Museums, International Exhibitions and China’s Cultural Diplomacy

*Museums, International Exhibitions and China’s Cultural Diplomacy* examines the role museums and, more specifically, international exhibitions, have played in shaping China’s international image to date.

Drawing on theories and methods from museum studies and international relations, the book evaluates the contribution international exhibitions make to China’s cultural diplomacy strategy. Considering their impact on the country’s international image, Kong also probes the mechanisms and processes involved, examining in detail the policy of, and international activities promoted by, the Chinese government. The book also analyses the motives of the Chinese and overseas museums that host these exhibitions. Taking some major exhibitions that were on show in the UK during the 21st century as a representative case study, the book reveals the mechanisms by which these exhibitions were developed and shared overseas. Questioning who really shapes the image of China, Kong challenges Western assumptions and looks ahead to consider whether, moving forward, the Chinese government and museums could work together in a mutually beneficial way.

*Museums, International Exhibitions and China’s Cultural Diplomacy* contributes to the growing literature on museums and diplomacy. As such, it will be of interest to academics and students engaged in the study of museums and heritage, international relations, culture, politics, China and wider Asia.

**Da Kong** is a Lecturer in Museum Studies at the Department of Cultural Heritage and Museology in Fudan University, Shanghai. Her research focuses on international exchanges between museums, looking particularly at China’s exhibition exchanges, soft power, and cultural diplomacy. She is currently leading two municipal projects in Shanghai on this subject.
Routledge Research in Museum Studies

This series presents the latest research from right across the field of museum studies. It is not confined to any particular area, or school of thought, and seeks to provide coverage of a broad range of topics, theories and issues from around the world.

The following list contains information about the most-recent titles to publish within the series. A list of the full catalogue of titles is available at https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Research-in-Museum-Studies/book-series/RRIMS

**Connecting Museums**  
*Edited by Mark O’Neill and Glenn Hooper*

**Art in Science Museums**  
Towards a Post-Disciplinary Approach  
*Edited by Camilla Rossi-Linnemann and Giulia de Martini*

**Museums of Language and the Display of Intangible Cultural Heritage**  
*Edited by Margaret J-M Sönmez, Maia Wellington Gahtan and Nadia Cannata*

**Museums, Modernity and Conflict**  
Museums and Collections in and of War since the Nineteenth Century  
*Edited by Kate Hill*

**Negotiating Race and Rights in the Museum**  
*Katy Bunning*

**Museums, Refugees and Communities**  
*Domenico Sergi*

**Museums, International Exhibitions and China’s Cultural Diplomacy**  
*Da Kong*
Museums, International Exhibitions and China’s Cultural Diplomacy

Da Kong
Contents

List of illustrations vii
Preface ix

1 Introduction 1
  Soft power, cultural diplomacy, and national image 2
  Museums, international exhibitions, and cultural diplomacy 5
  Aim and structure of this book 13

2 China’s cultural diplomacy in image building 25
  China’s cultural diplomacy: aim, resources, and actors 27
  Traditional culture on exchange 36

3 Museums and international exhibitions as instruments of China’s cultural diplomacy 48
  Policies and initiatives 48
  Legal system for international exhibitions 50
  Institutional system and the AEC 54

4 International exhibitions as China’s cultural diplomacy toward the UK 61
  A brief introduction to Chinese cultural relics exhibitions in the UK 62
  China: The Three Emperors, 1662–1795 and a state visit 67
  The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army and the 2008 Beijing Olympics 70
  The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China and the London 2012 Olympics 74
  Ming: 50 Years That Changed China and the BRI 78
vi Contents

5 International exhibitions and the image of China 91
   Qing China: multi-ethnicity and multi-culturalism 91
   Qin China: democracy and mass production 100
   Han China: Chinese people and the nation 107
   Ming China: the silk road and cultural vitality 115

