



The Soft Power of China and the European Union in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative and Global Strategy

Paulo Afonso B. Duarte & Laura C. Ferreira-Pereira

To cite this article: Paulo Afonso B. Duarte & Laura C. Ferreira-Pereira (2022) The Soft Power of China and the European Union in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative and Global Strategy, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 30:4, 593-607, DOI: [10.1080/14782804.2021.1916740](https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2021.1916740)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2021.1916740>



Published online: 26 Apr 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1327



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)




Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

ARTICLE



The Soft Power of China and the European Union in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative and Global Strategy

Paulo Afonso B. Duarte and Laura C. Ferreira-Pereira 

Research Centre in Political Science (CICP), University of Minho, Braga, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Soft power has emerged as a topic of growing interest in Chinese foreign policy and its expression gained new salience when it was anchored within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This article proposes a comparative analysis of the soft power of China and the European Union (EU) in the context of the BRI and Global Strategy of June 2016. Drawing on the role theory, this study seeks to fill a gap in previous scholarly works, focusing on the soft power dynamics underlying the China–EU relationship, which do not incorporate the BRI as an increasingly influential soft power tool in Chinese foreign policy. It concludes that the BRI and Global Strategy have infused China’s and EU’s soft power, respectively, with innovating aspects; and despite the emergence of some common ground as a result of that, differences between the two actors regarding role conception, role expectation and role performance remain noticeable.

KEYWORDS

China; European Union; Soft Power; Belt and Road Initiative; Global Strategy; CFSP

1. Introduction

Given their growing engagement and role within the ever complex and contested global governance structures, the relationship between China and the European Union (EU) has attracted unprecedented academic attention in recent years. This has fostered a distinctive research agenda much taken by concerns over the evolution of these actors’ bilateral cooperation in various issues, ranging from security to human rights; and over the nature, functions and the development of the EU–China strategic partnership (Kirchner, Christiansen, and Dorussen 2016; Michalski and Pan 2017a; Song and Hall 2018). Moreover, while some works have underlined the structural changes and future prospects within China–EU relations (Maher 2016; Hongjian 2018), others have focused specifically on the impact of US–EU–China interactions on the reconfiguration of Sino–European relations (Sverdrup-Thygeson 2017). Some scholars have stressed the complementary order-shaping roles of the EU and China, and their respective visions of a desirable world order (d’Hooghe 2005; Chen 2016). The rise of China and the intensification of its influence in different regions of the world, particularly in Europe, have further prompted comparative works that sought to explain dichotomies in the EU’s and China’s conceptual and normative approaches, global governance perspectives and types of power (De Vergeron 2015; Wang and Song 2016).

Finally, available studies provide a comparative assessment of EU’s and China’s soft power (Chen and Song 2012; Michalski 2012; Michalski and Pan 2017a). Yet, these ones have overlooked the two latest global strategies adopted by the two actors: China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Global Strategy for the EU’s Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS). So, this article will contribute to the

literature by illuminating the novel developments that these foreign initiatives have brought to the Chinese and European soft power approaches. The analysis will draw on Nye's classic concept of soft power characterised by the ability of a given state to get other countries 'to want what it wants and of shaping others' preferences through persuasion rather than coercion' (Nye 1990, 166–167). The comparative exploration of soft power in China and the EU will be based on the understanding of soft power as a combination of cultural, economic and scientific dimensions. Hence, the examination of the principal means through which both actors have exerted soft power in diverse spheres, namely culture, education, science, development aid cooperation and promotion of multilateralism.

Soft power constitutes a longstanding feature of the EU's international relations and for many decades there has been an intense debate on the distinctive nature of the Union's soft power and its implementation (Duchêne 1972; Manners 2002; Ferreira-Pereira 2012; Kavalski 2013). Yet, an investigation focused on the Chinese soft power has only flourished in recent times (Gottwald and Duggan 2011; Gao 2015; Dugué-Nevers 2017; Chan and Song 2020). Incidentally, Beijing only officially adopted soft power as 'a political strategy' (Courmont 2015, 2) at the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party (CCP), held in October 2007. Since then, Chinese authorities have shown increasing interest in the promotion of soft power. As of 2013, the BRI was developed as a soft power tool to help China ensure the survival of its political regime and the reinforcement of its international influence.

While providing a comparative analysis of the evolution of China's and the EU's soft power, at the level of conceptualisation and implementation, this article aims at responding to the following research question: What are the most striking developments in China's and the EU's soft power against the background of the BRI and the EUGS? The timeframe spans from the beginning of the twenty-first century until December 2019, a period which allows one to analytically cover a six-year period after the launching of BRI (2013–2019). Previous studies have examined the Chinese contemporary foreign policy and the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CSFP) in compared perspective (Chen and Song 2012; Michalski and Pan 2017a). This analysis attempts to generate an added-value by examining China's and the EU's soft power against the backdrop of the BRI and the EUGS on the basis of a triadic criteria, featuring objectives, methods and resources, which draws upon the works of Chen and Song (2012) and Michalski (2012).

In the assessment of the temporally asymmetrical trajectories of Chinese and European soft power, such triadic criteria will be complemented by the role theory which claims that social systems, such as cultures, societies and groups, are structured on and guided by roles. The examination will underline the soft power role conception of each actor that leads to changes in role performance, in a process in which an actor continuously receives the inputs from external audiences and recalibrates its behaviour according to its own values and others' expectations. This further justifies the focus on the two latest comprehensive foreign policy initiatives, i.e. the BRI and EUGS. The BRI will be scrutinized as a tool of soft power that dwells upon the link between the Community of Common Destiny (CCD), the *Tianxia*, as well as the victimisation of the past, nostalgia and pragmatism (see below). On the other hand, the EUGS has brought with its interesting developments in the EU's soft power given the unprecedented priority and weight ascribed to public diplomacy, with young people being its main target. Whilst displaying a number of similarities, these foreign policy strategies evince convergences and dissonances between China's and the EU's soft power. Furthermore, the analysis will take into consideration the establishment of the (EU-China 2020) Strategic Agenda for Cooperation, designed to bolster the EU–China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of 2003 that places emphasis upon 'people-to-people exchanges', involving cultural and education cooperation, as well as youth mobility as a 'vector of peace' (15).

The appraisal of Chinese and European soft power will rely on a qualitative analysis of secondary (mostly scientific articles and book chapters) and primary sources. Among the latter, stand out EU's and China's official documents, survey data (e.g. Pew Research Center) and indicators provided by Soft Power 30 Index which combines 'objective data and international polling to offer what Professor Nye has described as the clearest picture of global soft power to date' (The Soft Power Report 2018, 13).

