation Handbook. Making Better Decisions Through Citizen Involvement* (San Francisco, CA, 2005). For an introduction to the aforementioned participatory big group moderation techniques, see Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff, *Future Search. An Action Guide to Finding Common Ground in Organizations & Communities* (San Francisco, CA, 2000); Harrison Owen, *Open Space Technology. A User’s Guide* (San Francisco, CA, 2008); David Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change* (San Francisco, CA, 2005).
10. Claude Arpi, “From AIDS to Tibet: Jin Wei,” 5 August 2017, <http://claudearpi.blog.spot.co.uk/2013/07/from-aids-to-tibet-jin-wei.html>.
11. The successful conduct of the workshop appeared to contradict prevailing political tendencies at the time. It took place in the late period of the Hu/Wen administration, when the political climate in mainland China began to deteriorate markedly. Anti-western sentiment was running high following unrest in Tibet, which came just weeks before the Beijing Olympics in 2008. And in 2009, ethnic violence in Xinjiang further heightened domestic tensions at China’s periphery. Public Security Bureau member, Zhou Yongkang, China’s former “security czar,” was stifling civic activism by ramping up political control under the banners of “social management” and “stability preservation.”
12. Phil Entwistle, quote from email communication with the author, 11 October 2017.
13. “A Finding Aid to the James Marshall Papers,” Manuscript Collection No. 157, 1899-1986. 20 Linear ft., [Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives], <http://collections.americanjewisharchives.org/ms/ms0157/ms0157.html>.
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15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, 84.
17. *Ibid.*, 85.

18. Paul Sharp, "Making Sense of Citizen Diplomats: The People of Duluth, Minnesota, as International Actors," *International Studies Perspectives*, 2 (2001), 136.
19. John Robert Kelley, "The New Diplomacy: Evolution of a Revolution," *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 21/2 (2010), 288.
20. *Ibid.*, 294.
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22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. Joseph Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616/1 (2008), 95.
26. Park, "New Diplomacy," 5.
27. Marc Gopin, *To Make the Earth Whole: The Art of Citizen Diplomacy in an Age of Religious Militancy* (Plymouth, 2009), 93.
28. *Ibid.*, 95.
29. *Ibid.*
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32. John Fox and François Godement, "A Power Audit of EU–China Relations," 1 August 2017, 1, [http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR12\\_-\\_A\\_POWER\\_AUDIT\\_OF\\_EU-CHINA\\_RELATIONS.pdf](http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR12_-_A_POWER_AUDIT_OF_EU-CHINA_RELATIONS.pdf).
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34. Eberhard Sandschneider, "A Two-Way Bridge to China," in *Bridging the Trust Divide: Cultural Diplomacy and Fostering Understanding Between China and the West*, ed. Helmut K. Anheier and Bernhard Lorentz (1 August 2017), 39–40, [https://www.stiftung-mercator.de/media/downloads/3\\_Publikationen/Bridging\\_the\\_trust\\_divide.pdf](https://www.stiftung-mercator.de/media/downloads/3_Publikationen/Bridging_the_trust_divide.pdf).
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  46. Michael Yahuda, "The Sino-European encounter. Historical influences on contemporary relations," in Shambaugh, Sandschneider, and Hong, *China-Europe Relations*, 13.
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  49. Julian Thomas Hottinger, "The relationship between track one and track two diplomacy," 2 August 2017. <http://www.c-r.org/accord/engaging-armed-groups/relationship-between-track-one-and-track-two-diplomacy>.
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  51. In recent years, China has expelled a small number of Europeans: founder and former director of the Beijing-based civil society think tank China Development Brief [CDB] Nick Young in 2007, CDB co-worker Jeremy Béja and human rights worker Tim Millar in 2015, as well human rights activist Peter Dahlin in 2016. The recent wave of expulsions appear linked to the rise of the hard authoritarian Xi/Li administration.
  52. Kelley, "New Diplomacy."
  53. "China watching" has its roots in the Cold War era, in particular the period of China's tumultuous Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) where news of a politically isolated mainland China needed deciphering by western intelligence officers, journalists, and scholars. Chinese reform and opening-up to the outside world after 1978 offered new opportunities for scholars and practitioners alike to gain first-hand experience by living and working in mainland China. From the early 1980s onwards, the door to "China practicing" remained firmly opened. China's accession to the World Trade Organisation in 2001 further accelerated the domestic need and desirability to invite foreign experts to come to China.
  54. Bridge building includes activities such as the conduct of seminars, conferences, and dialogue fora as well as the organisation of study tours to Europe and China.
  55. Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, "Introduction to Communities of Practice. A Brief Overview of the Concept and Its Uses," 2 August 2017, <http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>.
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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

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