6 International exhibitions and a contemporary China 128
   China Design Now 129
   China’s past, present and future 130
   Ancient and contemporary China in exhibitions 138

7 Who shapes the image of China? 144
   The Chinese government 144
   The Chinese museums 154
   The host museums 157
   The power relations 163

8 Conclusion 170
   Imaging China vs. imagining China 171
   Challenges and opportunities for Chinese museums 174
   A new understanding of museum diplomacy 178

Index 181
Illustrations

Figures

4.1 Jade rhyton 角形玉杯, Western Han Dynasty (202 BC–8 AD), Museum of the Nanyue King of Western Han Dynasty 77
4.2 *Age of Empires: Chinese Art of the Qin and Han Dynasties (221 BC–AD 220)* exhibition, 2017, The Metropolitan Museum of Art 80
4.3 Jade suit of Dou Wan 窦婉金缕玉衣, Western Han Dynasty, Hebei Museum 81
4.4 Hanging lamp in the shape of a foreigner 人形铜吊灯, Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 AD), bronze, Hunan Museum 81
4.5 Cowry container with bull and rider 四牛鎏金骑士铜贮贝器, Western Han Dynasty, bronze, Yunnan Provincial Museum 82
5.1 Anonymous, The Qianlong Emperor in Buddhist dress 乾隆皇帝佛装像唐卡, from Puning Temple in Chengde, Qing Dynasty (1636–1912), thangka, colours on cloth, The Palace Museum 92
5.2 Giuseppe Castiglione, The Qianlong Emperor in ceremonial armour on horseback 乾隆皇帝大阅图轴, Qing Dynasty, hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, The Palace Museum 96
5.3 Anonymous court artist, The album of the Yongzheng Emperor in costumes 8 胤禛行乐图册·刺虎页, Qing Dynasty, album leaf, colour on silk, The Palace Museum 97
5.4 *The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army* exhibition, 2007–8, Trustees of the British Museum 103
5.5 Jade suit 金缕玉衣, Western Han Dynasty, Xuzhou Museum 109
5.6 Jade suit 丝缕玉衣, Western Han Dynasty, Museum of the Nanyue King of Western Han Dynasty 109
5.7 Stone lavatory 石厕, Western Han Dynasty, Xuzhou Museum 110
5.8 Bronze ginger grater 铜姜擦, Western Han Dynasty, Museum of the Nanyue King of Western Han Dynasty 110
5.9 Earthenware dancing figure 陶绕襟衣舞俑, Western Han Dynasty, Xuzhou Museum 111
viii  *List of illustrations*

5.10 Silver box 银盒, Western Han Dynasty, partly gilt, with stand of bronze and wood, Museum of the Nanyue King of Western Han Dynasty 114

5.11 Gold belt plaque 金带扣, Western Han Dynasty, Xuzhou Museum 114

7.1 Kneeling archer with pigment 绿面跪射俑, Qin Dynasty (221–207 BC), Emperor Qingshihuang’s Mausoleum Site Museum 148

**Tables**

1.1 Museum professional interviews in the UK 15

1.2 Museum professional and cultural official interviews in China 17

4.1 A list of major Chinese exhibitions at museums in the UK in the 21st Century 63
Preface

This study dates back to my undergraduate studies at Fudan University in 2006. At the time, museums were still a very small or even invisible element in the daily life of most Chinese people, including my own. Many people wondered what to do in museums, and what museum studies was exactly about. I began my undergraduate studies in Museum Studies with these concerns and uncertainties about the future. Driven by an interest in international politics, I chose Diplomacy as my second major in my sophomore year, and that is where I heard the term cultural diplomacy for the first time. It was also the year when China began to emphasise cultural soft power in national policies. Later, I decided to pursue postgraduate studies at the University of Leicester after graduating from Fudan in 2010. At this point, I witnessed the most active cultural exchanges, including museum and exhibition exchanges between China and the UK, partly because of the two consecutive Olympics in Beijing and London. One of China’s most successful international exhibitions, *The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army* at the British Museum had just finished a couple of years ago and people still mentioned it to me from time to time. This reminded me of my diplomacy studies at Fudan and drove me to link museum and exhibition exchanges with cultural diplomacy for my master’s thesis. Then, I took up an internship at the British Museum as part of the master’s programme, while at the same time preparing for PhD admissions into Leicester. It was natural for me to focus on museums, international exhibitions, and China’s cultural diplomacy, which laid the foundation for this book.

