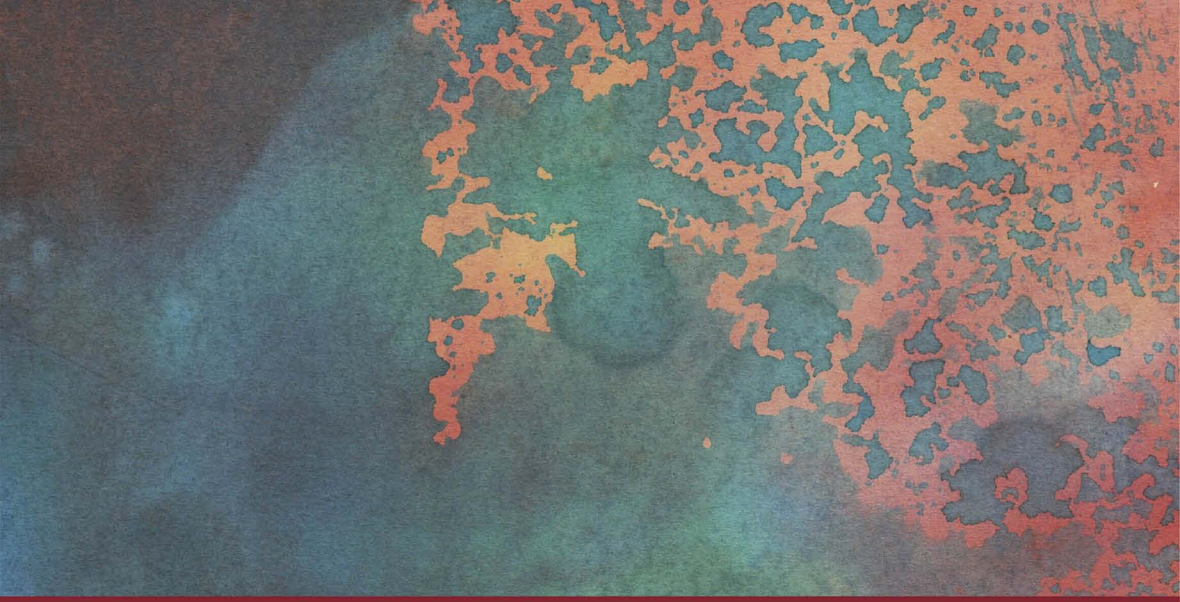
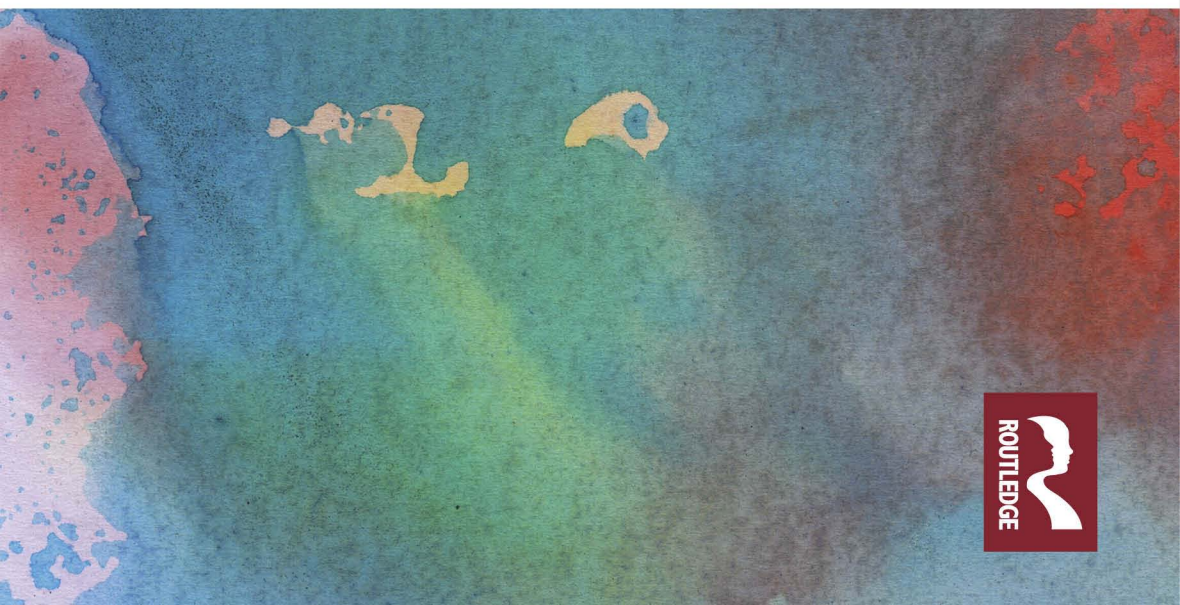


Routledge New Diplomacy Studies

CHINA'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

A GREAT LEAP OUTWARD?

Xin Liu



ROUTLEDGE

China's Cultural Diplomacy

This book examines China's contemporary global cultural footprints through its recent development of cultural diplomacy.

The volume presents an alternative analytical framework to examine China's cultural diplomacy, which goes beyond the Western-defined concept of 'soft power' that prevails in the current literature. This new approach constructs a three-dimensional framework on Orientalism, cultural hegemony and nationalism to decipher the multiple contexts, which China inhabits historically, internationally and domestically. The book presents multiple case studies of the Confucius Institute, and compares the global programme located around the world with its Western counterparts, and also with other Chinese government-sponsored endeavours and non-government-initiated programmes. The author aims to solve the puzzle of why China's efforts in cultural diplomacy are perceived differently around the world and helps to outline the distinctive features of China's cultural diplomacy.

This book will be of much interest to students of diplomacy, Chinese politics, foreign policy and International Relations in general.

Xin Liu is a Senior Lecturer and Chinese Course Leader at the University of Central Lancashire, UK.

Routledge New Diplomacy Studies
Series Editors: Corneliu Bjola
University of Oxford
and
Markus Kornprobst
Diplomatic Academy of Vienna

This series publishes theoretically challenging and empirically authoritative studies of the traditions, functions, paradigms and institutions of modern diplomacy. Taking a comparative approach, the New Diplomacy Studies series aims to advance research on international diplomacy, publishing innovative accounts of how 'old' and 'new' diplomats help steer international conduct between anarchy and hegemony, handle demands for international stability vs international justice, facilitate transitions between international orders, and address global governance challenges. Dedicated to the exchange of different scholarly perspectives, the series aims to be a forum for inter-paradigm and inter-disciplinary debates, and an opportunity for dialogue between scholars and practitioners.