This article begins by providing the major connections between soft power, role theory and the Chinese and European global strategies. It then presents an overview of the emergence of the BRI and the EUGS, before giving a closer look at the evolution of China's and the EU's soft power against the backdrop of and in articulation with these two overarching foreign policy strategies. Finally, in the light of role theory based on the abovementioned triadic criteria, it comparatively assesses the conceptual and role-related gaps in soft power prevailing between the two actors. The conclusion underlines that the BRI and the EUGS have infused China's and EU's soft power, respectively, with innovating aspects; and differences in role conception, role expectation and role performance between the two actors remain noticeable, despite the existence of some common ground.

2. Connecting the dots: Soft power, role theory, and Chinese and European global strategies

There is a logical link and even a symbiotic relationship between the analytical propositions of the role theory and the soft power concept based. Both ascribe importance to perceptions – self and external perceptions – which operate as drivers of foreign policy making and adaptation; and both acknowledge the indispensable interaction between the self and the other. Indeed, an important implication springing from interdependence between role theory and soft power concept is that the self can only project its soft power if and when the other recognises it as being legitimate and is receptive to it. Contrary to hard power dynamic within which the self imposes its role on the other, in the soft power dynamics, the other is not a passive subject, but an active object in the acceptance process. In fact, the self's expectations and values may collide with or reject the other's attempt to exert influence (Fijałkowski 2011). So, soft power only works if a certain role or model generates identification and acceptance on the part of others.

To grasp the way in which soft power moulds perceptions, expectations and fosters adaptation, the role theory provides a befitting analytical framework encompassing 'role conceptions', 'role performance', 'role expectations' and 'role adaptation'. While role conception refers to 'an actor's perception of his or her position vis-à-vis others' (Harnisch, Frank, and Maull 2011, 8), role performance is 'the actual policy behaviour of the actor in [a] social context' (Ibid, 114). Role expectations are defined as the 'appropriate behaviour' that both a domestic and an external audience expect a certain actor to adopt. Finally, role adaptation refers to 'changes of strategies and instruments in performing a role' (Ibid, 10). According to Harnisch, Frank, and Maull (2011), all of these components are crucial within a process that characterises the search for an identity through a dialectic process self vs others. This translates itself into foreign policy by the fact that states 'will act on the basis of meanings grounded in the conceptions that they hold vis-à-vis themselves and other states' (Michalski and Pan 2017b, 613). As such, it is the role played by a given state based on identity(ies) and expectations about the self, whilst interacting in 'collective structures', which gives that state a certain position in the 'international social order' (Ibidem).

Such components of the role theory analytical framework will be examined by looking at three criteria – making up what we call the triadic criteria – which draw upon the works of Chen and Song (2012) and Michalski (2012). These are the objectives, methods and resources that reflect the identity change(s), as identity does not evolve by itself, in a vacuum: it is moulded by specific goals and interests of the self which, in turn, depend on the other's own goals and expectations. Objectives thus matter, but they cannot be achieved without a set of methods and resources. For the sake of this study, objectives will be examined considering China's and the EU's view of soft power, as an instrument deemed to help them to shape/reshape their identities. On the other hand, the methods and resources will be appraised in connection with strategies and means mobilised by China and the EU in order to achieve such objectives as to increase their international presence, develop an external image of responsible powers and promote a multipolar order. Incidentally, these objectives seem to be common to China and the EU; and, despite the differences also examined in this study, both actors share similar views on the role of soft power to achieve them.

Nye's concept of soft power has expanded beyond its original scope to encompass economic methods and resources, namely an overseas assistance programme (Nye 1990; Fijałkowski 2011). At the same time, the former enables the scrutiny of soft power exercise by both democratic and non-democratic states. For these reasons, the triadic criteria adopted in this study presents itself as instrumental to underpin, not only the commonalities, but also the divergences in EU's and China's exploration of soft power towards spreading global status and influence, as reflected in the BRI and the EUGS. These are the latest global strategies launched by China and the EU, which will enable to capture each actor's idiosyncrasies; and therefore they seem most appropriate to compare critically both actor's goals, methods and resources that typify their soft power approaches.

Overall, the EUGS reinforced the Union's soft power toolbox within the realm of the CFSP, which came to comprise several important elements such as engagement with civil society and people-to-people contacts through education and research. Taken together, these elements aim at increasing the credibility of a Union whose foundations have been considerably shaken by successive crises since 2008 (see below), and this makes the EUGS a topical tool to assess the EU's performance on soft power. As for the BRI, considered the hallmark of Xi Jinping's foreign policy, it has been devised as a holistic tool to ensure the country's stability, whilst creating an external environment more favourable for China's reemergence. By invoking the virtues of the Confucianist thoughts, it represents a 'soft' attempt to dissipate Sinophobia worldwide and promote a multilateralism with Chinese characteristics (see below).

3. The Belt and Road Initiative and the European Union's global strategy: an overview

The BRI and the EUGS are foreign policy initiatives of global nature that resulted from the re-assessment of both actors' positioning in a rapidly changing international arena. They were designed to overhaul both China's and EU's international relations, whilst upgrading their relations with major powers and key-regions in the world. By means of the two strategic documents, China and the EU advocate multilateralism as a tool to address transnational challenges; and exhibit their endorsement of 'win-win' solution to foster collective security and durable peace. They also acknowledge the merits of comprehensive or joined-up (as the EU calls it) approaches founded in an interplay of policy or a mix of actions to address non-traditional security threats and to foster mutual understanding and trust in world affairs.

The BRI has deep historical roots that can be found in the ancient Silk Road. The latter evokes China's key-role in world trade and its 'good old times' in terms of economic superiority. The conception of Silk Road re-emerged in a speech delivered by President Xi Jinping in Astana, in September 2013. Here, he proposed the creation of an overland Silk Road economic belt stretching from China to Europe; and one month later, in Indonesia, he announced a twenty-first century maritime Silk Road (Xinhua 2015). Like the ancient Silk Road, the BRI aims to bring China back to the centre of the world (Duarte and Xing 2018). At the same time, it is informed by an open-door policy as underlined by the action plan released by China's National Development and Reform Commission: 'it is open to all countries, and international and regional organizations for engagement [...] mutual learning and mutual benefit' (2015, 3–4).

At the time the BRI was launched, the EU was still struggling to overcome the consequences of the 2008 economic crisis that have undermined its external image as a community of prosperity and solidarity. The June 2016 referendum on the UK's membership of the EU was held against the background of growing populism, uncontrolled migration and transnational terrorism; and the Brexit process exacerbated widespread uncertainty in the European landscape. Deep tensions with Russia in the context of the Ukrainian crisis (caused by Crimea's annexation), the war in Syria and Chinese ambitions embodied in the BRI called for a pragmatic geopolitical repositioning of the EU's in the world. From this follows that an identity crisis is embedded in the EUGS, launched in June 2016, by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRVP), Federica

Mogherini. As a response to such crisis, the new strategic document has identified contemporary challenges to European security and set up priorities for the CFSP from conflict prevention to public diplomacy¹. Within the framework of the latter, the EU intends to extend its soft power capacity by streamlining public diplomacy across external action, as well as by integrating culture in international relations and youth programmes (e.g. Erasmus+ programme) in its collaborative or joined-up approach to foreign policy (European External Action Service 2017, 11 & 25).