My PhD years (2011–2015) at Leicester witnessed an increase in China’s charm offensive around the world, including sending exhibitions abroad, while criticism and scepticism always went on alongside in international media. Chinese museums experienced a boom in this period, and a new museum was opened to the public every day. The international museum community admired this great opportunity for Chinese museums, without fully understanding how this boom had happened and how Chinese museums worked. They hoped to grasp the opportunity for themselves but did not know how to work with this rising market in China. It was probably the same for Chinese museums. I felt these contradictions almost every day during my...
PhD studies, navigating through museum systems and politics in both countries. As one of the first PhD researchers on museum studies at Leicester from the Chinese mainland, I realised that it is so important to be the bridge and promote an understanding between these two systems. As a Chinese student learning in a Western institution, with a Chinese perspective, and focusing on a Chinese issue, I hoped this research can contribute toward resolving the Chinese problem, and enhancing the impact of China’s cultural diplomacy and international exhibitions. Writing in English and for British and international readers, I hope this research can explain the Chinese situation and respond to the concerns about China’s cultural diplomacy and international exhibitions.

I have returned to Fudan, where my passion for museums began, after obtaining my PhD from Leicester. China and its museums have evolved so rapidly in the past few years. It had 5,535 museums with 28,600 exhibitions, 334,600 educational activities, and 1.227 billion visitors in 2019. Museums have become a critical part of Chinese people’s daily lives, particularly those living in cities. Exhibition exchanges are active now more than ever. International exhibitions of different cultures from any part of the world have regularly been on stage in Chinese museums. China’s international policy in the new era, particularly the Belt and Road Initiative, requires Chinese museums to play a bigger role and make a larger impact.

As a Chinese academic focusing on museum studies, with experience of being educated in China and the UK, I have had the best luck to witness and experience this sea change in China and around Chinese museums over the past two decades, and to record and reflect upon these matters in this book. The book examines the role of museums in shaping China’s international image. It also considers the role of the Chinese government and its central agencies, as well as that of museums in China and the West by examining international exhibitions travelling from China to the West in the 21st century, when China rose onto the international stage and began to formalise its soft power strategy. It emphasises the value of museum professionalism for China’s cultural diplomacy and the responsibility of the Chinese government in respecting and promoting the professional development of Chinese museums. This book is probably one of the first to explore China’s museums, international exhibitions, and cultural diplomacy from an intercultural and interdisciplinary perspective. This is a start. I sincerely hope it can contribute a Chinese perspective toward the global understanding of Chinese museums and cultural diplomacy, and toward the growing literature on museum diplomacy. I also look forward to this book inspiring more research on China’s museum diplomacy from different perspectives in the future.

This study would not have been possible without the kind support of the people I interviewed and talked to, formally and informally, both in China and the UK. They provided valuable information on exhibition exchanges between both countries and shaped my understanding of museum diplomacy. These professionals and cultural officials enjoy great reputation in the field.
and were still generous enough to support my research. Some of them are listed in the book, and some remain anonymous. I express my sincere thanks to all of them. If there are any misunderstandings or unsophisticated arguments in the book, these are my mistakes.

I am grateful to the archive services at the British Museum, Fitzwilliam Museum, Royal Academy of Arts, and the Victoria and Albert Museum. I am also grateful to the Palace Museum, Museum of the Nanyue King of Western Han Dynasty, Xuzhou Museum, Emperor Qingshihuang’s Mausoleum Site Museum, Hebei Museum, Hunan Museum, Yunnan Provincial Museum, British Museum, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art for providing images for this book.