Secret Diplomacy
Concepts, contexts and cases
Edited by Corneliu Bjola and Stuart Murray

Diplomatic Cultures and International Politics
Translations, spaces and alternatives
Edited by Jason Dittmer and Fiona McConnell

Sports Diplomacy
Origins, Theory and Practice
Stuart Murray

Countering Online Propaganda and Extremism
The Dark Side of Digital Diplomacy
Edited by Corneliu Bjola and James Pamment

China's Cultural Diplomacy
A Great Leap Outward?
Xin Liu

For more information about this series, please visit: www.routledge.com/Routledge-New-Diplomacy-Studies/book-series/RNDS

China's Cultural Diplomacy

A Great Leap Outward?

Xin Liu

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2020
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-0-367-28153-3 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-429-32029-3 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Wearset Ltd, Boldon, Tyne and Wear

This book is dedicated to my family.

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

Contents

Figures

Acknowledgements

This is my first book thus I am indebted to so many people for its coming to fruition. Its seed started from my PhD and four journal articles which were published in 2017–2019 based on the PhD thesis. My deepest gratitude and appreciation goes to my PhD supervisors, Dr Petra Bagley and Dr Edward Griffith, my internal examiner, Dr Yu Tao, two external examiners, Dr Michael Barr and Dr Edney Kingsley, and all the anonymous reviewers for the journal articles published on *Journal of Contemporary China*, *Asia Studies Review*, *Cambridge Journal of China Studies* and *Journal of Contemporary Eastern Asia*. Without their support, guidance, insightful feedback and intellectual challenges, this seed could never have sprouted and blossomed.

Meanwhile, I could not be more grateful to my family for their generous and unselfish support throughout my career transition from China to the UK; then from a teacher and translator to a scholar, especially to my husband for having endless stimulating and candid discussions with me that helped develop the ideas, for keeping sending me recommended readings, and for encouraging me to reach high with a free mind to think beyond boundaries. I also want to give a special mention to my daughter, who is the first reader of the completed manuscript and who used her English and computer skills to help me polish the fruit by meticulously proofreading, pointing out the need for clarifications, checking even the smallest details and creating the word clouds. We enjoyed many rounds of delightful discussions over the key words chosen by the respondents in Chapter 5.

Next, I must thank all the interviewees for allowing me to collect primary data and for sharing their insights with me. I am especially indebted to Feixia Yu, Xin Gao, Jinghan Zeng and Meng Zhang, who helped me establish crucial contacts with different organisations that gave this book the breadth of its empirical evidence.

Equally grateful am I to the University of Central Lancashire for its continued support for staff development and for granting me sabbatical leave to concentrate on writing this book. My heartfelt thanks go to Feixia Yu again, who extends all-rounded help to me, from constantly sending me links to the latest news stories to helping me ring fence my time and for covering some of the teaching workload during my sabbatical.

I also want to thank Professor Simon Anholt and Dr Wolfram Manzenreiter for giving me permissions to reproduce the National Brands Hexagon and the 2008 China Brand Hexagon respectively, and Mr Jason Bair, Acting Director of International Affairs and Trade at the United States Government Accountability Office, for advising me on the copyright issue and directing me to the other GAO report on the Confucius Institute. I thank Kate at the Copyright unit of Uclan in helping me get a quote to pay for the Country Rating Table produced by Gallup.

I am also extremely grateful to the two anonymous reviewers of my book proposal and sample chapters, the series editors and Andrew Humphrys at Routledge for their inspiring and instrumental feedback and the confidence their positive comments have given me. Last but not least, my sincere gratitude to Bethany Lund Yates, my editorial assistant, for her patience, efficiency and professionalism in guiding me through the production process.

This book has been made possible and better because of each and every one of you.

Thank you all.

Abbreviations

AAUP	American Association of University Professors
ABC	Audit Bureau of Circulations
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CAUT	Canadian Association of University Teachers
CC	Confucius Classroom
CCC	China Cultural Centre
CCKF	Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation
CCP	Chinese Communist Party/CPC: Communist Party of China
CI	Confucius Institute
CIUC	Confucius Institute at the University of Chicago
CPAFFC	Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries
CPHRC	Conservative Party Human Rights Commission
CPIFA	The Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
DV	dependent variable
EACS	European Association of Chinese Studies
EV	extraneous variable
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GI	Goethe Institute
GPPI	Global Public Policy Institute
HSK	Chinese proficiency test
ICD	Institute of Cultural Diplomacy
IV	independent variable
MERICS	Mercator Institute for China Studies
MOC	Ministry of Culture/MOCT: Ministry of Culture and Tourism (since March 2018)
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MV	mediating variable
NAS	National Association of Scholars

NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NPO	non-profit organisation
PGAS	Pew Global Attitude Survey
PPP	Purchasing Power Parish
SCIO	The State Council Information Office
TRA	Taiwan Relations Act
UFWD	United Front Work Department
UKCISA	UK Council for International Students Affairs
USCC	US–China Economic and Security Review Commission
USCCD	US Centre for Citizen Diplomacy

Introduction

> I thought I've seen the whole picture, but no matter how high I stand and how many angles I've changed, I still cannot see it all.
>
> (Xin Liu)

China, the oldest continuous civilisation on earth, has survived 4,000 years' history with a rich cultural heritage, and since 2010 has re-emerged as the second largest economy in the world. However, the perception of Chinese civilisation in the rest of the world has shifted from admiration in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when ancient China was introduced to the West as the model of a secular and humane civilisation by Matteo Ricci (1610),[1] Gottfried Leibniz (1697),[2] Charles de Montesquieu (1748)[3] and Voltaire (1756),[4] to one of growing contempt in the nineteenth century, when China was defeated in the two Opium Wars (1839–1842 and 1856–1860) and the first Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). Since the time of this negative downturn until today, China's image has been misrepresented in many Western countries. The transformation brought by China's modern development seems to have only changed the colour code, from race to regime: from 'yellow peril' to 'red threat'.