Although both the BRI and the EUGS have yet to prove whether they will be able to rise to the occasion in terms of meeting the role expectations of both domestic and international audiences, it is timely to ascertain the EU's and China's soft power dynamics against their backdrop.

4. Soft power in Chinese foreign policy

The decline of the US international image after its invasion of Iraq has raised awareness among Chinese leaders about the importance of developing a soft power strategy (Chen and Song 2012). Yet, it was only after 2007 that the development of soft power has gained a prominent place in China's foreign policy (Chen and Song 2012; Courmont 2015). By then, soft power was formally adopted as part of the country's external strategy at the 17th National Congress of the CCP; and the former President Hu Jintao officially called for a renewal of socialist cultural initiatives, by making culture an important part of Chinese soft power. The ambition to make China a 'superpower of culture' (Dugué-Nevers 2017, 95) should be seen in this light.

As Michalski underlines (Michalski 2012, 67–68), China's conception of soft power places 'strong emphasis on history, culture and socio-economic development'. As such, it transcends the Nye's original concept since it 'emphasizes the ability of the state actor to promote China's attractiveness on the international scene, as well as to persuade foreign interlocutors [...] of solutions and proposals in China's interest, thereby influencing the agenda of international relations' (Ibidem). According to Chinese academics, China's soft power seems to encompass virtually everything from ideology, culture to economics – all aspects, except military coercive measures pertaining to hard power (Li 2008; Gao 2015).

The *Tianxia* (meaning 'all under heaven') is a fundamental concept in the definition of China's soft power and the recalibration of the Chinese role conception vis-à-vis domestic and international expectations. This concept derives from the Zhou Dynasty and has accompanied Chinese politicians ever since, being at 'the core of the Chinese traditional concept of political order' (Godehardt 2016, 12). The *Tianxia* system assumes that there are no boundaries, but rather a universal and moral order ruled by an emperor who governs under divine mandate. This role conception of ancient China, based on a hierarchical relationship between the centre (i.e. Emperor) and the periphery (i.e. tributary states), has been recently revisited by the Chinese political elite in search for an alternative to the markedly Western vision conditioning contemporary international relations (Edney 2015). Xi Jinping is not an emperor whose mandate is assigned by heaven, albeit in the domestic sphere he concentrates all power in himself since Mao Tse-tung; and abroad he is one of the most influential world leaders. Concrete evidence of the *Tianxia* and its omnipresent ruler can be found domestically in the implementation of the Orwellian society that carefully watches and even punctuates each citizen's behaviour (through the so-called Social Credit System²). Moreover, under Xi Jinping's leadership China is exporting critical technology as that provided by Huawei, which is highly controversial³ for allegedly sharing customers' data with Chinese intelligentsia.

The *Tianxia* system emerges as a holistic whole, combining geographical, psychological and institutional dimensions, within which order prevails over freedom, ethics takes precedence over the law and the elites' vision supplants democracy. There are similar traits between *Tianxia* and the soft power underlying the CCD envisaged by the BRI. Both share a holistic ideal, according to which the world will be better governed if differences between states and individuals are sublimated to the benefit of all. In practice, *Tianxia* and CCD call for a readjustment between role conception and expectations, to the extent that 'Chinese political elites feel a keen sense of obligation to restore the

country's past great-power status and show its people that China is globally respected and admired' (Edney 2015, 262). This recalibration of role-perception and expectations has allowed for the redefinition of China's role in the world, based on an interplay between the old teachings of Confucius, 'the historical legacies' (Michalski and Pan 2017b, 617), the *Tianxia* system and a classic realist understanding of international relations.

Therefore, what surfaces in China's soft power is an apparently contradictory and complex combination of Confucian values, assertiveness, pragmatism, and nationalism nurtured not only by a historical experience of humiliation⁴ inflicted on China by the West, but also by the urgency to protect the national interest (Kirchner, Christiansen, and Dorussen 2016). All these key-concepts that have been helping to re-define China's role in the world politics reverberates in the BRI which, as some observed, is 'more than a sophisticated marketing strategy that speaks to domestic audiences and fosters Chinese soft power abroad' (Mayer 2018, 1217).

According to Chinese political elites, soft power has become 'a crucial strategy for China to cultivate a benign international environment for its continued growth' (Gao 2015, 7–8), thereby enabling the CCP to meet the domestic and external role expectations. At the domestic level, Chinese people expected the CCP to improve economic development and living standards, as well as fight against corruption. Externally speaking, role expectations linked to international community's calls for a more responsible China. The President himself recognised the soft power's potential when affirming that: 'We should increase China's soft power, give a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China's message to the world' (Cit. by Xinhuanet 2014, para.4). Furthermore, there is the assumption that soft power is a constitutive aspect of a 'state's international status and influence', and a 'tool for maintaining advantageous positions in international competition' (Shambaugh 2015, 22). Interestingly, as the next section will highlight, the connection between the projection of soft power and the pursuit of a distinctive status in the international arena has been, for a long time, close to the heart of the EU.

5. Soft power in the European Union's foreign and security policy

Overall, it is consensual that one of the EU's foreign policy specialties has been soft power; and this emanates largely from the European culture, cultural exchanges and its commitment to principles, such as human rights and education (Manners 2002; Moravcsik 2017). But there is a profusion of manifestations of EU's soft power and the scientific domain has also gained relevance as part of the so-called science diplomacy. In the 2014–2020 cycle of funding, science diplomacy became an important dimension within Horizon 2020. In June 2015, the European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, Carlos Moedas, highlighted that 'science diplomacy presents a matchless opportunity to address the political, demographic and environmental challenges of the age through the universal language and expression of scientific endeavour'. He also emphasised that 'the EU approach to diplomacy must use the elevated language of science for its remarkable uniting power [...] use our soft power to benefit research, science and innovation ...' (Moedas 2015, 2 & 4).

Education, research and science have been concrete aspects of EU's public diplomacy and, as such, real manifestations of the European soft power. As elucidated by Ferreira-Pereira and Pinto (2021), considering the growing role played by the Erasmus Programme as a foreign policy tool, higher education has developed as soft power means employed by the EU to boost cooperation and achieve higher order foreign policy goals in its relations with partner countries like Brazil and Russia. The success of Erasmus+, the EU's programme for education, training, youth and sport for the period 2014–2020,⁵ have opened space to further explore the effective use of a public dimension in diplomacy, an approach the EU had shied away until recent years. This programme, which became a symbol of tangible benefits of European integration, has been used by the European External Action Service (EEAS) to communicate with and through external audiences.