I express my special thanks to the Department of Cultural Heritage and Museology at Fudan University and my Director Professor Lu Jiansong, for his support on my research and for providing the best learning opportunities for me to see and compare museums world over. Great thanks go to Professor Du Xiaofan, for bringing me into a broader field of heritage studies and practice. I am also grateful to all my teachers, colleagues, and friends at Fudan University. They have brought me into the museum field, welcomed me back and encouraged me when I returned and joined them again. I express great gratitude to Professor Simon Knell at University of Leicester, who is my PhD supervisor and my role model. He is always insightful, illuminating, respectful, and encouraging, both when I was at Leicester and now back at Fudan. He always gives me courage to think independently and positively. I owe the greatest debt of thanks to my family. I am very grateful to my parents for their love, support, and accompaniment throughout this long process. I love them very much.
1 Introduction

Over the past two decades, the Chinese government’s desire and efforts to strengthen soft power and polish its international image have attracted increasing global attention. This ambition has been delivered in innovative and traditional formats, including, for example, publicising the first lady’s personal charm, sending pandas the world over, refining domestic and foreign policies, providing foreign aid, increasing economic investments overseas, promoting international communication and publicity, and hosting the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2010 Shanghai Expo. During this period, international exhibitions of Chinese art treasures, including terracotta warriors buried with China’s First Emperor and royal collections from the Forbidden City, have been seen around the world with increasing frequency. Many exhibitions have been hosted on a large scale in prestigious spaces and have triggered widespread discussions and debates on Chinese culture, and on contemporary Chinese politics, economy, and society in the media and amongst the general public. They have been highlighted as an important element of China’s cultural diplomacy by Chinese and international scholars and commentators. These initiatives have helped China gain a certain degree of reputation and appreciation. However, the efficacy of such endeavours is often doubted and this has been mainly attributed to the deep involvement of the Chinese government in initiating and delivering these efforts. In David Shambaugh’s words, ‘much of China’s poor international image and lack of soft power has to do with its government propaganda machine’. Is China’s cultural diplomacy as part of its overall soft power and image-building strategy ineffective? Are these cultural programmes instrumentalised or propagandised by the Chinese government?

The literature on museum diplomacy has grown steadily over the past few decades. Museums working internationally is not a new phenomenon. How museums, particularly through their international exhibitions, contribute towards a country’s cultural diplomacy and soft power, and the relations between museums and governments have been explored from an interdisciplinary perspective. Several monographs that have been published in this period have examined museums and cultural diplomacy in different countries and at different points in time. Museums can be commissioned or instrumentalised for cultural diplomacy to send exhibitions abroad, as the US
government sponsored the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Smithsonian Institution to exchange exhibitions internationally during the Second World War and the Cold War. More recently, museums have taken the opportunity of being associated with cultural diplomacy to achieve their agendas; for example, British national museums take advantage of the British government’s ambition for soft power to guarantee special funding for their World Collections Programme.

In a globalised and interconnected world, museums will impact cultural diplomacy by working internationally, even if they do not have direct relations with political agenda. The Guggenheim’s global expansion delivering American commercialism and cosmopolitanism is probably one of the best examples of this. Contemporary museums have contributed to cultural diplomacy as non-governmental actors, and have gradually challenged the boundaries of international politics and museum studies. Unfortunately, the involvement of Chinese museums in museum diplomacy is yet to be examined in full in both Chinese and English literature, although China’s international exhibitions as cultural ambassadors have attracted great interest over the past two decades.