If seen through theoretical lenses, we will be able to see two images of 'otherness' here. First, the dichotomy of East and West as cultural entities was dissected by Said's (1978) critique of Orientalism, in which the Orient was rendered as being the "inferior other" for the Occident to define its own superior identity; in a way, an Orientalist perception of the world is "the West and the Rest" (Hall, 1992: 185), with 'the West' at the centre and 'the Rest' as the inferior. In history, although China had mostly been held as a civilised Confucian utopia until the eighteenth century, it became a rotten Oriental empire towards the end of the Qing Dynasty that had its cultural identity subject to 'otherness'.

Second, this historical legacy was carried on to modern times, when China's authoritarian regime evolved its image from being the 'cultural other' to being the 'ideological other'. Despite the moving of the dynamic hub of the world economy from the developed Western countries led by the USA and Europe to the developing Asian nations led by China and India, the traditional equation of the West with modernity and the Orient with the exotic past remains to be

challenged, and has continued to be a particular obstacle to the Chinese attempt at establishing its political identity. As long as China maintains that the values of its political system are fundamentally different from the leading Western countries, China is still considered as the 'other', if seen through the framework of hegemony and ideology constructed by Gramsci (1971). Moreover, in the discourse of nationalism proposed by Ozirimli (2005), China again falls into the camps of 'us' and 'them'. These polarised 'other' representations uphold each other, and become dual forces of Western domination over China's power of discourse when they come into play with the power and knowledge relations as defined by Foucault (1980). All these, to put it simply, mean that China, as a non-Caucasian, non-Western and non-democratic nation with the largest population and now the second largest economy, "has often been a 'problem' for the world and the world has often been a 'problem' for China" (Scott, 2007: 3). In addition, when American scholars Bellamy and Weinberg (2008) are discussing how to "restore America's image", they quoted the then French President Sarkozy saying:

> it's difficult when the country that is the most powerful, the most successful – that is, of necessity, the leader of our side – is one of the most unpopular countries in the world. It presents overwhelming problems for you and overwhelming problems for your allies.
>
> (cited in Bellamy and Weinberg, 2008: 55)

This image problem is probably even more overwhelming for China. So, the question is: What can China do about it? Among the multipronged efforts made, a state-led cultural diplomacy campaign was launched as part of China's 'Going Global' national strategy.

This book tries to put China's cultural diplomacy endeavours in the context of change that springs from historical, internal and external dimensions, which have all left profound marks on it. While inspired and stimulated by the growing literature in this field, a significant void has been identified in the existing scholarly research that this book attempts to fill. Challenging the adequacy and even appropriateness of using 'soft power' as the mainstream theoretical framework constitutes the point of departure. The book argues for an alternative analytical framework that goes beyond and beneath this Western-defined concept by constructing a three-dimensional model to decipher the multiple contexts China lies in. The analysis touches on Orientalism, Occidentalism, communism, nationalism, cultural hegemony and cultural pluralism, and shows how the development of China's cultural diplomacy is inextricably entangled with all these factors. To a considerable extent, its aim to regain China's great power status that is considered appropriate to its size (in population, geographical and economic terms) and historical heritage is what the China Dream has derived its ultimate motivation from.

The book also attempts to define the unique features of China's cultural diplomacy by putting it in multiple comparative frameworks: both in contrast with its

Western counterparts and in juxtaposition of different domestic programmes. It should be noted here that the word 'West' has different connotations: although the economic power shift is happening in a geographical domain, and there is also a geographical shift in terms of China studies inside the 'Western world', from Europe-centred study of traditional China (pre-1911) to USA-centred study of modern China (post-1911), 'the West' has often been used as a shorthand narrative for a political and cultural concept. It is "a historical, not a geographical construct" according to Hall, who has remarkably deconstructed the concept as "a tool to think with", "an ideology", "a system of representation" and "a standard or model of comparison" (Hall, 1992: 186). Of course, when East and West are compared, they may appear to be unified and homogeneous, essentially with one view about the other, however, it is fully appreciated that they are used as generalisations for an essentially non-generalisable identity as both the East and West are terms covering enormous historical, cultural and economic distinctions; they are only compared to make a point of the dialectic relationship in a system of global power relations.

To a large extent, Chinese scholars, Chinese state media and even government rhetoric have all helped perpetuate the East–West dichotomy in establishing a binary opposition between China and 'the West'. They used the term, or more recently, the 'Western hostile forces' (*xifang didui shili*), in a way as if it were a monolith entity with a concerted mind: the West wanted this, or the West did that. As Buruma and Margalit pointed out, "anti-Americanism plays a large role in hostile views of the West. Sometimes it even represents the West" (2005: 9). This will be discussed in the book as a manifestation of Chinese Occidentalism, which is revealed as a counter-discourse to Orientalism in modern China where "the image of modern West is used as a cultural and symbolic capital for different ideological agendas" (Chen, 2002: 12).

Another important annotation is needed for Orientalism, which "was the product of a particular moment in the history of European colonialism, and as a result changes and falters with the fate of imperialism" (Dabashi, 2015: 17). Indeed, the whole topography of domination and resistance is changing, the world structure has now shifted from being bipolar during the Cold War era to being unipolar after the collapse of the former USSR, and then to an emerging multi-polar world today. In this process, miraculous economic development has endowed China with a favourable shift of wealth and power. What is at stake today is not so much the "end of history" as once argued by Fukuyama's (1989), but the end of West-centrism. Many of the world's leading powers were negatively affected by the global financial crisis started in 2008, while China continued to achieve rapid growth and overtook the USA as the world's largest economy measured in PPP (Purchasing Power Parity) terms in 2014. The direction of moving to a world that no longer rests upon Western hegemony has generated a sense of crisis for those currently in the dominating positions, which in turn leads to the perception of the rising China as a 'threat'. Since Nixon (1967) believed "Red China [has become] Asia's most immediate threat" in his 1967 article, it has evolved into so many different versions, particularly after it became

topical in the early 1990s: seeing China as a military and economic threat (Roy, 1996; Broomfield, 2003), an ideological threat (Yee and Storey, 2002; Yang and Liu, 2012), a development model threat (Peerenboom, 2007), an environmental threat (Bingman, 2010), a spy threat (Newman, 2011), an energy consumption threat (Richardson, 2014) and an intellectual property rights threat (Roper, 2014). The recently coined term of "sharp power" (Walker and Ludwig, 2017) will be discussed in the book as a latest addition to this whole host of 'threat' vocabulary as a synonym of China's "soft power threat".