Although recognising that 'soft power is not enough' for an EU 'under threat' (European External Action Service 2016, 13 & 44), the Global Strategy has asserted that the organisation

'has always prided itself on its soft power' and is 'the best in this field' (Ibid, 4). The fact that it has enshrined the aim of promoting 'people-to-people' contacts paved the way for the consolidation of soft power tools within the CFSP. This is in line with the novel priority that both the EUGS and its annual implementation reports have given to public diplomacy. They have stressed the necessity of investing in and joining up public diplomacy across different fields, in order to connect European foreign policy with citizens and better communicate the Union to its partners. Prioritisation of public diplomacy was deemed necessary to develop a 'joined-up Union: the idea that the full potential for EU foreign policy can only be realised if the Union works jointly across policy sectors, institutions and Member States' (European External Action Service 2017, 25). The goal of deepening the 'joined-up Union' was based on the assumption that it was 'essential not only to communicate the added-value of the EU's action, but also to open new channels for European and non-European citizens to engage with EU policymaking' (Ibid, 30). Equally important, through public diplomacy, the EU intended 'to build trust and mutual understanding worldwide' (European External Action Service 2018, 16).

6. Soft power in China and the European Union in comparative perspective

This section provides a comparison between Chinese and the European soft power against the backdrop of the BRI and the EUGS, considering the selected triadic criteria, namely the objectives, methods and resources. As referred earlier, this examination will be made through the lenses of the role theory, whose conceptual tools enable to better seize how China and the EU have conceived and performed their soft power roles; and how this has been influenced by what others expect them to act like, thereby leading them to a role adaptation.

6.1 Objectives

As this section will demonstrate, despite China's and the EU's soft power against the backdrop of the BRI and the EUGS has been put at service of achieving some similar objectives, such as to increase their global presence, project a responsible and peace-oriented external image and foster a stable multilateral and multipolar order, differences in various aspects remain noticeable. As mentioned earlier, the EUGS and the BRI were forged with a clear ambition to help to steer the course of China's and the EU's foreign policies towards endowing the two actors with a more influential role in reshaping the international order in times of transition. In this process, soft power became associated with concrete endeavours to support the two actors by enhancing widespread visibility, respectability and credibility of their roles on the global stage.

In the case of the EU, given the identity crisis that had crystallised in the sequence of an unprecedented succession of crisis, whose corollary was the Brexit process, the EUGS, as some observed, boiled down to an 'identity-building exercise' whose main task is 'to narrate the nature and boundaries of the self' (Pishchikova and Piras 2017, 109). It 'reflects a vulnerable self facing an identity crisis that needs to rebuild its legitimacy with its citizens and its credibility around the world' (Ibid, 117). Hence, the re-appraisal of the EU's self-conception as an international actor in the CFSP remit. Symptomatic of this, the EUGS puts forward that: '[...] the idea that Europe is an exclusively civilian power does not do justice to an evolving reality [...]. For Europe, soft and hard power go hand in hand' (European Union Global Strategy 2016, 4). The document also provides evidence that role expectations constitute an important part in reassessing the fundamentals of the EU's international soft power role, when underlining that 'partners expect the European Union to play a major role, including as a global security provider' (European Union Global Strategy 2016,3). Thus, while continuing to highlight its comparative advantage in soft power vis-à-vis other key international actors, the new strategic document has recognised that soft power needs to be complemented by hard power to enable the EU to adapt its role performance to secure the credibility and respectability on the global stage.

EU's soft power has been used to foster a multilateral order based on mutual respect of different perspectives and approaches (Chen and Song 2012; European Union Global Strategy 2016). In the EUGS, while underlining that 'This is no time for [...] lone warriors', the EU reinforces its commitment to the promotion of 'a rules-based global order with multilateralism as its key principle and the United Nations at its core' (European Union Global Strategy 2016, 4–8). In seeking to adapt its role performance to better foster a global multilateral order, the EU has been expanding and deepening its strategic partnerships with pivotal powers, notably China; and in so doing it has been forging a differentiated international identity (Song and Hall 2018).

The BRI emphasizes the promotion of prosperity, peace and progress that China is willing to share with the rest of the world. China's new international role conception as a responsible stakeholder unfolded by the BRI can be seen as a 'decisive strategic manoeuvre for China to ensure security and promote power status in the international order, moving from a rule-taker to rule-maker' (Zhou and Esteban 2018, 487). Interestingly, while the EU's use of multilateralism projects its role conception as an international 'force of the good' (Henökl and Reiterer 2015, 15) and responsible stakeholder, the BRI looks for something more, as shown by the creation of Chinese-led institutions (e.g. the AIIB below). This multilateralism with Chinese characteristics leads Buzan to call China a 'reformist revisionist', which 'accepts some of the institutions of international society', although it 'resists, and wants to reform, others', especially when they no longer reflect the current world order (Buzan 2010, 18).

While the EU has projected its soft power with the aim of diffusing European values and norms to the rest of the world, China has not directly sought this objective within its performance of soft power. Interestingly, China has already acknowledged that endeavours towards economic growth made so far under the BRI have not been accompanied by a greater adherence to China's culture by international audiences. As some have observed, 'foreigners are still sceptical about China's own values and ideas', as they tend to see governmental efforts as 'pure propaganda' (Chen 2015, para.1). Therefore, China's soft power has been mainly characterised by a reactive nature, whilst encompassing the goal of promoting an enhanced image of the country, the mitigation of the perception of China as a threat and the deterrence of Western cultural and political incursions in China (Michalski 2012). The Chinese government has realised that the country's role performance and role conception needed to be adapted to the external expectations, therefore changing the way China presents itself to the world. Such adaptation has been made through the BRI, which rests on a narrative that the government has forged for both internal and external consumption. This narrative aims at assuaging the international community's fears regarding China's real intentions underlying the BRI (Duarte and Xing 2018).

In adjusting its role conception domestically and abroad, the 'spiritual socialist civilization' inherent to the BRI may not necessarily be altruist given that, in parallel to the win-win narrative of Chinese soft power, there is an attempt to rewrite History, the Chinese way (Duarte and Leandro 2020). Indeed, there is a certain revisionism-oriented goal in the BRI as it emerges as a soft tool designed to counter the Western-led international relations and build an international system alternative to the Westphalian order (Dreyer 2015). Hence, the BRI has been used as a tool to build a Chinese-centred order based on *Pax Sinica* (Duarte and Xing 2018).