These observations have prompted me to link Chinese museums and cultural diplomacy together, to think about how their international exhibitions contribute to and benefit from China’s cultural diplomacy. Are the international exhibitions sent by China instruments of cultural diplomacy that are directly shaped by the Chinese government? How does the Chinese government engage in the production and realisation of such exhibitions? Does it intend to deliver or propagate specific messages through these exhibitions? How do these exhibitions impact the image and perceptions of China? What are the roles of the Chinese museums that are involved? What are the relationships between the government and these museums? Do Chinese museums realise government policy when they produce the exhibitions and communicate with their counterpart’s institutions overseas? How do these Chinese museums balance their roles as professional institutions and ‘mouthpieces’ of the government? What can the Chinese government and museums do to improve the impact of these international exhibitions? How can Chinese museums take opportunities for cultural diplomacy and promote their professional development? This study attempts to answer these questions.

**Soft power, cultural diplomacy, and national image**

American political scientist Milton Cummings defined ‘cultural diplomacy’ as ‘the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding’. It has existed since the inception of human civilisation. Ancient Greeks and Romans spread their culture along with military conquest and territorial expansion. In the 19th century, the French began to realise the power of culture, education, and religion in strengthening their political influence overseas. Cultural colonialism was a vital part of the French, British, Spanish, and
Portuguese colonial strategies. Throughout the 20th century, the two World Wars and the Cold War made the Western world fully recognise the value of culture for diplomatic strategy and national interest, and therefore they made all efforts to promote their cultures abroad. Since the 1990s, along with the worldwide popularity of ‘soft power’, cultural diplomacy regained attention and has been re-approached from a soft power perspective.

American political scientist Joseph Nye coined the term ‘soft power’ in 1990 in Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power, and developed the concept further in 2004, in Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics. Although the concept is continuously challenged and criticised as ‘relativity and vagueness, and underestimates its interconnectedness with hard power’, it has become increasingly popular and has been extensively discussed worldwide in international politics and other fields. According to Nye, ‘a country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries – admiring its values, emulating its examples, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness – want to follow it’. Therefore, it is important for a country to achieve its agendas in international politics by attracting and/or persuading people rather than threatening or luring them with military and economic ‘carrots and sticks’. A country’s soft power, as Nye argued, is closely associated with its international image and reputation. If a country has a positive image and reputation, it owns soft power and is easier to win the support of other countries through attraction and/or persuasion. To some extent, building soft power is building a country’s image and reputation. Nye highlighted culture as one of the three main resources of a country’s soft power, with the other two being ‘political values (when it [the country] lives up to them at home and abroad)’ and ‘foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)’. In today’s interconnected and multi-polarised world, soft power is strongly emphasised and highly valued by almost every country. It is not difficult to understand why cultural diplomacy has been so valued in the current century. Under the influence of the soft power rationale, cultural diplomacy has been increasingly examined and practised with new concerns and emphasis.

The first concern is around who initiates and delivers cultural diplomacy. Former British cultural diplomat Mitchell argued that cultural diplomacy ‘is essentially the business of governments’. It can be negotiated and delivered by governments through bilateral or multilateral cultural treaties, conventions, agreements, or exchange programmes, and cultural agencies under delegation and commission of the government. The aim is ‘to impress, to present a favourable image’. However, as Ivey and Cleggett claimed, in the information age, ‘government cultural work has been diminished in scope … as trade in cultural products and Internet communication has increased the complexity and informal character of cross-cultural communication’. Therefore, the value of non-governmental actors and the private-public partnership has been increasingly emphasised. Governments are no longer exclusive actors in cultural diplomacy. The private sector can not only be commissioned by the government to deliver cultural projects, but can also initiate international cultural
Introduction

exchanges for its own purpose, which can contribute towards governmental agendas, intentionally or otherwise.