In Yee and Storey's book (2002: 0) *The China Threat: Perceptions, Myths and Reality*, the 'China Threat' was named as "one of the most significant debates in international relations since the end of the Cold War". Two actual debates were staged on the Munk Debates, Canada's premier international debate series on major policy issues: one was held in 2011 on "China's Rise – Does the 21st Century Belong to China?",[5] and a more recent one was held in May 2019 on "Is China a Threat to the Liberal International Order?". The winners of the first debate were Henry Kissinger and Fareed Zakaria who argued against "China emerges as totally dominant" as it seems to be "ideologically and operationally ill prepared for it",[6] gaining 22 per cent more audience votes from 40 per cent 'con' pre-debate to 62 per cent 'con' post-debate. The winners of the second debate only won over audiences votes by a small margin of 2 per cent, from 24 per cent 'con' pre-debate to 26 per cent 'con' post-debate, which means that the majority (74 per cent) of the 3,000 audience still believe China *is* a threat to the liberal international order.[7]

The Chinese reaction to these 'threat' discourses is "confused and annoyed, if not outraged", "for the average Chinese feels that the West wants to 'demonise' China, while Chinese leaders interpret the China threat as a threat *to* China" (Yee and Feng, 2002: 33). Lampton has rightly observed that "as China's power has grown, it has wanted to make itself more charming, more effective, to limit counter-reactions" (2008: 27). However, government rebuttals seem to have "failed to reassure regional and global actors" (Goldstein, 2005: 115), even to the extent of being counterproductive as such texts "vigorously reproduce the dangers of the very threat they seek to deny" (Callahan, 2005: 712). Therefore, launching a campaign of cultural diplomacy is believed to be a "strategic communication" that would help China to "get the right message to the right audience through the right medium at the right time" (Anderson and Engstrom, 2009: 36).

In May 2006, *People's Daily* and *China Daily* published an editorial one after the other, titled respectively "China Promotes its Culture Overseas to Dissolve China Threat"[8] and "China Threat Fear Countered by Culture".[9] This shows both an internal and external dimension: internally, China needs to construct a coherent view of its national identity at home that is commensurate with its people's expectation of China's rightful place in the wider world; externally, China wishes to communicate with the world the message of Confucius's belief in 'harmony in diversity', and to re-establish its significance as a major power and culture in today's world, which is marked with economic globalisation, political multi-polarisation and cultural diversification. Guo has summarised this as:

> the international interest in, and recognition of, China's role in the global economy and international politics appear to coincide with a Chinese government's rethink of the image of China as a world power in tune with its reputation as an ancient civilisation.
>
> (Guo, 2004: 30)

In a way, China's cultural diplomacy wishes to challenge the equation of globalisation with Westernisation, while serving the dual aims of countering the China threat argument and advocating cultural pluralism at the same time, corresponding to the aforementioned two images of 'otherness'.

Drawing on empirical materials and perspectives through a number of interrelated frames, this book develops and applies an alternative framework of analysis to examine some of the key programmes of China's cultural diplomacy. Since the Confucius Institute (CI) represents a flagship project, multiple comparative case studies are carried out against its different counterparts: first, between its various host locations overseas across different cultural boundaries with China; then in contrast to other Western global programmes such as the Goethe Institute and the British Council. It is also juxtaposed with other state-sponsored Chinese organisations such as the China Cultural Centre (CCC) affiliated to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MOCT), and non-state-organised programmes such as Journey to the East, a student collaboration programme between partner universities in China and the UK. Engaging in multiple comparative case studies represents an attempt at "polyhedron of intelligibility" recommended by Foucault (2003: 249) when there is a multiplicity of force relations to reckon with, as one can only really understand something by looking at it from different directions and using different methods. This way allows a more rounded and more balanced picture of the subject to be developed. Substantial primary and secondary data have been collected and analysed, including 40 interviews carried out over a time-span of six years, and a multitude of source materials in both original Chinese and English, including government documents, academic publications, media reports, as well as internal reports and copies of agreements.

What is in a title?

History is always the preface to the current chapter being written. If we look back at the first two generations of Chinese leaders since the Communist Party came to power in 1949, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, we can see the former paid more attention to military and ideological power, while the latter placed more emphasis on economic power. Although China has practised cultural diplomacy for many decades, from the famous Ping-Pong Diplomacy in the early 1970s to Panda Diplomacy in the 1980s, it is fair to argue that the practice has been relatively sporadic until it appeared on the agenda of the third-generation leaders as a means to serve a new end. China has mainly been an exporter of manufactured goods and an importer of cultural goods since its opening up in

the late 1970s. Segal's article (1999) argued that China has had such limited cultural outreach not only compared to the 'dominant West' but also in comparison to Japan, that during the first twenty years of opening up, the Chinese government has had to spent more efforts in resisting and controlling the domestic impact of external cultural influences than in attempting to create any specific external influence of its own. It was until quite recently that China is observed to have begun systematically promoting Chinese culture abroad for "pride, influence and revenue" (Lampton, 2008: 140). Though it is a new mission, the way it is handled at the government level is still heavily influenced by the old practice.

'The Great Leap Forward' started by Mao Zedong in 1958 turned out to be such a calamity for the Chinese economy as well as for its traditional culture and values, that it was criticised as the "Great Leap Backward" (Bettelheim, 1978) in modern Chinese history. Six decades have passed since then and China has made great strides in social and economic changes, yet the imprint left by 'The Great Leap Forward', is so indelible and far-reaching that even today the state-run system that features concentrated state power, national investment and mobilisation is still in place: at the word of government command, national level support and resources are allocated in a campaigning style to create a sensational effect, and it is the number that is used as measurement to show the implementer's political achievements – from the Olympic medals to China's GDP growth. The CI as the flagship project of China's new cultural strategy is just another example. In 2006, Hanban Director Xu Lin confirmed in an interview that China aims to establish 1,000 CIs by 2020 (Xinhua, 2006), overtaking the Alliance Française, which was founded in 1883 and is as large as the British Council, Goethe-Institut and Instituto Cervantes combined. This target was announced with pride, as Hanban is confident of achieving it with both policy support and ample financial input from the 'above'. What Paris has managed to realise in 130 years will be achieved by Beijing in less than two decades. It is reminiscent of Mao's slogan of 'overtaking the UK in 15 years' in the 1950s – a slogan brimming with rising nationalism but which triggered the disastrous 'Great Leap Forward'.

