Chinese Cultural Diplomacy in the 21st Century: The China Cultural Centre Project

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the China Cultural Centre (CCC) project in the context of Chinese cultural diplomacy. CCCs started to expand globally since the beginning of the 2000s and have now come to the forefront of China's cultural diplomacy. By 2022, the Chinese government had set up 45 CCCs in countries across Europe, Asia, Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, with the goal to increase their number to 55 by 2025. Despite this, these institutions are understudied. The existing academic literature on CCCs presents two major weaknesses. Firstly, it relies primarily on Chinese media reports, which tend to be descriptive regarding CCCs and their activities. Related to this issue, current research on CCCs offers little in-depth analysis of their structure, operation, and programming. Drawing on a diverse range of data collected from policy/official documents, media/journalistic publications, academic literature, non-academic material (including memoirs, catalogues, personal letters, and speech notes), and 13 semi-structured interviews in Australia, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating the CCC project through the lens of its development, purpose, key relations, setup, working modes, and cultural programs.

This study makes an original contribution to furthering knowledge of the CCC project by mapping out its establishment, operation, and programming through varied data sources. More specifically, it highlights the main structural and operational characteristics of the CCC project at various points in this thesis. It also provides insights into its working modes and associated activities primarily based on the case of the CCC in Sydney (CCCS), complemented with relevant information concerning CCCs elsewhere. Furthermore, it sheds light on implications of the above aspects for the CCC project, adding to the understanding of China's cultural diplomacy in the 21st century, and expands current discussions about Chinese cultural diplomacy.

Led by the Chinese government, CCCs, representative of national-level cultural organisations, are set up as physically independent entities without fixed partners in host countries, with a primary programming focus on delivering arts and cultural activities. These aspects partly explain why CCCs are less controversial (especially compared with China's other flagship cultural diplomacy project, the Confucius Institutes), despite their close links to the Chinese government.

From a programming perspective, CCCs mainly operate through three working modes, namely, global coordination, partnership with Chinese provincial-level governments, and collaboration with partners in host countries. These working modes, as this thesis will demonstrate, reflect how China perceives cultural diplomacy and have multiple implications regarding the foreign audience's reception.

Overall, this thesis holds that while the CCC project has attracted less criticism abroad, this does not equate to its success as a cultural diplomacy initiative. It further argues that the success of the

CCC project is first dependant on how its practical challenges, including funding and staffing, can be further tackled to ensure a sustainable and effective operation abroad. Secondly, the success of the CCC project is also hinged on the reception of its cultural programs and the impact they have on the foreign public. In this light, this study suggests a less top-down approach to managing CCCs and calls for more flexibility and autonomy for their operation in host countries.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis:

1. does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university

2. and the research within will not be submitted for any other future degree or diploma without the permission of Flinders University; and

3. to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed..  .....

Date.....1 March 2024.....

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Australia Broadcasting Corporation
AFC	Adelaide Festival Centre
BFPA	Beijing Forum for Performing Arts
BIEC	Bureau of International Exchange and Cooperation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CAEG	China Arts and Entertainment Group
CASS	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
CCC	China Cultural Centre
CCCS	China Cultural Centre in Sydney
CCFA	Chinese Culture Friendship Association
CEMOCF	Center for the Establishment & Management of Overseas Cultural Facilities
CFLAC	China Federation of the Literary and Art Circles
CI	Confucius Institute
CICA	China International Culture Association
CIEA	China International Exhibition Agency
CPAA	China Performing Arts Agency
CPC	Communist Party of China
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
ELICOS	English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students
EU	European Union
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
G20	Group of Twenty
JHC	Jewish Holocaust Centre
MCT	Ministry of Culture and Tourism
NICE	Network of International Culturalink Entities
NIIS	National Institute of International Strategy
PRC	People's Republic of China
Quad	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
SJM	Sydney Jewish Museum
SJRM	Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum
UNSW	University of New South Wales
USIA	US Information Agency
UTS	University of Technology, Sydney
WTO	World Trade Organization

CONVENTIONS FOR CHINESE TERMS AND CHINESE NAMES

Throughout this thesis, the researcher presents key Chinese terms in simplified Chinese characters, the Pinyin Romanisation system, and English on their first use in the text. All subsequent uses are in English.

Following the Chinese naming conventions, the researcher presents Chinese personal names by placing the family name before the given name. All Chinese names and terms are written according to the Pinyin Romanisation system.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The People's Republic of China (PRC, hereafter China) has since its establishment practised cultural diplomacy, from sending Chinese acrobatic troupes overseas in the 1950s–1960s, the Ping-Pong Diplomacy of the 1970s to the Panda Diplomacy of the 1980s. China's cultural diplomacy has demonstrated distinct aims and traits in different historical periods. With limited political and economic resources and few diplomatic connections with the world between 1949 and 1971, China used cultural exchanges as informal channels of communication to establish social and economic foundations for diplomatic relations (Deng & Zhang 2009). Under Mao Zedong's leadership, China's cultural diplomacy was characterised by ideological propaganda to promote China's revolutionary achievements and support world revolution (Yang, Yue 2020). Following Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening-up policy (改革开放政策 *gaige kaifang zhengce*) in 1978, China experienced rapid economic growth. Chinese cultural diplomacy shifted to engage in wider cultural interaction with the world beyond ideological differences for the country's economic development (Kong 2021). Gradually, China has become one of the world's largest economies since joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) at the turn of the century and it has since been systematically promoting its culture abroad for new aims.

Accompanying China's growing economy and influence in the new millennium, there has been increasing uneasiness and even a sense of crisis from parts of the world, typically represented by the US, the European Union (EU) and Japan, that currently dominate the international system (Lai 2012a). This sentiment has led to the perception of a rising China as a threat to the world. The idea became highly topical in the 1990s as China's economy took off rapidly, subsequently culminating in the so-called "China threat theory" which "maintains that an increasingly powerful China is likely to destabilize regional security in the near future" (Roy 1996, p. 758). The argument can be further seen in the fields of the military, economy, and ideology (Renée 2009; Roy 1996; Su 2008; Yang & Liu 2012). Facing the "China threat" discourse, China believes itself misunderstood and misrepresented on the international stage and that there is the need to counter those negative images and foster a positive external perception for protecting the state's national security and economic growth (Hartig 2019). To respond, the Chinese government issues rebuttals that reject foreign conjectures of a threating China and commonly dismisses them as a reflection of Cold War mentality, ill will, and bias against China (Deng 2008). Nonetheless, such actions do not seem to be effective. On the contrary, as argued by William Callahan (2005, p. 712), they "vigorously reproduce the dangers of the very threat they seek to deny".