The second concern is around what the aim of cultural diplomacy should be and how it can be achieved. This has been explored by scholars and practitioners in juxtaposition with the term ‘public diplomacy’, which ‘deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies’. Summarising the new trends in America’s cultural diplomacy in the 21st century, Juliet Antunes Sablosky of Georgetown University, a former foreign service officer of the US government, said:

Cultural diplomacy is related to public diplomacy, but whereas the latter addresses both short-term policy needs and long-term interests, cultural diplomacy’s emphasis is on long-term interchange among nations. In promoting mutual understanding, it seeks to provide a context within which our national interests and policies can be understood. By their nature cultural diplomacy activities involve long-term investments in our relations with people in other countries.

Cultural diplomacy should aim towards shaping a favourable environment for a country’s policy, rather than promoting the policy directly. Whereas public diplomacy aims to win the support of the foreign public through an explanation of policy, cultural diplomacy aims to promote cultural understanding through cultural means. For cultural diplomacy, the result does not have to be an immediate agreement. As Ljuben Tevdovski, Ambassador of the Republic of Macedonia to Canada noted:

Cultural diplomacy promotes the spirit, ideas and ideal of the nation, in the same time promoting openness and diversity. The audience is given opportunity to entirely disagree with the policies of a state, and still appreciate, cherish or enjoy segments of its culture.

Cultural understanding will have long-term political benefits for the country in question. That is, the fundamental rationale for cultural diplomacy is that if a foreign public or government understands a country’s culture and its way of thinking, then it is more likely to understand, agree with, or even support that country’s policies and actions.

The comparison with public diplomacy also provides a means of understanding the third concern of cultural diplomacy: what its practice should constitute. Margaret J. Wyszomirski and others have argued that public diplomacy comprises two major components, namely ‘information policy’ and ‘cultural/educational programs’. The latter refers to cultural diplomacy. Scholars have insisted that effective cultural diplomacy should avoid information manipulation by the government. Richard Arndt also emphasised this in his evaluation of America’s cultural diplomacy during the Cold War.
Tevdovski stated that the main concerns around cultural diplomacy ‘represent the place and role of cultural diplomacy in contemporary conduct of international relations, reflecting also upon the wide-ranging activities and capacities, as well as the multi-layer [sic] structure of actors, and shared responsibilities’. In the information age, international communication is no longer subject to the absolute control of individual governments. The public has access to diverse sources of information and is no longer limited to official messages that are often related to propaganda. In the Western language system, ‘propaganda’ is generally considered ‘some kind of lying as a legitimate tool of political power’. In the early 20th century, it had a relatively neutral tone and countries like the UK did not avoid using the term to describe their policies. After the Second World War and the Cold War, propaganda began to be more associated with the informational, psychological, and ideological policies of Nazi Germany and Communist Russia, and the word gained ‘a negative connotation’. The importance of distinguishing between cultural diplomacy and propaganda has been emphasised repeatedly.

The main concerns about cultural diplomacy, which refer to but are not limited to the inclusion of non-governmental actors and the exclusion of information/policy dissemination and manipulation, partly reflect endeavours towards reducing the risk of it being interpreted as propaganda. This is probably one of the advantages of cultural diplomacy in contemporary international politics. As part of general diplomacy, cultural diplomacy can never be separated from governments and political intentions. However, cultural diplomacy, particularly in the current century, emphasises how governments facilitate cultural exchanges with the aim of promoting a cultural understanding and shaping favourable images and perceptions, rather than directly delivering propagandistic messages.

The principal concern about and criticism of China’s soft power – the deep involvement of the government – is consistent with the key concerns about cultural diplomacy of international scholars and practitioners. This partly reflects the fact that Western scholars continue to examine China from Western perspectives without considering the Chinese situation in full. If China wants to make an impact through cultural diplomacy, particularly in the West, it will have to first think about what the international community generally likes and dislikes. In this book, China’s cultural diplomacy will be examined against this understanding, in the context of Chinese situations and characteristics.