However, by March 2013, there were only 400 CIs established worldwide, suggesting the 1,000 target was a bit out of reach; or by using a different calculation, if we include the Confucius Classrooms (CCs) that partners with local secondary schools or primary schools, then the 1,000 target has already been exceeded. Therefore, a new vision was announced to have "a global distribution in 500 major cities all over the world by 2020", according to Xu Lin in another interview with Xinhua (Xinhua, 2013), while specifying a new target of having 500 CIs and 1,000 CCs established worldwide by 2015. The statistics released by the Hanban website by December 2015 indicated there were indeed altogether exactly 500 CIs and 1,000 CCs in total worldwide. This perfectly rounded figure is a bit dubious and possibly artificial, particularly because it was announced back in March 2013. Cultural promotion cannot be planned out numerically like this and made sure the target has to be met. No wonder scholars

researching China's cultural diplomacy have commented on "the extent to which it attempts to overtly quantify its culture power" as a feature of China's approach to cultural diplomacy (Barr, 2015: 187).

As the term suggests, cultural diplomacy involves both a dimension of 'culture' and 'diplomacy', and this new strategy demonstrates changes in China on both fronts. Although Deng Xiaoping's open-door policy introduced in 1978 was acclaimed as the "Great Leap Outward" (Cheng, 1979), and has propelled China to global prominence in recent decades through its economic might, it was not fully applicable to the diplomatic front during his time when the strategy was "keeping a low profile". A generally more assertive stance on China's foreign policy in the post-Deng era has been observed and articulated by a number of scholars (Unger, 1996; Shambaugh, 2013), and in the Chinese discourse, it is now geared towards "striving for achievements" (Yan, 2014: 154), and Xi Jinping formally presented the latter as the new strategy in his speech at the foreign affairs conference in October 2013. This change of discourse mirrors the shifts in China's self-identity and foreign policies. However, in their new book titled *China's Great Leap Outward: Hard and Soft Dimensions of a Rising Power*, Scobell and Mantas (2014) only explored China's economic and military expansions, while Fallows' overview of China in 2016 was titled "China's Great Leap Backward" as a result of "darkening political climate", commenting that "the country has become repressive in a way that it has not been since the Cultural Revolution" (2016, n.p.).

At the government level, the cultural front was declared to be the third pillar of China's diplomacy after politics and economy in 2004, and Sun Jiazheng, the then Chinese Cultural Minister (1998–2013), pledged to reverse the "huge deficits in the trading of cultural products" (cited in Lai and Lu, 2012: 86). Since the induction of the national strategy of 'Going Global' (*zou chu qu*) in the tenth Five-Year-Plan (2001–2005), the cultural front quickly followed up with *The Implementing Regulations of the Going Global Strategy of Radio, Film and Television* published by the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television in the same year, 2001. A decade later, both the Ministry of Culture and the State Administration of Press and Publication have published their own twelfth Five-Year Plan (2011–2015) on implementing the 'Going Global' strategy (Zhu, 2012), ushering in the age of a 'Great Leap Outward'.

Some milestone events in the last decade or so have marked the fledgling activities of China's cultural diplomacy: from the debut of the 'Year of Chinese Culture' series in France, Italy, Russia and Australia in 2003, to the opening up of the CIs all across the globe since 2004; from launching twenty-four-hour cable news channels (CCTV News, CNC) and newspapers (*China Daily Asia Weekly* and *European Weekly*)[10] overseas in 2010, to staging the Chinese image advertisement in New York Times Square in 2011. The government rhetoric has also shown no ambiguity in its intention to improve China's image abroad: from Jiang Zemin's "Call for Further Propaganda Work to Enhance China's Image Abroad" back in 1999 (cited in Cull, 2009: n.p.), to Li Changchun's appeal to "augment the soft power of Chinese culture and further elevate our national

image"[11] in 2009 (cited in Lam, 2009: n.p.). Wang Chen, who currently heads the Communist Party's overseas propaganda division (*Zhonggong Zhongyang Duiwai Xuanchuan Bangongshi*), added that media and cultural units should enhance their "capacity to broadcast, to positively influence international public opinion and to establish a good image for our nation" (cited in Lam, 2009: n.p.).

After significant investments in various high-profile initiatives and projects, including establishing three national bases for international cultural trade, and the one in Beijing claims to be the 'largest in scale and most comprehensive in scope' in the world, the numbers released by the Chinese government seem to suggest early success: cultural products and services exports grew by 2.8 and 8.7 fold respectively from 2001 to 2010 (Zhu, 2012), and the CIs had expanded to 155 countries all over the world by the end of June 2019.[12] However, despite these impressive figures in input and output, the effects are less satisfactory so far if measured by the major poll results. The Chinese government was disappointed and baffled to find these numbers were not translated into the desired policy result of improving China's national image, which was reflected in a *People's Daily* editorial, asking "How Can We Make the World like Us?" It started with the question of "has China's ascending status brought the nation the admiration and the acceptance of other countries?", the discussion below shows the frustration that when "admiration" is expected, even "acceptance" was not achieved:

> While China continues to exert a more confident image, it is also meeting some resistance from the world, even from its old friends. From the snooty coverage by overseas media outlets to various polls of public perception in foreign countries, these suggest that China is facing a challenge to improve its image.
>
> (People's Daily, 2010)

Although no specifically causal relationship can be established between the decline of favourable values on China's image and the ineffectiveness of China's cultural diplomacy as the causes are complex and open to debate, these poll results at least indicate the challenges faced by it. Such polls include the BBC World Service Country Rating Poll, which saw the negative rating of China increase from 32 per cent when the Poll began in 2005 to 40 per cent in 2009 after the Beijing Olympics, and further up to 42 per cent in 2017.[13] The Gallup World Poll rates of 'very favourable' and 'mostly favourable' views towards China have also decreased from 18 per cent and 46 per cent respectively in 1979 when the poll began, to 8 per cent and 33 per cent respectively in 2019 (see Appendix 1: Gallup, 2019), despite the fact that China has been rated No. 1 since the 2008 Gallup World Poll on the question of "who do you think is the leading economic power in the world today?". Although there are some positive moves in Russia and Africa, these falls could perhaps be seen as a signal to Beijing that having the second largest GDP in the world may not automatically push up its

national image; instead, the quickly expanding GDP may have raised the volume of the China threat argument and reflected adversely in its image ranking.