Finally, when it comes to fight what Xi Jinping believes to be the harm effects of a Western-led globalisation, a new identity is deemed necessary (Brown and Bērziņa-Čerenkova 2018). Here, the BRI emerges as a privileged instrument to reintroduce the Confucianist 'soft' virtues – a precious gift from millennial China – in the ordinary citizen. Despite all win-win rhetoric underlying the BRI, the self is seen as the good in opposition to the other, who is the source of disorder (Chan and Song 2020). This dialectic self vs other is at the very core of China's identity recalibration. This is crucial in terms of role conception and role expectation dynamics, because without moulding identities and perceptions domestically and abroad, Xi Jinping believes that Western-led globalisation will continue to undermine China's Confucianist virtues and its re-emergence (Dreyer 2015; Lams 2018).

When comparing the objectives of China's and the EU soft power, a fundamental difference is that 'China's soft power strategy is intended to make its hard power look less threatening to its neighbours', and 'to reduce the effectiveness of regional coalitions that attempt to balance against China' (Edney 2015,

261). There is not such a goal underlying the projection of soft power in the case of the EU. Another interesting difference is that the BRI has evolved as Xi Jinping's tool to implement soft power by means of a top-down approach. That is, Chinese soft power, contrary to the EU's soft power, is centralised in the government which previously validates what the official media, Confucius Institutes and universities should or not disseminate. Xi Jinping has thus been actively promoting a 'discourse power' based on the assumption that discourse matters in shaping internal and external audiences' perception towards China (Lams 2018, 394). To render the Chinese way of living appealing abroad – something the Chinese President believes to be achievable through 'telling China's story properly' (China Digital Times 2016, para.29) – he has adopted a rule-by-fear approach, censoring media for any negative episode which could damage China's image (China Digital Times 2016). On the contrary, the EU tends to adopt a bottom-up approach to soft power, as this springs from civil society (and its various organisations on the ground), and from a plethora of people-to-people contacts – two concrete elements that resonate with the aims of EUGS.

China's soft power still lacks the internationally acknowledged attractiveness inherent to the 'European model' composed of ideas, institutions, principles and values, which have been a determinant of the EU's global influence (Ferreira-Pereira 2012). According to the Soft Power 30 Index of 2019, China occupies the 27th position, while the EU is at the forefront, with France ranking first, followed by UK and Germany. Yet, as the following subsection will outline, more or less emulating on the 'European model' in some policy areas, China has been introducing adjustments in its soft power realm in terms of methods and resources with the achievement of the BRI's core ambitions in view.

6.2. *Methods and resources*

The adaptation of China's historical role conception as a leading developing country to that of a responsible stakeholder in global affairs, as advocated by the BRI (Gottwald and Duggan 2011), has led China to build up a soft power strategy whose methods comprise diplomacy and a more active role in the multiplication of multilateral *fora* and within regional organisations. Historically speaking, the EU has stood out as a prime example of building influence through the promotion of multilateral cooperation structures and regional integration processes. It has further wielded soft power by using diverse structural foreign policy tools. Examples include not only the EU's enlargement policy, the neighbourhood policy and the development policy, but also the Asia-Europe Meeting, created in 1996. More recently, the EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy, adopted in 2015 as a response to the BRI, stresses principles and values cherished by the EU, notably good governance, ownership, sustainability and transparency (European Commission 2019).

Furthermore, as referred earlier, the EU has been promoting soft power through education and science for decades now. Data from World University Rankings 2019 indicate that three of the top 10 universities in the world are located in the EU. Thus, being internationally recognised as a major actor in the educational domain, further explains the absence of gaps between role conception and external expectations regarding this EU's role. The Union's science diplomacy (European Commission 2017) has been complemented by 'the diplomacy of education and research exchange' that has been bolstered within the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation. The 'diplomacy of education and research' includes 'Erasmus and Erasmus Mundus, the Framework Programmes of Science and Technology, the Marie Curie Fellowships, the EU Centres of Excellence and Jean Monnet chairs' (Michalski 2012, 72). Through educational programmes such as Erasmus+ or research projects financed by Horizon 2020, the EEAS has managed to extend the EU's soft power capacity by building on the positive experiences of the individual users of these programmes. This is an effective use of a public dimension in diplomacy, an approach that, as mentioned earlier, the EU has prioritised in the implementation of the EUGS.

China is a latecomer when it comes to projecting soft power at the educational and cultural levels. Only recently, due to the awareness that advances in economy have not resulted in an improved

external perception of the country in fields of education and science, have Chinese leaders introduced adjustments in the country's role performance. A concrete evidence of this relates to the role played by the China Scholarship Council, which, since 2010, 'has offered some 20,000 scholarships to foreign students' (Shambaugh 2015). Moreover, Chinese ministries have offered a variety of short courses for diplomats and military officers originating from developing countries. Besides tangible skills, these courses have attempted to win hearts and minds like the Erasmus programme. Within the latter, as a result of joint efforts between the EEAS and other Directorate Generals of the European Commission, 'participants are most likely to become EU informal ambassadors [...], carriers of EU soft power leading to changes in cultural and social perceptions' (Perilli 2017, 1).

It is interesting to note that starting from a modest number of foreign students in the early 2000s, China's international enrolment has continuously grown, which made the country the third-largest global study destination (ICEF Monitor 2016). Moreover, many observers have begun to appreciate Asia as a so-called third pole in a global higher education landscape, that has been traditionally dominated by the US and Europe. Data from World University Rankings 2019 (para.6) refer to Tsinghua University as the top university in Asia, 'becoming the first Chinese institution to lead the continent under the current methodology (since 2011)'. While some major EU's member states stand out in the promotion of their language and culture through the expansion of institutes (i.e. *Alliance Française* and the British Council), China has endeavoured to step up its own cultural and language promotion initiatives, as a response to the Western/European strategy. Aware that ancient culture is the country's biggest soft power asset, Chinese policymakers have used the popularity of national culture, including Chinese cuisine and acupuncture, to foster international relations and tourism. Another aspect worth noting is the relevance of football as a Chinese soft power tool in the framework of the BRI (Tan et al. 2016). Xi Jinping has already signalled his ambition of turning China 'from a major sports country to a world sports power', through 'participating in the World Cup, hosting the World Cup, and being the World Cup champions' (Ibid. 1449–1450).

China's soft power has disseminated a win-win logic that matches interests imbued with realist contours (Buzan 2010). Whilst perceiving Western resistances to the manifestation(s) of its role conception as the Middle Kingdom, China has responded with a soft power method that we can call method of institutional capacity building: it entails the creation of new institutions and the invitation for Western countries to become members. The creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which has attracted several EU's member states, is a paradigmatic example of this (Xiao 2016). Another illustrative example is the cooperation format called 16 + 1 (renamed 17 + 1 in 2019, after the accession of Greece) that China established in 2011 with Central and Eastern European countries and has become a privileged multilateral forum used by Beijing to promote BRI-related interests.