Meanwhile, China sees its culture as the most valuable resource to counter the "China threat" narratives (Maags 2014), and to project an image of peaceful rise (Lai 2012a). In particular, Chinese traditional culture and history were utilised to rein in external concerns about the country's ascendancy, as manifested in the promotion of ideas such as "Peaceful Rise/Development" (和平崛起/发展 *heping jueqi/fazhan*) and "Harmonious World" (和谐世界 *hexie shijie*) under former Chinese President Hu Jintao's leadership (2002–2012). For example, referring to Zheng He, navigator of the Ming Dynasty, the State Council's White Paper, entitled *China's Peaceful Development Road* (中国的和平发展道路 *Zhongguo de heping fazhan daolu*), emphasised that China had always been a peace-loving nation with a pacific culture and its people longing for peace and harmony, as demonstrated by Zheng's journeys abroad, which brought not only material goods, including tea, chinaware, and silk, but also technology, peace, and civilisation (*China.org.cn* 2005).[1] What was also important from a Chinese perspective was that Zheng's trips, with the largest fleet in the world at the time, "did not occupy an inch of any other's land", but rather they showed "the good faith of the ancient Chinese people in strengthening exchanges with relevant countries and their peoples" (*China.org.cn* 2005). The implications of China's development for today, as the White Paper explained, were, therefore, that it was not only beneficial to the Chinese people, but also an opportunity and a contribution to the world as China opened its large market and supported a peaceful international environment (*China.org.cn* 2005).

Furthermore, Confucian cultural values, such as "all under Heaven" (天下 *tianxia*) and "harmony without supressing differences" (和而不同 *he er butong*) were incorporated in interpreting the notion of "Harmonious World", which, from a cultural perspective, advocated that countries should learn from each other, seek common ground, and respect the diversity of the world and jointly promote common prosperity and progress of human civilisation (Qu & Zhong 2017). This further echoed what Confucius said that "[t]he exemplary person seeks harmony rather than conformity, the petty person seeks conformity rather than harmony" (君子和而不同，小人同而不和 *junzi he er butong, xiaoren tong er buhe*) (cited in Bell 2008, p. 253). The interpretation gave a contemporary meaning of China's "Harmonious World" order which was the peaceful coexistence of different cultures, political systems and values, whereas uniformity was perceived as leading to disharmony (Zhang 2007). The promotion of Hu's "Harmonious World", as argued by Zhang Jian (2007), served as a declaration of China's peaceful intentions and presented a preferred international order that was rooted in Chinese traditional culture and norms. Overall, to defuse negative perceptions held by the international community, China focused "on the passive explanation of 'what China is not', without any mentioning to 'What China really is'" (Aoyama 2007, p. 20).

[1] Zheng He was known for his seven voyages to Asia and Africa between 1405 and 1433.

Since Xi Jinping took the presidency in 2012, the Chinese leadership has attempted to position the country as a relevant global authority, aiming for international acknowledgement of the country's political and social order as a cultural/civilisational model (Ptáčková et al. 2021).That is to say that, apart from its rising international status, China intends to gain external validation for its policies that lead the nation to re-emerge as a global economic and political power (Breslin 2020). On the cultural front, China desires to be seen as a major cultural power in the world (Liu 2021), setting up the goal to become "a strong country in culture" by 2035 (*Xinhua News Agency* 2020). Chinese civilisation and historical achievements are mobilised to enhance a shared sense of national identity and pride to overcome the "century of national humiliation" (百年国耻 *bainian guochi*) and for contributing to the "rejuvenation of the Chinese nation", which, as Xi (2012) states, "has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people since the advent of modern times".[2] In this context, the "Chinese Dream" (中国梦 *zhongguo meng*) is promoted domestically to drive the restoration of the prosperous state in ancient times. Internationally, it is employed to convey common aspirations between China and other nations, as well as the country's peaceful disposition (Wang, J 2019). As Xi states, "the realization of the Chinese Dream will bring the world peace, not turmoil, opportunities, not threats" (Xi 2014b, p. 62).

Parallel to this, Callahan (2017) observes that the "Chinese Dream" is oftentimes juxtaposed with and discussed as a challenge to the "American Dream" which is seen as a global discourse. As Shi Yuzhi (2013) suggests, not every country is in a position to have the national dream, but only great powers, such as China and the US, dare to have their national dreams. Furthermore, the "Chinese Dream" is different from the "American Dream" in the sense that the former is about national wealth and prosperity based on collectivism, whereas the latter concerns personal freedom and achievement centred on individualism (Shi 2013). Therefore, "China here is defined as a nation united in its virtuous pursuit of global power, while America is portrayed as a collection of individuals bent on their own selfish schemes" (Callahan 2017, p. 257). Xia Chuntao (2013) even holds that the "American Dream", which promises the realisation of individual success through personal efforts, is illusory as social class gaps persist and income inequality worsens. In his view, the "Chinese Dream" has eclipsed the "American Dream", which is not attractive anymore. In a deeper sense, the distinctiveness of the "Chinese Dream", compared to that of the US, is underpinned by the unique history and cultural values of the nation. Callahan (2017) points out that while America sees itself as the world's first new nation and a beacon of freedom and democracy, China considers itself as the world's first ancient civilisation with 5,000 years of continuous history and a peaceful and harmonious alternative to a perceived American hegemony. In this light, the "Chinese Dream" is

[2] The "century of national humiliation" refers to the period from the First Opium War (1839–1842) to the end of the Sino-Japanese War in 1945, when China endured intervention and subjugation by Western powers and Japan.

about “a return to the glory days when China had—or is now perceived to have had—a strong, unified culture and identity”, and “an attempt to restore China’s ideational greatness while not losing the material gains” achieved over the past decades (Barr 2015, p. 191).

The use of traditional culture and history to push Chinese narratives globally can also be identified in the theoretical foundation of the “Community with a Shared Future for Mankind” (人类命运共同体 *renlei mingyun gongtongti*), another diplomatic slogan that Xi has attached great significance and actively used to present his world vision (Wang, J 2019).[3] The term reflects the Confucian belief of “Great Harmony” (大同 *datong*) or “Great Unity”, which embodies a utopian society that is for the public and values integrity and trust, and where people love and care about each other, and live in a harmonious way (Wang 2020). Such a perspective, according to Guo and Zhuge (2018), represents ancient Chinese people’s pursuit of an ideal political life, social development, and their views concerning justice, equality, and harmony, which are of contemporary relevance. In the view of Chinese scholars, the articulation of the “Community with a Shared Future for Mankind” is based on China’s development path and Chinese culture (Sang & Guo 2018). It also represents a Chinese global vision, which aims to counter and transcend international norms and theories that are traditionally formulated by the West and underpin the existing international relations (Wang, J 2019). In particular, Sun (2020) argues that the current international order, which is dominated by the US, is causing harm to the world with such values and principles as egoism, unilateralism, and hegemonism. It is in this sense, as argued by Zhao Kejin (2017), that China’s advocacy of the “Community with a Shared Future for Mankind” has offered a Chinese solution to the problems that have occurred in the process of Western modernisation.