There are also two surveys which particularly measure a state's soft power effects. One is the Pew Global Attitude Survey (PGAS), whose systematic and comprehensive data was cited by Joseph S. Nye (2004) to assess America's soft power; the result shows that favourable views of China's image have continued to tumble in the USA and the UK, going down from 50 per cent and 52 per cent in 2009, to 38 per cent and 49 per cent in 2018 respectively (see Appendix 2: Pew Global, 2018,). The other survey is a specific soft power ranking, The Soft Power 30, which was described as the "clearest picture of soft power to date" by Nye (cited in Soft Power 30, 2018: 12). The report provides detailed insights into a country's soft power resources and how they are leveraged by using political values, culture and foreign policy. China was rated at the bottom position of thirty in 2015 but climbed up to twenty-seven in 2018.[14]

These snapshots of opinion polls may provide a revealing picture of China's contemporary international image, but when these figures were cited to explain the mission of China's cultural diplomacy to reshape China's image, they were simply adopted as a benchmark without questioning the background of whom was constructing these polls. They are all organisations based in the USA or the UK: from leading consulting company like Gallup to the research centre at the University of Maryland that produces the BBC poll; from the Pew Research Centre as a non-partisan fact-tank based in Washington DC to Portland Communications, a political consultancy and public relations agency based in London that produces The Soft Power 30 report. Bhabha has argued that, "economic and political domination has a profound hegemonic influence on the information orders of the Western world, its popular media and its specialized institutions and academics" (1994: 19). As listed above, all the major polls were organised by Western institutions, which is a reflection of such "hegemonic influence". This means national image is much more about power and knowledge, and it is this perspective that is lacking in understanding China's image problem. I argue in this book, that this is actually the 'root cause' that must be treated; those poll results are no more than symptoms that cannot be relied on to form any effective diagnosis.

True, as Ramo argues, "in the end, what China thought about itself did not matter so much. What mattered was what the world thought of China" (2007: 12), but two questions must be asked: first, what determining factors are shaping the world's perception of China?; and second, when we talk about the *world's* perception, how much influence does *the Western world's*, in particular the *USA's*, perception of China have in shaping China's international image? With this in mind, Manzenreiter's research offered a more insightful and detailed reading of these statistics in pointing out that since the BBC rating samples include most OECD countries:

> It may come closer to represent the "West" than the Gallup World Poll. Most countries in Europe and North America tend to evaluate China's

> influence more negatively than the world average, which is outbalanced by more positive appreciation in Central America, Africa and Asia (with the exception of Japan, down from 22% to 8%).
>
> (Manzenreiter, 2010: 39)

This seems to be consistent with the more negative receptions the CIs have received in Europe and North America than in the rest of the world, since they were rolled out globally in 2004. A series of shockwaves have been sent from these two regions against this 'flagship' of China's cultural diplomacy: first, from the US State Department against visa renewals for CI teachers in May 2012 (Fischer, 2012); and then, to the dozens of CIs closed down between 2013–2019, all of which were located in Europe and North America, from France to Sweden, Germany to the Netherlands, and Canada to the USA. These incidents raised a series of questions that made the author ponder: when the closing down of the CI was interpreted as "heading for a 'soft power' *war* with the West" (Volodzko, 2015: n.p.), and the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games was considered to provide "a platform for an ideological *battle*, between the normative Western forces of a self-defined global consensus and a nation state claiming status as a leader of an alternative to that so-called consensus" (Finlay and Xin, 2010: 895), is cultural diplomacy really a non-menacing platform to showcase China's peaceful rise, or is it actually starting a new battlefield? Why China's similar efforts in promoting its culture were perceived and received differently to other Western countries and encountered unexpected controversies? If cultural diplomacy is a 'prescription' to treat China's image problem, what ingredients in this recipe could potentially generate side effects? And how can we improve the 'prescription' to make sure it not only treats the symptoms but also addresses the root cause?

After exploring answers to the above questions, this book also discusses which measurement will make this cultural 'leap outward' truly 'great', and how not to repeat the mistakes made by Mao's Great Leap Forward when the meaning of 'great' was translated into a blind pursuit of speed and scale rather than, or even at the cost of, effect and impact.

How this book is structured

This comprehensive study of China's cultural diplomacy is divided into six chapters. The first chapter sets out the theoretical premises for this book, arguing the necessity to look through multiple lenses of the historical, international and domestic contexts in which China is endeavouring to reshape its image. It approaches the subject by first discussing the limitations of the mainstream concept of 'soft power' in the current literature: this West-centric concept has not engaged with any historical analysis of the role of Orientalism and hegemony in shaping the current global cultural terrain, or with China's domestic dimension. Its binary view of cultures and values also defies the fundamental vision of cultural diplomacy, which is not a zero-sum game, but a positive sum game of nurturing mutual understanding and respect between cultures. Then, an

alternative and more sophisticated framework of analysis is proposed to look beyond and beneath the soft power narrative. The political and cultural face of Chinese nationalism is portrayed in detail to shed light on its double-edged role in both motivating and limiting China's cultural diplomacy. The new framework facilitates a broader and deeper understanding and allows one to see a more nuanced picture of China's cultural diplomacy than what is shown through a single lens of soft power.

Following the constructed alternative framework, Chapter 2 focuses on the debates about the vehicle and driver of China's cultural diplomacy. It starts with a theoretical discussion of the competing views internationally and in the Chinese context, and develops an argument that the vehicle of China's cultural diplomacy tries to project soft power on two wheels of culture and political values, to serve the purpose of reshaping China's image away from being the 'cultural other' and 'ideological other' respectively. However, the state-led approach to driving this vehicle is generating some side effects with its sponsorship, censorship and presence in the front seat. Then the chapter analyses the inherent tensions existing in practice both between the two sources of building soft power and between the two means of doing so, attraction and persuasion, with empirical evidence: first, through a comparative case study of the CI with the CCC; then through a comparative case study of the CIs in the USA, UK and South Korea. The finding shows that with the blurred boundary between culture and political values under the soft power framework, China's attempt at reshaping its image as an Eastern cultural contestant is often disrupted by its authoritarian political values, and China's cultural attraction is often reduced by its state-led persuasion.