These initiatives reflect China's commitment to multilateralism underlying the BRI. Yet the country is a latecomer regarding involvement in multilateral structures; and this is a relevant difference between China and the EU, with implications on the two actors' modes of exercising soft power. While since its inception, the EU has stood out as a 'champion of multilateralism' (Michalski and Pan 2017b, 617), China has historically privileged bilateralism, with its participation in the United Nations (including the UN different institutions) being the exception to the rule (Wuthnow, Li, and Qi 2012).

Chinese understanding of multilateralism was conveyed by Xi Jinping at Davos (25 January 2021), when he affirmed that: '[M]ultilateralism is about having international affairs addressed through consultation; [...] rejecting an outdated Cold War mentality, [as] isolation or estrangement will only push the world into division' (in China Today 2021, para.1–4). Along these lines, as observed by Zhang, Chinese leadership has seen multilateralism, including that cultivated by the EU, as an international working method to curb US international influence and promote a more multipolar world increasingly in line with its national strategic interests (Zhang 2012, 181). Nevertheless, Beijing has never embraced multilateralism unreservedly. For example, any discussion within multilateral institutions regarding China's alleged sovereignty over most of South China Sea is considered

unthinkable. And, overall, China tends to be more realist and multipolarity-oriented and less liberal and multilateralism-oriented' than the EU (Ibidem).

Development aid policy is another converging method through which China and the EU perform their soft power (European Union Global Strategy 2016; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC 2016). Both China's and the EU's role conception(s) as international actors with increasing responsibilities on global governance have been moving them to promote aid to developing countries, notably in Africa. Nevertheless, there is evidence that they have resorted to different methods and approaches. The emphasis that the EU has placed on principled conditionality stands in contrast with the longstanding Chinese non-conditionality approaches to the development of aid notably in Africa, which derives from the country's defence of the principles of sovereignty and non-interference (Fijałkowski 2011).

China's soft power projection has involved the use of resources projected through various means like infrastructures' diplomacy, trade deals, cancellation of external debt and loans policy that are often considered more advantageous than those provided by the Western states. Under the aegis of the BRI, Xi Jinping has been promoting assistance to the Developing World (see Hurley, Morris, and Portelance 2018) in order to sustain Chinese domestic growth, while aiming at increasing global influence and protecting overseas interests. That said, several underdeveloped countries identified as potential BRI borrowers (e.g. Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan) face currently debt distress, which overshadows expectations regarding the model of assistance offered under the aegis of the BRI. As for the EU, the soft power underlying development aid has been based on conditionality-oriented approaches informed by norms and principles like democracy, good governance and respect for human rights that, in 2017, were enshrined in the New European Consensus on Development. The centrality of human rights in the EU's soft power, which is more focused on the individual dimension, stands in stark contrast with the Chinese soft power which places emphasis upon economic rights (Arifon 2018).

Role performance in China and the EU has been influenced by the perception of the importance of norms, despite these ones having been implemented in a different way. The EU's normative power is not imposed by one higher-order structure. Hence, its nature tends to be appealing. In the Chinese case, the norms – resting on a mixture of ancient philosophy and precepts – are explored by the government with the aim of building a 'state-centred, hierarchical model of diplomacy' (d'Hooghe 2005, 89). Moreover, when comparing China's and the EU's 'normative power resources', some argue that 'China emphasises on norms as an end, while the EU emphasises on norms as a means' (Michalski and Pan 2017a, 76). This conceptual gap causes tensions between both actors, not only at the level of role conception on the international front, but also at the level of policy implementation. Chinese no-strings-attached approach on developmental aid is perceived by the EU as being detrimental to its role performance as a 'model power'. This is especially so regarding the EU's so-called 'new sovereignty approach', which combines good governance and human rights (Wissenbach and Wang 2016, 264).

Although global governance-related conceptual gaps between China and the EU as above mentioned (i.e. on approaches to soft power, the role of conditionality within development policies, democracy, sovereignty, human rights, and multilateralism) still persist, one must acknowledge the positive shift that the BRI has operated on Chinese foreign diplomacy. This is so since this initiative has contributed to decrease the gap between China's traditional role conception, on the one hand, and the international community's expectations, on the other. This observation cannot be fully dissociated from the evolution of the world's perception on this country between 2015 (approximately one year after the BRI was launched) and 2018. While, in 2015, China occupied the last position (30th) in the Soft Power Index 30, in 2018 and 2019 China ranked 27 (The Soft Power Report 2015, 2018, 2019). What is more, a 2018 Pew Research Center survey concludes that 'while the US is still seen more favorably in several [European] countries, its image in Europe has shown a significant decline in positive evaluations since 2016 [. . .]' for the benefit of China's soft power, considering that 'some European countries gave China more favorable ratings than they gave the US' (Pew Research Center 2019, para.5–6). That being said, all this does not mean that the country has been fully

successful in enhancing its soft power worldwide using the BRI as a major tool. A number of reasons account for this, as elucidated in this article, notably the top-down and hierarchical nature of the Chinese soft power and the CCP's censorship directed at telling the 'right Chinese story' by focusing only the positive aspects of China's regime.

7. Conclusion

Drawing on role theory, this article has attempted to offer a comparative study of the EU's and China's soft power, whilst highlighting the most striking developments against the background of the BRI and EUGS. Based on such comparative analysis, it has demonstrated that the EU and China have experienced an identity redefinition in the 2010s, which was largely influenced by domestic and external expectations vis-à-vis their own role conception and performance.

This links to our second major finding: each actor's identity dilemma and ensuing redefinition has materialised in asymmetrical soft power experiences. The victimisation of China's past has translated on an assertive stance in the country's foreign policy; and soft power has been mobilised on a reactive manner to mitigate the worldwide Sinophobia. Being perceived as a civilian/normative power, the EU has exercised soft power to further ensure the attractiveness of the European economic, social and ethical model.

The third finding of this study is that the EUGS and the BRI reveal innovating aspects regarding soft power performance. The EUGS has stressed the need for the global action of the EU to be informed by a public diplomacy dimension anchored in people-to-people contacts through culture, education, research and science. This became crucial to disseminate the differentiated added value of the EU in the world. As for China, the BRI has put soft power at the service of ensuring external receptiveness to the country in view of its ever-growing influential stance in international politics and economics. And, to some extent, this has been achieved, as evinced by Soft Power Index 30 data. One innovative feature regarding Chinese soft power performance is that under the BRI, it has acquired a more proactive stance towards building an international system alternative to the Westphalian order. This can be seen in China's shift from a traditional bystander towards a creative shaper of the global multilateral governance through institutions-building, as evinced in the creation of the AIIB and the 17 + 1 format of cooperation that have captured the interest and support of many EU countries. Future proliferation of such China-led institutional initiatives under the BRI, as part of a Sino-inspired multilateralism, has the potential to undermine EU's interests and role in world affairs.