Museums, international exhibitions, and cultural diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy can be delivered through different cultural activities, such as dance, music, film, and field archaeology. Art exhibitions, however, are arguably the most powerful. As Mitchell noted:

It is a reasonable generalization to say that the visual arts have tended to be most successful in making a striking impression or, in the language of
cultural relations, ‘a big splash’. A major exhibition lasts for some weeks, appeals to anyone with cultural awareness (whereas orchestras and theatre companies have a more limited public), announces itself through prominent posters, which are part of its total effect and seen by many more than the exhibition itself, and leaves a tangible legacy in the form of catalogues and reproductions. So far as the wider, rather than the specialized, public is concerned, an exhibition can touch the sensibilities with more enduring effect. For this reason the visual arts are perhaps the most potent means of putting across a national image or changing that image.  

Art exhibitions can be used as instruments of cultural diplomacy to “‘normalize” political relations’ serve as ‘bona fides of trust’, promote nations, or shape a desired image. Throughout the 20th century, American museums were sponsored by the US government to exchange exhibitions with foreign countries to win hearts and minds and counter Fascism and Communism. Exhibitions of abstract expressionist art were even secretly commissioned by the Central Intelligence Agency to project an image of the US as a country of democracy and freedom. After 9/11, American museums received governmental funding to develop community engagement and exhibition projects with museums in the Islamic world. In the early stages of the Cold War, the South Korean government commissioned its national museum to send art exhibitions to the US and later to Japan, in order to consolidate their allied relationship and strengthen its national identity after getting rid of Japanese colonial rule. International art exhibitions were also used by Japan to deliver a desired self-image in the US in the 1980s. In the current century, the British Museum’s (BM) *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia* (9 September 2005–8 January 2006) and *Shah ‘Abbas: The Remaking of Iran at the British Museum* (19 February–14 June 2009), are examples of how museums ‘keep doors open for political negotiations’, particularly when the bilateral relationship is in jeopardy. In the latter exhibition, a reciprocal agreement resulted in the London institution borrowing objects from Iran in exchange for the BM sending the Cyrus Cylinder to Iran. Similar museum and exhibition exchanges that have acted as ‘symbolic gestures of political goodwill’ have also been reported between national museums in Singapore and France. Italy and Greece used exhibitions of their glorious pasts ‘to counter the negative image of [their] struggle for economic survival’ in the US. International travelling exhibitions of pearl treasures are an important component of Qatar’s diplomatic strategy to make larger international impact and enhance political legitimacy.

Policymakers need evidence to verify their sponsorship for cultural diplomacy. Based on exhibition evaluation and audience research, museums are proved to be positive contributors to cultural diplomacy and generators of soft power, and have provided an example for evaluating the efficacy of cultural diplomacy. Sponsored by the Japan Society, Robert Bower and Laure
Sharp, for example, evaluated a travelling exhibition sent by Japan as a ‘good-will gesture’ to Washington, DC, New York, Seattle, Chicago, and Boston in 1953–1954,\textsuperscript{56} to examine the exhibition’s ‘success in affecting the political attitudes of its American audiences’.\textsuperscript{57} They conducted around 6,500 questionnaires and 700 interviews with audience members in 4 cities before and after their visits to the exhibition. They found that the exhibition challenged ‘derogatory stereotypes of the Japanese’,\textsuperscript{58} although this was, to some extent, achieved by reinforcing previously held positive attitudes towards Japan and its people. Susan Reid and Tomas Tolvaisas, evaluated American exhibitions sent to the USSR in the 1950s and 1960s, which were aimed at ‘combating anti-American Soviet propaganda’,\textsuperscript{59} and ‘sow[ing] seeds of dissent and dissatisfaction in order to undermine and gradually destabilize the USSR’, respectively.\textsuperscript{60} Reid interviewed guides and specialists who had first-hand experience of the exhibition and direct engagement with the Soviet audience. She argued that the effects of the exhibition ‘were very complex and contradictory’,\textsuperscript{61} and that it had not been as influential as the governmental sponsors had claimed. Tolvaisas analysed audience comments from the comments books that had been collected and lodged in the official archives. He believed that the exhibition made a huge contribution to America’s cultural diplomacy, saying that it:

advanced Soviet citizens’ understanding of American daily life, increased popular good will toward the United States, and stimulated Soviet consumerist desires … enabled the guides and their government to learn more about everyday life in the Soviet Union … both sides had broader, more accurate views of each other.\textsuperscript{62}