Moreover, the history of China’s ancient exchanges with the world has been evoked to conceptualise the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (一带一路 *yidai yilu*), which, according to Xi, is “a major platform of cooperation for countries concerned to attain common development” and aims “to bring about a community with a shared future for mankind” (Xi 2017c).[4] As Xi drew historical and cultural references to explain the Initiative at the opening ceremony of the BRI Forum for International Cooperation in 2017,

> [o]ver 2,000 years ago, our ancestors, trekking across vast steppes and deserts, opened the transcontinental passage connecting Asia, Europe and Africa, known today as the Silk Road. Our ancestors, navigating rough seas, created sea routes linking the East with the West,

[3] In his UN speech in 2017, Xi outlined the term from five dimensions including the promotion of partnership, security, growth, inter-civilisation exchanges and the building of a sound ecosystem. He urged that countries “should stay committed to building a world of lasting peace through dialogue and consultation”, “should build a world of common security for all through joint efforts”, “should build a world of common prosperity through win-win cooperation”, “should build an open and inclusive world through exchanges and mutual learning”, and “should make our world clean and beautiful by pursuing green and low-carbon development” (Xi 2017a).
[4] The “Belt” refers to the “Silk Road Economic Belt”, which connects China with Europe through Central Asia. The “Road” denotes the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road” that bonds Southeast Asia, Africa, and Europe.

> namely, the maritime Silk Road. These ancient silk routes opened windows of friendly engagement among nations, adding a splendid chapter to the history of human progress….
>
> Spanning thousands of miles and years, the ancient silk routes embody the spirit of peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit. The Silk Road spirit has become a great heritage of human civilization (Xi 2017b).

To Xi (2017b), although humankind has achieved great progress, the contemporary world is fraught with challenges. Such challenges include new momentum for global growth, lack of inclusive and balanced development, income gap between the rich and the poor, and terrorism, all of which the BRI, emblematic of a cultural bridge between Chinese civilisation and other parts of world, aims to address through a new cooperative framework. Such a framework, invoking the spirit of the ancient silk roads which underpin China's historic world status in ancient times, would promote, in Xi's view, peace, prosperity, an open, inclusive, and balanced economic globalisation, innovation, ecological and environmental protection, and connection between different civilisations.

The Chinese government insists that the BRI is China's benevolent action to share with other countries the benefit of its fast development, extending friendship and boosting economy and trade "without any of the US-style political strings attached", despite realist analysts' criticism about China's desire for global hegemony and pessimists' characterisation of the Initiative as wishful thinking and fantasy (Zhao 2020, p. 322). For example, Tim Winter (2021) perceives the BRI in the framework of geo-cultural power, arguing that at the centre of the silk road imaginaries sits China, regaining its place as the Middle Kingdom of both world history and of contemporary international affairs. He further notes that the BRI "popularises Silk Road metaphors of connectivity that harbour new forms of power within a language of friendship, dialogue and cooperation" (Winter 2021, p. 1393). Similarly, Callahan (2016) holds that the BRI seeks to socialise Asian and European countries into a world order that is preferred by China and in which China possesses the global normative power. These views about the BRI are also shared by Chinese scholars. Many Chinese public intellectuals, as Callahan (2016, p. 3) observes, consider the BRI as "a cultural and moral alternative" to what they describe as "the corrupt and ineffective world order of 'American hegemony'", thus leading to new standards of globalisation and the reshaping of rules and norms of international institutions. Indeed, as Wang Jingsheng (2021), counsellor of the State Council,[5] points out, the implementation of the BRI will inevitably have an impact on the current world landscape, and even push forward the restructure of a new international order. Taken together, compared to his predecessor, Xi is more eager to tell the world what China really is (Kong 2021). The employment of

[5] The counsellors of the State Council are appointed by the Premier of the State Council. According to the Counsellors' Office of the State Council, the counsellors are renowned experts and scholars with great social influence. Their main responsibilities include participating in the discussion of public affairs, making recommendations, consulting on state affairs, undertaking democratic supervision, etc. See http://english.counsellor.gov.cn/html/tjhqi.html.

Chinese culture and history for promoting China's alternative views and solutions to the world clearly shows the nation's increasing confidence as a rising power in shaping global perception and countering criticisms.

Despite noticeable differences between Hu and Xi's approaches, it can be said that Chinese culture and history have been heavily incorporated as part of the foundation in China's diplomatic practice in the 21st century. In practical terms, the Chinese government has, since the beginning of the new century, placed a marked emphasis on cultural diplomacy, which was declared by former Chinese Minister for Culture, Sun Jiazheng (2004), as the third pilar of China's diplomacy, following political and economic diplomacy. Since 2002, it has implemented the "going out" (走出去 *zou chuqu*) strategy in the cultural realm, aiming to showcase achievements of the reform and construction of contemporary China, promote contemporary Chinese culture, integrate into international mainstream society and media, shape a positive image on the international stage, and build China into an international cultural hub (Yang 2009).[6] This has led to a series of cultural diplomacy initiatives, including large-scale translation projects, the global development of state-owned/affiliated media outlets, the worldwide establishment of the Confucius Institutes (CIs), the initiation of the Silk Road International League of Theatres, and, more recently, the inauguration of the Beijing Forum for Performing Arts (BFPA), just to name a few.[7]

It was against this background that China Cultural Centres (CCCs) (中国文化中心 *zhongguo wenhua zhongxin*), culture promotion organisations established outside China by its Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MCT),[8] began to expand since the early 2000s. There are now more than 40 CCCs in a number of countries across Europe, Asia, Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. The CCC project, as stated on its website, is to enhance cultural exchange and cooperation, deepen mutual understanding and friendship between China and the host country through cultural performances, exhibitions, festivals, etc. (China Cultural Center 2015).[9] In the past decade, it has come to the