Chapter 3 then contextualises the operations of the CIs by applying the alternative analytical framework in charting the global 'cultural terrain of struggle' in which China is 'othered' both culturally and ideologically. It develops an argument that the global cultural terrain is an uneven one both in terms of unbalanced powers with hidden barriers for the counter-hegemonic side, and also a hierarchical one affecting the interactions between various players. The complexity of the three-dimensional and conflict-ridden interplays is then epitomised by actual examples of CIs in the field, using both primary and secondary data as evidence to support the theoretical discussions. The process considers the following questions: how was the global cultural terrain constructed in history; what power dynamics underpin the formation and shifting of the terrain conditions; and how has the relationship among different actors been affected by the flow of people and ideas in the inter-cultural connections. Both theoretical reflections and empirical investigations are carried out to reveal the configurations underlying the global 'cultural terrain of struggle', and the challenges faced by the CIs by examining the actual dynamics and intricacies in the field among the multiple players and stakeholders.

Chapter 4 moves from the macro level to the micro level by giving a comprehensive analytical comparison between the CI and its Western counterparts, with a view to answering the question of why the CI with a similar goal is perceived

differently. It reveals a much deeper reading into the differences than what the existing studies have suggested, which has only focused on the CI's government connections and different operating models. The newly developed alternative framework is again employed to show that it is an oversimplification to only focus on the visible difference in *locations*, but does not challenge the Orientalist grounds where hidden difference in power *positions* in this uneven terrain lies at its very core. Apart from the primary data collected by the researcher's first-hand interviews and four copies of CI agreements, secondary data is also drawn on to drive the analysis from the micro level further down to the specific case of the Confucius Institute at the University of Chicago (CIUC), to investigate deeper into this most widely reported closure in the Western media so far.

Chapter 5 starts with discussions of the debatable term of 'sharp power', and then focuses on the role 'citizen diplomacy' can play in dissolving such perception via people-to-people interactions and access to first-hand knowledge and experience. A case study of a student collaboration programme initiated in 2014 between the UK and Chinese partner universities was carried out by combining quantitative and qualitative research methods with questionnaires and interviews. The data shows that autonomy from any political involvement and agenda is the greatest strength of non-government-initiated programmes, and the introduction of 'real China' through interacting with average citizens is very effective in improving participants' perception of China, even if they see all sorts of problems in its quickly evolving society. When Chinese government's political values often become a barrier to the full effects of its state-led cultural diplomacy, citizen exchange should play a bigger role as its most 'unauthoritarian' manner is often far more effective than official efforts.

Chapter 6 moves back to the macro level of the global cultural terrain by combining the cultural boundary theory with nationalism traits to contrast the terrain conditions in the East and West, and to avoid the risk of generalising the prominent features of China's cultural diplomacy. Then, the independent variable affecting the CI's effective operation is identified and contextualised, that is, the CI's ability to localise its product and process to suit different target audiences, along with a number of extraneous variables, including ideology, nationalism, the media environment in the destinations, bilateral relations and different cultural boundaries in between. People-to-people interaction is also an important mediator that contributes to facilitating mutual understanding. A diagram of various variables at play in this process is mapped out to demonstrate the unique challenges China faces in bridging the gaps both between its internal articulations and external communications, and between its own projected image and the world's perceived image of a more powerful China. It then builds on previous chapters to reach the four distinctive features of China's cultural diplomacy, and finishes with discussions of their implications on the practice of China's cultural diplomacy.

The conclusion summarises the research findings and reflects on the messages from the closed down Confucius Institutes. It also shares some final thoughts regarding the recent happenings between China and the USA, and the role

cultural diplomacy can play in keeping the looming Cold War at bay. It points to the fact that if a new Cold War is in the making, we can see not only the difference between today's China and yesterday's Soviet Union, but also the division within the Western camp. China's impact on and engagement with the rest of the world, across the East and West, North and South, along with Trump Administration's "America First" foreign policy that has alienated some of its traditional allies, have all prevented the formation of a unified 'camp' against China. However, it also highlights the interconnections between the domestic and international contexts for cultural diplomacy by comparing the different interpretations of the Chinese notion of '*tianxia*', its ancient view of the world, and the government's strategic narrative of 'harmony in diversity'.

I appreciate that a single book like this one cannot cover every aspect of China's multifaceted cultural encounter with the rest of the world, and the issues covered here are by no means dealt with exhaustively, just like the sentence I started with at the beginning: "I thought I've seen the whole picture, but no matter how high I stand and how many angles I've changed, I still cannot see it all." However, I do hope this study sketches out a portrait of China's cultural diplomacy showing its distinctive characteristics. It is a product of a continuous dialogue between myself as both an insider and outsider of Chinese culture, and between the source materials in both Chinese and English. As a native Chinese scholar educated in both China (two BA degrees) and the West (MBA and PhD in the UK), the author tries to use her vantage point to bring in the pluralistic perspectives, and hopefully, stimulate others to explore further the emerging efforts of China to engage with the world.

Notes

1 Nicolas Trigault, S.J. *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583–1610*. English translation by Louis J. Gallagher, S.J. (New York: Random House, 1953); *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhu Shiyi*), a book written by Matteo Ricci (1985 [1610]), which argues that Confucianism and Christianity are not opposed but are in fact remarkably similar in key respects.
2 The *Novissima Sinica* (*News from China*) was a collection of letters and reports from Leibniz's correspondents, with a Preface written by Leibniz himself, published in 1697 and 1699; Leibniz, "On the Civil Cult of Confucius", 1700/1701, in Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Writings on China*, translated by Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1994).
3 In the twenty-two books of Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des loix*, published in 1748, references to China appear frequently in the concluding chapters of books or at the end of sequences of arguments to show how the empire serves to illustrate Montesquieu's fundamental principles and to elucidate his method.
4 Voltaire's notable play, *The Orphan of China*, published in 1755, was based on a Chinese play, *The Orphan of Zhao*, which had been translated for European readers by the Jesuit missionaries. In other works, such as his monumental universal history, *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (*An Essay on Universal History: The Manners and Spirit of Nations*, 1756), Voltaire also showed his admiration for Chinese civilisation.
5 The debate was published in 2011: *Does the 21st Century Belong to China? The Munk Debate on China*, by House of Anansi Press, Toronto.