Finally, the BRI and EUGS have exhibited growing Euro-Chinese convergence on the merits of soft power to promote multilateralism and international stability through people-to-people contacts, involving cultural, education and research/science cooperation, as well as youth mobility. Yet, this has not dispelled differences between the two actors regarding role conception, role expectation and role performance, which remain noticeable. This cannot be dissociated from still diverging views on multilateralism and competing conceptual understanding of democracy, sovereignty, human rights and the role of conditionality in development aid policies. Also, surely, the top-down (China) vs bottom-up (EU) approach to soft power has further impacted on the prevailing differences on how each actor perceives its own role and their roles are perceived by third parties.

Notes

1. In the EUGS public diplomacy is mentioned only once as an element of 'strategic communication'. Yet, actions connected to public diplomacy can be found throughout the document and its follow-up reports.
2. See <https://www.businessinsider.com/china-social-credit-system-punishments-and-rewards-explained-2018-4>
3. See <https://www.ft.com/content/6928451a-20d1-11e9-b126-46fc3ad87c65>
4. It refers to the almost 100 years-period (1839–1949) when China was subjugated by Western powers.
5. See (European Commission 2018), https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about_en.LinkManagerBM_FN_AUTO5J8RLJPL

Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge that this study was conducted at the Research Center in Political Science (UIDB/CPO/00758/2020), University of Minho/University of Évora, and was supported by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology and the Portuguese Ministry of Education and Science through national funds.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Laura C. Ferreira-Pereira  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4701-1113>

References

- Arifon, O. 2018. "Comparing Chinese and EU Soft Power: The Credibility Factor." *Languages Cultures Mediation Journal* 5 (2): 35–50. doi:10.7358/lcm-2018-002-arif.
- Brown, K., and U. Bérziņa-Čerenkova. 2018. "Ideology in the Era of Xi Jinping." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 23 (3): 323–339. doi:10.1007/s11366-018-9541-z.
- Business Insider. 2018. <https://www.businessinsider.com/china-social-credit-system-punishments-and-rewards-explained-2018-4>
- Buzan, B. 2010. "China in International Society: Is 'Peaceful Rise' Possible?" *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3 (1): 5–36. doi:10.1093/cjip/pop014.
- Chan, S., and W. Song. 2020. "Telling the China Story Well: A Discursive Approach to the Analysis of Chinese Foreign Policy in the 'Belt and Road' Initiative." *Chinese Political Science Review* 5 (3): 417–437. doi:10.1007/s41111-020-00146-1.
- Chen, D. 2015. "The Rise of China's New Soft Power". <https://thediplomat.com/2015/06/the-rise-of-chinas-new-soft-power/>
- Chen, Z., and L. Song. 2012. "The Conceptual Gap on Soft Power between China and Europe and Its Impact on Bilateral Relations." In *Conceptual Gaps in China-EU Relations: Global Governance, Human Rights and Strategic Partnerships*, edited by Z. Pan, 50–64. London: Palgrave.
- Chen, Z. 2016. "China, the European Union and the Fragile World Order." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 54 (4): 775–792. doi:10.1111/jcms.12383.
- China Digital Times. 2016. <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2016/02/191569/>
- China Today. 2021. http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/ctenglish/2018/commentaries/202102/t20210208_800235512.html
- Courmont, B. 2015. "Soft Power Debates in China." *Academic Foresights* 13: 1–6.
- d'Hooghe, I. 2005. "Public Diplomacy in the People's Republic of China." In *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, edited by J. Melissen, 88–105. New York: Palgrave.
- De Vergeron, K. 2015. *China-EU Relations and the Future of European Soft Power: A Strategy for a European Cultural Diplomacy*. London: London School of Economics and Political Science.
- Dreyer, J. 2015. "The 'Tianxia Trope: Will China Change the International System?" *Journal of Contemporary China* 24 (96): 1015–1031. doi:10.1080/10670564.2015.1030951.
- Duarte, P., and L. Xing. 2018. "Conclusion: The One Belt One Road in the Politics of Fear and Hope." In *Mapping China's 'One Belt One Road' Initiative*, edited by L. Xing, 279–289. Cham: Palgrave.
- Duarte, P., and F. Leandro, eds. 2020. *The Belt and Road Initiative - International Perspectives on an Old Archetype of a New Development Model*. Singapore: Palgrave.
- Duchêne, F. 1972. "Europe's Role in the World Peace." In *Europe Tomorrow: Sixteen Europeans Look Ahead*, edited by F. Mayne, 32–47. London: Fontana/Collins.
- Dugué-Nevers, A. 2017. "China and Soft Power: Building Relations and Cooperation." *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations* 3 (1): 71–101.
- Edney, K. 2015. "Building National Cohesion and Domestic Legitimacy: A Regime Security Approach to Soft Power in China." *Politics* 35 (3–4): 259–272. doi:10.1111/1467-9256.12096.
- EU-China 2020 "Strategic Agenda for Cooperation". <https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/20131123.pdf>
- European Commission. 2017. *Tools for an EU Science Diplomacy*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the EU.
- European Commission 2018. http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about_en
- European Commission 2019. <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>