[6] The term "going out" was first used in 2000 to describe China's economic strategy. This strategy encouraged the use of both internal and international platforms and markets for the state's economic development, and was later implemented in China's cultural sectors to promote Chinese culture overseas (Yang 2009).
[7] Large translation projects include the 100 Excellent Contemporary Chinese Literary Works in Translation and Works on Chinese Culture in Translation; on the media front, in 2010, China's major state-owned media, namely, *Xinhua News Agency*, *China Central Television*, *China Radio International*, and *China Daily* all established new branches in their international sectors (Shambaugh 2013); the BFPA was established in 2020 by the National Centre for the Performing Arts, which is China's national level theatre and directly affiliated with the People's Government of Beijing Municipality. The BFPA, according to its website, is a collaborative organisation formed by performing arts institutions around the world, aiming to facilitate deep and ongoing arts-and-cultural exchange and cooperation among its members (Beijing Forum for Performing Arts n.d.).
[8] In 2018, China announced that the Ministry of Culture and China National Tourism Administration had been merged to form the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. For consistency purposes, this study uses the Ministry's current name—Ministry of Culture and Tourism.
[9] This website is currently unavailable, but a full-size screenshot of the original webpage can be accessed via the following link:
https://baike.baidu.com/reference/49983459/02f9GzDf7XdjNPgtucGMRF5O4DJ_gRB0FonLKB7IURxQASkrQ

forefront of China's cultural diplomacy. The Chinese government sees it as an important "platform and base" for its cultural promotions overseas (*Chinaculture.org* 2009). When interviewed in 2014, Ding Wei, then Chinese Vice Minister for Culture, asserted that the CCC project had become an essential part of the national strategy to present a positive image of the country and improve its cultural soft power (Wang, J 2014). Chinese top leaders highly value the CCC project, frequently attending its events during their diplomatic visits around the world. For example, former Chinese President Hu Jintao attended the "foundation stone laying ceremony" for the CCC in Berlin in 2005. Former Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao inaugurated the CCC in Bangkok in 2012, and current Chinese President Xi Jinping unveiled the CCC in Sydney (CCCS) in 2014.

The importance of the CCC project to the Chinese government is further manifested in the state-driven policy. In December 2012, the State Council officially approved the *Overseas China Cultural Centre Development Plan (2012–2020)* (海外中国文化中心发展规划 *haiwai zhongguo wenhua zhongxin fazhan guihua*), according to which 50 CCCs were planned to be established worldwide by 2020 (Wang, J 2014). As reported by the MCT, 45 CCCs had been set up in the world by the end of 2020 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2021a).[10] Despite the original target not being met, possibly hindered in part by the COVID-19 pandemic, the MCT has recently announced in its 14th Five-year Plan to increase the number of CCCs to 55 by 2025, demonstrating that expanding the CCC project globally remains a priority of the Chinese government (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2021b).[11]

Despite its obvious significance in Chinese cultural diplomacy, the CCC project, as pointed out by scholars, is understudied (Chen 2019; Chen & Wang 2019; Guo, Zhang & Wang 2016). Falk Hartig (2019, p. 75), an important scholar of Chinese public and cultural diplomacy, notes that there are "very few accounts" focusing on the CCC project in the English language literature.[12] In Chinese language research, there is also a small—although growing—body of academic work on the CCC project. A search performed in January 2023 with the key word "中国文化中心" (China Cultural Centre) under the "academic journal" category in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), a key national research and information publishing institution in China, returned 62 results

TcKqq3A20U-wtpyvyj1Hk3dYbzH4-IIjvFWAp5ZC-jdJkuXW5mU2M6bda6bFcnfOanrNfe013xk9nAFgyLKuAE8FQk_CAkoFjqwdemI7UV2cT5XMA.

[10] According to the MCT's *Statistical Report on Cultural and Tourism Development in 2022*, the number of CCCs remained 45 by the end of 2022. The official document can be accessed via the following link: https://zwgk.mct.gov.cn/zfxxgkml/tjxx/202307/t20230713_945922.html.

[11] The Five-year Plans are guideline documents issued by the Chinese government since 1953 on a five-year basis. They signal policy direction for China's social and economic development. The 14th Five-year Plan is the development plan for 2021–2025, outlining "the overall requirements, development goals, major tasks and measures" for this period (*Xinhuanet* 2021).

[12] Three recent academic publications, in English, on the CCC project are "The effectiveness of Chinese Cultural Centres in China's public diplomacy" by Zhang and Guo (2017), "Chinese cultural diplomacy and BRI: view from the establishment of China Cultural Centers" by Richter (2022), and "Can Chinese cultural diplomacy be done without controversy? The case of China Cultural Centres" by Wang (2023).

linked to the main theme of “中国文化中心”. Among them, only about 13 were research-based articles from diplomatic and cultural communication perspectives, with the remainder of the content primarily being media reports. Motivated by the lack of research on the CCC project, this thesis aims to fill this gap by providing one of the first in-depth studies regarding its establishment, operation, and programming.

1.2 Aim, research questions, and contribution

This research project aims to investigate the CCC project in the context of China’s cultural diplomacy in the 21st century. To achieve this aim, it will address two main questions. Frist, what is the role of the CCC project and how does it relate to China’s cultural diplomacy in the 21st century? To address this inquiry, two sub-questions are formulated, namely, 1) what is the purpose of the CCC project and how does it operate? and 2) what programs does the CCC project deliver? The second research question asks how does the CCC project add to the understanding of China’s cultural diplomacy in the 21st century? This question leads to another two sub-questions: 1) what implications do the establishment, operation, and programming of the CCC project have for Chinese cultural diplomacy? and 2) what lessons can be learnt from the CCC project through the lens of cultural diplomacy?

This thesis contributes to the understanding of the CCC project by mapping out its establishment, operation, and programming. While this is not a comparative work, it illuminates main characteristics of the CCC project by highlighting its similarities and differences with other cultural diplomacy initiatives at various points in this study. It also sheds light on the CCC project’s working modes and associated activities primarily based on the case of the CCCS, complemented by relevant information concerning CCCs elsewhere. These aspects deepen the knowledge of the CCC project and have yet to be comprehensively examined in the existing academic literature, which, as pointed out by Wang et al. (2021), tends to be largely focused on describing the development and history of the CCC project. By discussing the implications of the CCC project based on the above aspects, this research further adds to the understanding of China’s cultural diplomacy in the 21st century and expands current discussions about Chinese cultural diplomacy.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Research design

The aim of this research, as articulated before, first requires a contextual inquiry of China’s cultural diplomacy in the new century, exploring its role and features in a complex setting. Situated in such a context, a deeper understanding of the CCC project also needs multi-dimensional examinations of its structural, operational, and programming characteristics, as well as the implications of the above

on the CCC project as a Chinese cultural diplomacy initiative. Therefore, from a methodological point of view, this line of inquiry leads the researcher to consider the use of qualitative research, which "involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world" (Denzin & Lincoln 2011, p. 3) and helps gain "a complex, detailed understanding of the issue" (Creswell 2013, p. 48).