6 The Rise of China: Be it Resolved, the 21st Century will Belong to China.... Munk Debates, 17 June 2011, available at: www.munkdebates.com/The-Debates/The-Rise-of-China.
7 China: Is China a Threat to the Liberal International Order? Munk Debates, 9 May 2019, available at: www.munkdebates.com/The-Debates/China.
8 See China Promotes Culture Overseas to Dissolve "China Threat". *People's Daily*, 28 May 20106, available at: www.gov.cn/misc/2006–05/28/content_293566.htm.
9 See China Threat Fear Countered by Culture. *China Daily*, 29 May 2006, available at: www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006–05/29/content_602226.htm.
10 *China Daily USA* was launched in 2009; and *China Daily African Weekly* was launched in 2012.
11 Li Changchun was the Director of China's Central Commission for Guiding Cultural and Ethical Progress (*Zhongyang jingshen wenming jianshe zhidao weiyuanhui*) from 2002 to 2012, whose main mandate was controlling ideology and propaganda.
12 These are the figures, according to Hanban website: www.hanban.org/confucious institutes/node_10961.htm.
13 BBC World Service Country Rating Poll, 2017, available at: https://globescan.com/images/images/pressreleases/bbc2017_country_ratings/BBC2017_Country_Ratings_Poll.pdf.
14 Soft Power 30 (2018), A Global Ranking for Soft Power, The USC Center on Public Diplomacy, available at: https://softpower30.com/country/china/?country_years=2016, 2017, 2018.

References

Anderson, E. and J.G. Engstrom (2009). China's Use of Perception Management and Strategic Deception. Available at: http://origin.www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/ApprovedFINALSAICStrategicDeceptionPaperRevisedDraft06Nov2009.pdf.

Barr, M. (2015). Chinese Cultural Diplomacy: Old Wine in New Bottles? In David Kerr (ed.), *China's Many Dreams: Comparative Perspectives on China's Search for National Rejuvenation* (pp. 180–200). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bellamy, C. and A. Weinberg (2008). Educational and Cultural Exchanges to Restore America's Image. *Washington Quarterly*, 31(3): 55–68. Available at: www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1162/wash.2008.31.3.55.

Bettelheim, C. (1978). The Great Leap Backward: From China Since Mao. *Monthly Review Press*, 37–130.

Bhabha, H.K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Bingman, C. (2010). China's Environmental Crisis. *Journal of the Washington Institute of China Studies*, 4(4): 24–34.

Broomfield, E. (2003). Perceptions of Danger: The China Threat Theory. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 12(35): 265–284.

Buruma, I. and A. Margalit. (2005). *Occidentalism: A Short History of Anti-Westernism.* London: Atlantic Books.

Callahan, W. (2005). How to Understand China: The Dangers and Opportunities of Being a Rising Power. *Review of International Studies*, 31(4): 701–714.

Chen, X. (2002). *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China.* New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

Cheng, H. (1979). Great Leap Outward? Available at: https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/6458094.pdf.

China Daily (2006). 'China Threat' Fear Countered by Culture. *China Daily*, 29 May. Available at: www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006–05/29/content_602226.htm.

Cull, N. (2009). Testimony before the US–China Economic and Security Review Commission hearing: China's Propaganda and Influence Operations, its Intelligence Activities that Target the United States and its Resulting Impacts on US National Security. 30 April. Available at: www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/4.30.09Cull.pdf

Dabashi, H. (2015). *Can Non-Europeans Think?* London: Zed Books.

Fallows, J. (2016). China's Great Leap Backward. *The Atlantic*, December. Available at: www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/12/chinas-great-leap-backward/505817/.

Finlay, C. and X. Xin (2010). Public Diplomacy Games: A Comparative Study of American and Japanese Responses to the Interplay of Nationalism, Ideology and Chinese Soft Power Strategies Around the 2008 Beijing Olympics. *Sport in Society*, 13(5): 876–900.

Fischer, K. (2012). State Department Directive Could Disrupt Teaching Activities of Campus-Based Confucius Institutes. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 21 May. Available at: http://chronicle.com/article/State-Department-Directive/131934/.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge.* Brighton: Harvester.

Foucault, M. (2003). Questions of Method. In P. Rabinow and N. Rose (eds), *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault*, 1954–1984 (pp. 246–258). London: The New Press.

Fukuyama, F. (1989). The End of History? *The National Interest* (Summer): 3–18.

Goldstein, A. (2005). *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci.* Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey N. Smith (eds). New York: International Publications.

Guo, Y. (2004). *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China.* London: Routledge.

Hall, S. (1992). The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power. In Bram Gieben and Stuart Hall (eds), *The Formations of Modernity: Understanding Modern Societies: An Introduction, Book 1* (pp. 185–225). Cambridge: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers and The Open University.

Lai, H. and Y. Lu (eds) (2012). *China's Soft Power and International Relations*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Lam, W. (2009). Chinese State Media Goes Global: A Great Leap Outward for Chinese Soft Power? *China Brief*, 9(2): 22 January. Available at: www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34387&no_cache=1#.VZvXm_lViko.

Lampton, D.M. (2008). *The Three Faces of Chinese Power: Might, Money, and Minds.* London: University of California Press.

Leibniz, G.W. (1994 [1697]). On the Civil Cult of Confucius. In Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Writings on China*, translated by Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, Jr. Chicago, IL: Open Court.

Manzenreiter, W. (2010). The Beijing Games in the Western Imagination of China: The Weak Power of Soft Power. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 34(1): 29–48.

Montesquieu, C. de (1748). *De l'esprit des loix.* Geneva: Barrillot et fils.

Newman, A. (2011). China's Growing Spy Threat. *Diplomat*, 19 September. Available at: http://thediplomat.com/2011/09/chinas-growing-spy-threat/.

Nixon, R.M. (1967). Asia After Viet Nam. *Foreign Affairs*, October. Available at: www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1967–10–01/asia-after-viet-nam.

Nye, J.S. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Succeed in World Politics.* New York: Public Affairs.

Ozkirimli, U. (2005). *Contemporary Debates on Nationalism: A Critical Engagement.* New York: Palgrave.