- European External Action Service. 2016. *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union*. Brussels: European Commission. https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf
- European External Action Service. 2017. "From Shared Vision to Common Action: Implementing the EU Global Strategy". Year 1. https://www.unodc.org/documents/brussels/ABOUT%20EU%202017.06_EU_global_strategy_year1.pdf
- European External Action Service. 2018. "From Shared Vision to Common Action: Implementing the EU Global Strategy". Year 2. http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2018/EU_Global_Strategy_Jun2018.pdf
- European Union Global Strategy (EUGS). 2016. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3eaa2cf-9ac5-11e6-868c-01aa75ed71a1>
- Ferreira-Pereira, L. 2012. "The European Union as a 'Model Power': Spreading Peace, Democracy and Human Rights in the Wider World." In *The European Union Foreign Policy: Assessing Europe's Role in the World*, edited by F. Bindi, 293–305. Washington D.C: Brookings.
- Ferreira-Pereira, L., and J. Pinto. 2021. "Soft Power in the European Union's Strategic Partnership Diplomacy: The Erasmus Plus Programme." In *The European Union's Strategic Partnerships: Global Diplomacy in a Contested World*, edited by L. C. Ferreira-Pereira and M. Smith, 69–94. London: Palgrave.
- Fijałkowski, L. 2011. "China's 'Soft Power' in Africa?" *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 29 (2): 223–232. doi:10.1080/02589001.2011.555197.
- Gao, S. 2015. *China's Soft Power in the Arab World through Higher Educational Exchange*. Wellesley College.
- Godehardt, N. 2016. "No End of History: A Chinese Alternative Concept of International Order?" Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik German Institute for International and Security Affairs.
- Gottwald, J.-C., and N. Duggan. 2011. "Hesitant Adaptation: China's New Role in Global Policies." In *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses*, edited by S. Harnisch, C. Frank, and H. W. Maull, 234–251. London and New York: Routledge.
- Harnisch, S., C. Frank, and H. Maull, eds. 2011. *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Henökl, T., and M. Reiterer. 2015. "Multilateral Regional Governance: Comparing EU and China Engagement in Asia". Presented at the Conference EU and China: Reform and Governance. Brussels.
- Hongjian, C. 2018. "China-EU Relations: Structural Changes and Future Prospects." *China International Studies* 69: 47–65.
- Hurley, J., S. Morris, and G. Portelance. 2018. "Examining the Debt Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a Policy Perspective". <http://www.iberchina.org/files/2018/debt-implications-belt-and-road-initiative.pdf>
- ICEF Monitor. 2016. <http://monitor.icef.com/2016/01/education-and-the-exercise-of-soft-power-in-china/>
- Kavalski, E. 2013. "The Struggle for Recognition of Normative Powers: Normative Power Europe and Normative Power China in Context." *Cooperation and Conflict* 48 (2): 247–267. doi:10.1177/0010836713485386.
- Kirchner, E., T. Christiansen, and H. Dorussen. 2016. *Security Relations between China and the European Union: From Convergence to Cooperation*. Singapore: Cambridge University Press.
- Lams, L. 2018. "Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 23 (3): 387–411. doi:10.1007/s11366-018-9529-8.
- Maher, R. 2016. "The Elusive EU-China Strategic Partnership." *International Affairs* 92 (4): 959–976. doi:10.1111/1468-2346.12659.
- Manners, I. 2002. "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?" *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40 (2): 235–258. doi:10.1111/1468-5965.00353.
- Mayer, M. 2018. "China's Historical Statcraft and the Return of History." *International Affairs* 94 (6): 1217–1235. doi:10.1093/ia/iiy209.
- Michalski, A. 2012. "China and the EU: Conceptual Gaps in Soft Power." In *Conceptual Gaps in China-EU Relations: Global Governance, Human Rights and Strategic Partnerships*, edited by Z. Pan, 65–79. London: Palgrave.
- Michalski, A., and Z. Pan. 2017a. *Unlikely Partners? China, the European Union and the Forging of a Strategic Partnership*. Singapore: Palgrave.
- Michalski, A., and Z. Pan. 2017b. "Role Dynamics in a Structured Relationship: The EU-China Strategic Partnership." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 55 (3): 611–627. doi:10.1111/jcms.12505.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC. 2016. *One Belt One Road: A Community of Common Interest*. Ambassador Yang Yanyi, European Parliament.
- Moedas, C. 2015. "The EU Approach to Science Diplomacy". <https://www.europeaninstitute.org/index.php/49-programs/roundtables/2041-the-european-union-s-approach-to-science-diplomacy>
- Moravcsik, A. 2017. "Europe Is Still a Superpower and It's Going to Remain One for Decades to Come". <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/04/13/europe-is-still-a-superpower/>
- Nye, J. 1990. "Soft Power." *Foreign Policy*, no. 80: 153–171. doi:10.2307/1148580.
- Perilli, A. 2017. "Erasmus Student or EU Ambassador? People-to-people Contact in the European Neighbourhood Policy". Bruges Political Research Papers.
- Pew Research Center. 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/03/22/few-europeans-confident-in-xi-as-he-seeks-to-extend-chinese-economic-influence-in-the-region/>

- Pishchikova, K., and E. Piras. 2017. "The European Union Global Strategy: What Kind of Foreign Policy Identity?" *International Spectator* 52 (3): 103–120. doi:10.1080/03932729.2017.1339479.
- Shambaugh, D. 2015. "China's Soft-Power Push: The Search for Respect". <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2015-06-16/china-s-soft-power-push>
- Soft Power 30 Index. 2018. <https://softpower30.com/>
- Song, W., and R. Hall. 2018. "European Union's Construction of International Identity via Strategic Partnerships: Associating and Social Distancing." *Contemporary Politics*. doi:10.1080/13569775.2018.1497463.
- Sverdrup-Thygeson, B. 2017. "The Bear and the EU-China-US Triangle: Transatlantic and Russian Influences on EU's 'Pivot to Asia'." *Asia Europe Journal* 15 (2): 161–172. doi:10.1007/s10308-017-0472-7.
- Tan, T.-C., H.-C. Huang, A. Bairner, Y.-W. Chen, et al. 2016. "Xi Jin-Ping's World Cup Dreams: From a Major Sports Country to a World Sports Power." *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 33 (12): 1449–1465. doi:10.1080/09523367.2016.1243103.
- The Soft Power Report 2015. https://softpower30.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/The_Soft_Power_30_Report_2015-1.pdf
- The Soft Power Report 2018. <https://softpower30.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/The-Soft-Power-30-Report-2018.pdf>
- Wang, J. and W. Song, eds. 2016. *China, the European Union, and the International Politics of Global Governance*. New York: Palgrave
- Wissenbach, U., and Y. Wang. 2016. "Development Policy: Alternatives, Challenges, and Opportunities." In *China, the European Union, and the International Politics of Global Governance*, edited by J. Wang and W. Song, 251–269, Palgrave.
- World University Rankings. 2019. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/world-university-rankings-2019-results-announced>
- Wuthnow, J., X. Li, and L. Qi. 2012. "Diverse Multilateralism: Four Strategies in China's Multilateral Diplomacy." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 17 (3): 269–290. doi:10.1007/s11366-012-9202-6.
- Xiao, R. 2016. "China as an Institution-builder: The Case of the AIIB." *The Pacific Review* 29 (3): 435–442. doi:10.1080/09512748.2016.1154678.
- Xinhuanet. 2014. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-11/30/c_133822694_4.htm
- Zhang, X. 2012. "Multipolarity and Multilateralism as International Norms: The Chinese and European Perspectives." In *Conceptual Gaps in China-EU Relations*, edited by Z. Pan, 173–186, Palgrave.
- Zhou, W., and M. Esteban. 2018. "Beyond Balancing: China's Approach Towards the Belt and Road Initiative." *Journal of Contemporary China* 27 (112): 487–501. doi:10.1080/10670564.2018.1433476.