Given the in-depth analysis required by the research questions in this study, coupled by the complexity of the contemporary setting of cultural diplomacy, a case study is further considered a suitable design for this research project. A case study allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the selected case by examining it from different aspects and with various methods (Creswell 2013), with the aim to "present a rich portrayal of a single setting to inform practice, establish the value of the case and/or add to knowledge of a specific topic" (Simons 2009, p. 24). In the case of this research, it helps understand the CCC project in a particular context from multiple perspectives and through different sources of data, including the existing literature, policy/official documents, media/journalistic publications, other non-academic material, and interviews. These sources will be explained in detail later in this chapter.

1.3.2 Rationale for studying the China Cultural Centre project

The rationale for studying the CCC project is first because it is China's official cultural organisation established abroad. The significance of the CCC project in Chinese cultural diplomacy is reflected, as noted earlier, in the country's national policies and the increasing number of CCCs in recent years. As Zhang Dianjun (2010, p. 35) points out, CCCs have now become China's "most authoritative platform" to promote its culture abroad. It is, thereby, a relevant and illustrative initiative to understand China's cultural diplomacy in the 21st century.

Another reason for focusing on the CCC project is concerned with a lack of knowledge on this topic. Despite its expansion in the world, the CCC project is yet to be thoroughly investigated, with limited work based on in-depth case studies. This can be partly seen in the fact that, at the time of writing, there is no doctoral research or scholarly monograph, in either English or Chinese, about the CCC project (as a whole or case studies on particular CCCs). While there appears to be growing academic attention on the CCC project in recent years,[13] existing work presents two major weaknesses. First, current research on this topic primarily relies on information published by Chinese state-owned/affiliated media reports (Chen & Wang 2019), which tend to be descriptive about CCCs and their activities. These studies are helpful in getting a basic sense of what the CCC project is and does. However, the reliance on a single source of data can hardly be enough to offer in-depth understanding (Creswell 2013). Furthermore, this heavy dependence on Chinese state-

[13] See Wu and Yu (2013), Wei and Chen (2015), Ruan (2015), Guo, Zhang and Wang (2016), Guo and Zhang (2016), Zhang and Guo (2017), Wu (2018), Guo and Li (2018), Chen (2019), Wang Song (2019), Chen and Wang (2019), Wang et al. (2021), Richter (2022).

owned/affiliated media reports also presents the risk of perceiving the CCC project solely through the lens of a sanctioned narrative by the Chinese government, hence hindering a more balanced understanding without incorporating varied sources of data.

Following and related to the first weakness, current research on the CCC project does not offer detailed examinations of cultural activities conducted at any particular CCCs. This impedes the understanding of the CCC project in the context of Chinese cultural diplomacy. As Christina Maags (2014, p. 34) points out, it is precisely a deeper analysis of such cultural events that would provide insights into "what the Chinese government wants to demonstrate through the medium of 'Chinese culture' and which strategic approach it pursues in presenting this culture". These two aforementioned limitations in the existing academic literature have further justified an in-depth case study of the CCC project. Taking into consideration the weaknesses of current research, this study endeavours to be inclusive of varied sources of data and places a particular emphasis on the analysis of the CCC project's working modes and associated activities through the case study. This point will be elaborated later in the research method section and, for now, a further reason for studying the CCC project will be provided.

One of the obstacles in researching the CCC project is limited access to relevant resources. This is manifested in the fact that there is little detailed and comprehensive information released by the Chinese government about the operation of the CCC project. Unlike CIs, the CCC project does not have annual reports that are publicly available, which would have been valuable for providing contextual information for a study on this topic. It is equally rare to see, in research on the CCC project, extensive interviews conducted with those outside China who have participatory and/or working experience with CCCs. This may be concerned with a lack of information to identify and connect with such key people. Nonetheless, these resources are important as they could provide insights into perceptions of the CCC project from the receiving end of China's cultural endeavours abroad, therefore shedding light on the implications of the CCC project's operation and programming in relation to Chinese cultural diplomacy. Such difficulties in acquiring enough resources for conducting in-depth studies on the CCC project, perhaps, has partly led to the heavy reliance on Chinese media/journalistic reports, as reflected in the existing academic literature. Despite this, it is precisely these hurdles that underline the researcher's advantage in studying the CCC project, due to his previous experience working at the CCCS as a locally engaged employee. This background allows the researcher to understand the CCCS's operation and programming on a day-to-day basis, enabling a broader understanding of the CCC project as a whole with a specific focus on the Australian context. It further provides opportunities for the researcher to engage with participants and collaborators in the CCCS's cultural events, subsequently increasing the prospects of obtaining sufficient original data (particularly through interviews) for in-depth research. These

above factors have, too, played an important role in initiating this study. They are also connected with and further shape the selection of case and research methods in this thesis, as will be discussed in the following sections.

1.3.3 Focusing on the case in Australia

The present thesis is based on a single case study. This is partially because "[t]he study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis; the more cases an individual studies, the less the depth in any single case" (Creswell 2013, p. 101). In this research, Australia has been chosen as the focus for both practical and methodological considerations, albeit this does not preclude the use of information of CCCs in other countries to complement and strengthen the analysis in this study wherever possible and appropriate, as will be shown in Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 at various points.

One practical reason for choosing the CCC in Australia is concerned with, as already explained, access to resources, not least sufficient suitable interviewees, to ensure the accomplishment of such an in-depth study. The second practical reason is related to the timing of this research, which was conducted in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. This largely restricted the possibility of including a second or third case of CCCs from other countries in this thesis, as international travel was extremely challenging and costly on the one hand, and presented the risk of causing a long-period quarantine both overseas and domestically on the other. Considering the limited financial resources and time (three years) for a PhD project, it was not feasible to collect, analyse, and write up data from additional cases of CCCs elsewhere. This external factor has also shaped the focus of this study on the case in Australia, where the researcher resides.