Through visitor studies and staff interviews, Lee Davidson and Leticia Pérez Castellanos evaluated the exhibition exchange between New Zealand and Mexico and examined how international exhibitions become ‘cosmopolitan ambassadors’ for negotiating differences and nurturing empathy, although this exchange is museum-mission driven rather than diplomacy-driven. The results of 57 post-visit qualitative and 25 follow-up interviews demonstrated that international exhibitions can help ‘visitors make reflections and comparisons that identify the interconnectivity of different worlds’, and thus contribute to a mutual understanding amongst different cultures.\textsuperscript{63} Besides, media reports and exhibition reviews were used to assess the impact of international exhibitions on cultural diplomacy.\textsuperscript{64} A contribution to the national or local economy and tourism is an important component of cultural diplomacy in the current century,\textsuperscript{65} therefore, research measuring the economic impact of international exhibitions should be emphasised.\textsuperscript{66} Natalia Grincheva developed a digital mapping system to measure ‘museum capacities to exert global impacts’, which includes measuring the impact of international exhibition tours.\textsuperscript{67}
The impact of international exhibitions on cultural diplomacy is largely influenced by the relationship between governments and museums in initiating, organising, and delivering the project, which is a focus of the current literature on museum diplomacy. Andrew Wulf argued that the US government provided ‘thematic guidance’ in sending art exhibitions abroad between the 1940s and 1970s, nevertheless museums, artists and designers are the ‘Deus ex Machina for projecting a positive image of the United States abroad’. Michael Krenn confirmed the value of international art exhibitions for American cultural diplomacy in this period. He also disclosed the contradictions between the US government and museums. In his opinion, museums and the art world wished art for art’s sake and ‘would not support an effort to use art as simply a state-supported vehicle for the delivery of appropriate “messages”’. While the government ‘had little interest in supporting a program that did not serve definite national interests’. Krenn argued that this was one reason why American museums and cultural diplomacy working together failed towards the end of the Cold War.

There is a risk of museums and their exhibitions being considered propaganda when they work together with cultural diplomacy. As Judith Huggins Balfe argued, travelling exhibitions of artwork can be used as ‘mediators of politics’ for propagandistic and economic, political, secular, and religious agendas. However, they take effect ‘only if the art remains, in some measure through its own qualities, transcendent’. Museum professionalism is of critical importance in guaranteeing the artistic value and audience engagement that are necessary for successful art exhibitions as cultural diplomacy initiatives. When propagandistic intentions and political intervention impair museum professionalism in exhibition curatorship and organisation, the result can be detrimental for both museums and cultural diplomacy.

Museums can be politically engaged and commissioned for cultural diplomacy. They often work internationally for their own agendas which objectively has an impact on cultural diplomacy and soft power. Natalia Grincheva noted that American ideas of democracy, commercialism, and cosmopolitanism are embedded in the organisation and ideology of American museums from exhibitions and educational programming, to leadership and management. These values are promoted world over when American museums work globally. This way, American museums have generated soft power for the country, while retaining their professional independence. Exemplified by the museum franchising and global expansion of the Guggenheim, the K11 Art Mall in China, and the Hermitage, Grincheva emphasised that museums and art institutions ‘earn their diplomatic legitimacy not through their official status, like governmental players, but rather through their capabilities to raise their own budget to go global, to offer professional expertise in addressing international issues and to earn credibility’. Thus, museums have become autonomous and independent players in contemporary cultural diplomacy. They can reach areas that are beyond the control of governments.