There are also methodological reasons for choosing Australia as a focal point in this research. One of them concerns the gap in relation to China's cultural diplomacy, as manifested in recent research. For example, Ptáčková, Klimeš, and Rawnsley's (2021) work, entitled *Transnational sites of China's cultural diplomacy*, has compared Chinese cultural diplomacy across Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. This edited book sheds light on China's localised approaches to conducting cultural diplomacy and is focused on the involvement of non-state actors and their roles in bridging conflicts and enhancing mutual understanding. While offering various contemporary cases of Chinese cultural diplomacy in different locations, this research does not include Oceania, where China actively undertakes cultural diplomacy activities. Furthermore, Beattie, Bullen, and Galikowski's (2019) edited book *China in Australasia: cultural diplomacy and Chinese arts since the Cold War* has offered a wide-ranging examination of China's cultural diplomacy efforts in Australia and New Zealand. Predominately focusing on cases between the 1950s and 1970s, this research argues that, at their best and most successful, cultural diplomacy endeavours form part of a mutual relationship that is built on cultural understanding and friendship. However, a noticeable gap in this book is the lack of cases in the 21st century, hence hindering an up-to-date understanding of how

the Chinese government conducts cultural diplomacy. These two gaps reflected in recent works further underline the necessity and value of examining the CCCS, China's current state-led cultural diplomacy project in Australia.

The geographical gap shown in Ptáčková, Klimeš, and Rawnsley's research also exists in the existing literature on the CCC project, leading to another methodological reason for selecting the case of the CCCS. While current studies on this topic include countries in places such as Europe, Asia, and Africa, [14] the Oceanic region is largely unrepresented. Filling this gap contributes to furthering the understanding of China's cultural diplomacy in the 21st century, because, as Maags (2014) suggests in her research, varied approaches and programming narratives can be observed in Chinese cultural diplomacy in different nations. To what extent does such conclusion apply to the CCC project needs to be further examined. However, this indeed serves as a further motivation for investigating the CCCS, as it will not only add to the knowledge of the CCC project, but also provide more insights into China's contemporary cultural efforts abroad.

Furthermore, this study holds that there is great value in a deeper understanding of the engagement and interaction between China and Australia through cultural activities, despite bumpy bilateral relations between the two countries in the past years. It is believed that China and Australia will continue to have an interest in each other and conduct exchanges through cultural diplomacy. The following aspects drive home this point. Firstly, Australia has close economic and social relations with China, which remains Australia's largest trading partner. Australia–China trade has been growing continuously over the years due to their highly complementary economies, despite ongoing political tensions and trade disputes in recent years. From a societal perspective, as of the end of 2021, the Chinese-born population is the third largest migrant group in Australia, making up 7.9 per cent of Australia's overseas-born population and 2.3 per cent of Australia's entire population (Department of Home Affairs 2023). Australia also has a long history of arts and cultural interaction with China since even before official diplomatic ties were established. Secondly, to China, Australia is of importance in the region as well. An obvious reason for this, as Australian economist Tim Harcourt argues, is that China will continue to need Australia's rich and quality natural resources, iron ore in particular, to fuel its economic growth (*9 News* 2021). In addition, Australia is a key pillar of the network of alliances that upholds America's dominance in the Asia Pacific (Schuman 2021). What happens between China and Australia will have a tremendous impact on China's relations with the US and its allies in the region. For example, Australia is a member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), a loose grouping including the US, Japan, and India that largely seeks to contain China (Schuman 2021). Australia is also part of the newly formed tripartite security

[14] See Damm's (2021) book chapter on the CCC in Berlin and Wang Song's (2019) Master's thesis on CCCs in Europe; see research on the CCC in Bangkok by Chen and Wang (2019) and Wang et al. (2021); see, also, Zhang and Guo's (2017) research on the CCC in Benin.

arrangement, AUKUS, which will equip Australia with nuclear-powered submarines, and is seen as a response to the security challenges posed by China in the region (Hill 2021). Given these facts, the stakes are high for China to have a worsening relationship with Australia, whereas maintaining a friendly and positive environment between the two countries seems to be a logical pursuit for Beijing.

In sum, the above two sections have outlined the rationale behind this research as well as the practical and methodological considerations concerning the choice of the case study. The following part will move to research methods, explaining how data has been collected and analysed in this thesis.

1.3.4 Research methods

One of the strengths of a case study is that it draws on various sources of information (Yin 2018). Data collected through different methods offers various dimensions of the empirical reality, helping form a more thorough and comprehensive understanding of the research subject. In the case of this study, sources include policy/official documents, media/journalistic publications, academic literature, other non-academic material, and interviews. The researcher's bilingual capacity in oral and written Chinese and English was of great value in accessing material concerning the CCC project in both languages. His linguistic competence in Chinese also facilitated interviews with those participants, who preferred to use Chinese to respond interview questions as, in their views, it would help articulate their points more accurately and comprehensively.

1.3.4.1 Policy/official documents

Documentation assumes an important role in conducting case study research, as it can be stable and unobtrusive, contain specific information, and cover a long span of time (Yin 2018). In this research, one source of data was policy/official documents released into the public domain by Chinese government bodies, such as the State Council and the MCT. A related source was information and reports published on websites of the CCC's headquarters, CCCS (including its social media accounts, such as WeChat, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter/X), as well as CCCs in other nations. These sources are important channels through which a variety of direct information about the CCC project can be gathered and thus deserve to be considered for insights they can provide. This type of material also oftentimes provides valuable details, such as names, titles, organisations, and times of particular events, which are helpful in verifying and corroborating information collected from other sources in this research.

1.3.4.2 Media/journalistic publications

Another source used in this thesis was media/journalistic publications regarding the CCC from both inside and outside China. Such media/journalistic reports focused either on the CCC project as a

whole, or on one particular case or several CCCs in different geographical locations. The researcher is aware of the risk of using Chinese state-owned/affiliated media sources which, due to issues of censorship and freedom of speech in China, may only publish state-sanctioned narratives and figures to the public. This point also applies to the use of the aforementioned policy/official documents from Chinese official sources. Nonetheless, this study holds that it is still important to make use of such material in a critical way, as they provide insights into intentions and strategies of the Chinese government in relation to the CCC project and, more broadly, Chinese cultural diplomacy. The identification of these aspects through documents from Chinese government and journalistic sources can, therefore, illuminate the purpose and approach of the CCC project's development and operation, which are highly relevant to research questions of this study.

Overall, the present study acknowledges the risk of over relying on documentation and treating the information contained in all types of documents as 'truth' unconditionally in case study research. As Yin (2018) has warned us, it is important to be mindful that documents are written with specific purposes and for particular audiences. This means that when reviewing documents, the researcher should try to identify and question the objectives embedded in such material, so as to avoid the likelihood of being misled. Therefore, the present research approached this type of data with a cautious and critical mind. To strengthen its validity, this research triangulated information by analysing official policy documents (Chinese) and media/journalistic publications (English and Chinese), which were cross-validated through the review of existing scholarly work (English and Chinese)—a further source in this study.

1.3.4.3 Academic literature

As mentioned before, there has been growing academic attention on the CCC project since 2015, when Chinese academics started to focus on this topic (Guo & Li 2018). Such works discussed the CCC project from different themes and perspectives. These include, for example, development and/or challenges (Chen 2019; Guo & Li 2018; Ruan 2015; Wei & Chen 2015), library resources (Wu 2018; Wu & Yu 2013), effectiveness (Wang et al. 2021; Zhang & Guo 2017), and the Belt and Road Initiative (Richter 2022). A series of studies also looked at the CCC project in comparison with CIs (Chen & Wang 2019; Guo & Zhang 2016; Guo, Zhang & Wang 2016). Furthermore, several studies analysed the CCCs with a particular geographical focus, including Europe (Damm 2021; Wang, S 2019), Thailand (Chen & Wang 2019; Wang et al. 2021), and Benin (Zhang & Guo 2017).

This study also drew on academic monographs on Chinese cultural diplomacy. These works include, for example, Hartig's (2015) *Chinese public diplomacy: The rise of the Confucius Institute*, which was one of the first comprehensive pieces of research on the CI project through the lens of public and cultural diplomacy. Liu Xin's (2021) *China's cultural diplomacy: a great leap outward?* is another important work which examined the main characteristics of Chinese cultural diplomacy

based on the case of CIs. A further study that is of value is Kong Da's (2021) *Museums, international exhibitions and China's cultural diplomacy*, in which the author looked at Chinese cultural diplomacy through China's loaned exhibitions in the UK. Apart from this body of scholarship regarding the CCC project and Chinese cultural diplomacy, a broader range of research on cultural diplomacy and soft power in a global context was also used in this thesis.

1.3.4.4 Other non-academic material

In addition, this study incorporates non-academic material, such as memoirs, catalogues, personal letters, and speech notes, that is related to specific cultural events analysed in this thesis. While some of these documents are publicly accessible, others are not. For example, the exhibition catalogue used in the analysis of the *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* exhibition in Chapter 8 was published in hard copy only by the CCCS in 2015 for the purpose of this event. While this material was available to the public at the time of the exhibition, it is difficult to locate a copy of this catalogue today. Furthermore, personal letters and speech notes were given to the researcher by two interviewees respectively. Such material was valuable in reflecting on and analysing specific cultural activities, particularly in Chapter 7, which examines the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition, and Chapter 8. Information like this is private and cannot be accessed publicly. Apart from the above, interviews are also a source of information, based on which data can be weighed up. The following section will turn to interviews as part of the research methods in this thesis.

1.3.4.5 Interviews

Interviews, as an important source of case study evidence, are helpful in exploring explanations of a key event and offering responses that are reflective of participants' distinct perspectives (Yin 2018). In particular, semi-structured in-depth interviews seek to extract rich information from the individual who possesses certain expertise that is of the interviewer's interest and predicated on the interviewee's direct experience (Morris 2015). In conducting this type of interview, the researcher covers the topics related to research questions and may further explore reasons as to why the respondents provide a particular response. In other words, semi-structured interviews not only seek for the what and how, but also why an individual interviewee perceives the world in a certain way.

This research adopted semi-structured interviews as a source of data collection, as it aims to explore experiences and views of those who have direct interaction with the CCCS through its cultural activities. When selecting interviewees, this study put in place a "purposeful sampling" strategy, which means that the researcher selected certain participants as they can "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell 2013, p. 156). The present study includes 13 semi-structured interviews with former Chinese and Australian cultural diplomats, as well as arts and cultural administrators, academics, and artists in Australia, all of whom have had first-hand experience in attending cultural events at the CCCS (a list

of interviewees can be seen in Appendix I). Their perceptions were drawn on in analysing the CCC project's establishment as well as three working modes and their associated events, which will be further explained in the data analysis section.

Prior to each interview, the researcher made contact, via phone and/or email, with the potential participant, introducing the nature of this research project and explaining why he/she was considered a suitable interviewee in relation to his/her profession and experience. Following this, an information sheet and consent form were sent to the potential interviewee. The former document provided details concerning the purpose of this research, rights of the participant, and the interview process. The latter mainly outlined ways in which the interview data should be collected (audio recording, video recording, or written answers), reiterated the participant's rights, and explained how data would be used and options for protecting the interviewee's identification in the thesis/potential publications (not to be identified in any way, to be identified only using a pseudonym, to permit the researcher to use the interviewee's name and title/organisation). While the majority of interviewees had agreed to be identified by their names and titles/organisations, the researcher made the decision to not disclose such information wherever possible for protecting interviewees' privacy. After the consent form was agreed and signed by both the potential participant and the researcher, the interview was then scheduled at a time and in a way (online/email) that were of the interviewee's preference.[15] Ten interviews were conducted online and recorded with permission from each participant. The average length of these interviews was approximately 60–80 minutes. The remaining three interviews were undertaken by email, in which written answers were given by the participants. Interviews in this research were carried out in English and Chinese, as per the interviewee's choice.

In the lead up to each interview, a list of themes and questions that might be discussed in the semi-structured interview was sent to the participant. The formulation of these topics and questions was first and foremost based on the research questions/sub-questions. A group of questions were designed to understand how different types of cultural events are planned and delivered at the CCCS, what are the potential implications on the organisation of the CCCS's activities, and their perceived outcomes. These questions contribute to knowledge of the CCC project's working modes and programming through the Australian case, broadly connecting with both research questions of this study. A second group of questions were developed to seek participants' perceptions of the CCCS's setup. They lead to the interviewees' accounts of the CCCS's structure and its difference or

[15] At the point when interviews were being arranged, domestic travel in Australia was still impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic to various degrees. To ensure a smooth process of data collection and analysis and meet deadlines in this research project, interviewees were given the options to proceed with the interview either via online meeting platforms (MS Teams/Zoom) or email. The rationale behind this decision was explained to potential participants, who showed their understanding and largely agreed to be interviewed online through video calls.

similarity compared with China's other cultural diplomacy initiatives, particularly CIs in Australia. Answers to these questions explain how the CCC project operates from an administrative perspective (concerned with part of sub-question 1 of the first research question), and shed light on the implications of the above aspects on the perception of the CCCS's establishment and operation in Australia (concerned with part of sub-question 1 of the second research question). Further questions were formulated to explore participants' views regarding the CCCS's activities. Responses to these inquiries show how the CCCS's planning and delivery of cultural programs are viewed from the receiving end of Chinese cultural diplomacy. They, too, lead to broader reflections on the implications of the CCC project's programming through the lens of the CCCS. Two additional questions were designed to allow participants to share what they consider as successful Chinese cultural diplomacy programs/events. These responses support other data obtained in the interviews and main findings of this research in offering lessons that can be learnt for China's cultural endeavours abroad.

Responses to the interview topics should contribute the necessary data to answer the research questions on the one hand, and also resonate with the existing research on the overarching theme (Morris 2015). Therefore, the design of the interview themes and questions in the present study also drew on other similar types of interviews conducted in pertinent studies.[16] The relevance and suitability of these studies are manifested in three dimensions. First, though with different research questions and emphases, these studies all focused on one initiative or aspect of China's government-led cultural undertakings overseas. Second, these studies were all concerned with the purpose, actors, and approach of China's cultural diplomacy. Thirdly, from a methodological perspective, they all adopted case studies as research design. The present study, too, has these characteristics, as it is a case study to investigate China's official cultural centre abroad as one of the country's cultural diplomacy projects. Therefore, it is justifiable for it to formulate interview topics and questions by drawing on these previous works (interview questions can be found in Appendix II).

As semi-structured interviews, these questions were asked, addressed, and followed up in a customised manner depending on each participant's professional background and experience. For example, former cultural diplomats were given more opportunities to share their insights into the

[16] For example, it has focused on three PhD theses, which have all been published as monographs. These research works include Kong Da's thesis, entitled *Imaging China: China's cultural diplomacy through loan exhibitions to British museums*, which examined the role of China's loan exhibition in China's cultural diplomacy in the 21st century (Kong 2015); Falk Hartig's thesis, titled *Confucius Institutes and the rise of China: how the People's Republic of China uses its cultural institutions abroad to communicate with the world*, which investigated the role of China's CIs as well as their approach and implications in the context of China's cultural diplomacy (Hartig 2013a); Liu Xin's thesis, entitled *An alternative framework of analysis to investigate China's Confucius Institutes: a great leap outward with Chinese characteristics?*, which mainly examined the prominent features of the CIs through the lens of Chinese cultural diplomacy (Liu 2017).

establishment and operation of the CCCS, and the CCC project in general, from a diplomatic perspective.[17] This is primarily due to their expertise in this field and experience in observing and practicing cultural diplomacy programs. Those with first-hand collaborative and/or participatory experience in specific events at the CCCS were encouraged to share more details on such processes and their perceptions concerning pertinent activities, so that valuable information could be elicited for understanding the operation and programming of the CCC project. Overall, these interviews were loosely guided by the list of themes and questions while tailored strategies were also implemented to optimise data collection through this research method.

To strengthen the validity of the interviews, a few measures were put in place. Two pilot studies were carried out to fine-tune interview design, avoiding leading and assumptive questions. Apart from minor grammatical revisions to some parts of the interview questions for clarity purposes, no substantive changes were made after the polit studies. To minimise misinterpretation, the researcher encouraged interviewees to provide feedback regarding comments they made in the interviews. In one case, the researcher sought to confirm a response with the participant, who agreed with the transcript with further clarification provided. This adjustment was then updated in the analysis and writing of data. Furthermore, contradictory information to the themes was treated carefully and accounted for as opposed to being simply disregarded.

1.3.5 Data analysis and presentation

Following data collection, this section will further explain the use and analysis of data in this research. A review on the existing academic literature on the CCC project and cultural diplomacy (international and Chinese lenses) was first performed. This body of work partly shaped the analytic priorities and inspired the formulation of interview topics and questions in this study. The analysis of these scholarly works also presented diverging and converging views concerning the purpose, actor, and approach in cultural diplomacy from both international and Chinese perspectives, providing the context in which the CCC project is examined in this study. This analytic process, complemented by policy/official documents and media/journalistic publications, is manifested in discussions in Chapters 2 and 3.

Policy/official documents, media/journalistic publications, and the existing literature on the CCC project and Chinese cultural diplomacy were also used to analyse the development, purpose, key relations, setup, programming focus, and practical issues in Chapter 4. This analysis is supported

[17] Interview questions for the former Chinese cultural diplomat in Australia were customised into a shorter version, mainly focusing on the purpose, activities, working modes, challenges of the CCCS, as well as similarities and differences between the CCC and CI projects in a general sense. These questions are listed separately in Appendix III.

by interview data, particularly in the discussion of the CCC project's setup and programming focus to explain why it has been less controversial as part of China's cultural diplomacy abroad.

Interviews were first transcribed and read through in their entirety to get a sense of each interview as a whole to "obtain a *general sense* of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning" (Creswell 2009, p. 185, italics in original). Interview transcripts were slightly edited for better coherence, with no substantive changes made in the content. Notes were taken by the researcher to record preliminary thoughts at this initial stage. Following this, data was further described, classified, and interpretated in codes and themes, a process that represents the core of qualitative data analysis (Creswell 2013). Both "prefigured" and "emergent" codes (Crabtree & Miller 1992, p. 151) were used to label relevant segments of the text. The former type of codes was developed based on the existing academic literature, while the latter originated from interviewees' accounts. The reason for adopting this strategy was to capture information that was not only expected to be found based on previous studies but also novel information to emerge from this research. This way, the researcher approached the data in a reflective manner and with open-mindedness, so as to avoid inaccurate interpretations and overlooking important information. Codes were then categorised into a set of broader themes based on emerging relationships identified among them through ongoing comparisons and analyses (codes and themes are presented in Appendix IV).

Data collected through interviews was largely used in examining the CCC project's working modes (global coordination, partnership with Chinese provincial-level governments, collaboration with local partners) and specific cultural events through the Australian case. In particular, interview data has been analysed and presented in Chapters 5 to 8 to elucidate the way in which the CCCS plans and delivers its activities, and how such working modes are perceived by the interviewees. This is supported by policy/official documents and media/journalistic publications, which shed light on the broader mechanism, aims, and characteristics of such working modes in in the eyes of the Chinese government.

To further understand the programming of the CCC project, interview data was, again, analysed and presented to illuminate the purpose, actor, and approach of selected events, which are representative of the CCC project's working modes respectively. It was also used to provide insights into Australian participants' perceptions of the CCC project's programming. This analysis is further complemented by examinations of media/journalistic publications, which are indicative of local reaction to these cultural activities. Specifically, the joint commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the passing of Chinese playwright Tang Xianzu and William Shakespeare is discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to the global coordination working mode; the CCCS's annual programming (from 2015 to 2021) under partnerships with Chinese provincial-level governments is analysed in Chapter 6; the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* and *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* exhibitions are

examined as examples of the CCCS's collaboration with local partners in Chapters 7 and 8 separately.

Overall, it can be said that policy/official documents, media/journalistic publications, and the existing literature were used to contextualise this research and map out the establishment, operation, and programming of the CCC project. Meanwhile, interviews were used to provide specific perspectives and highlight implications of those aspects on the CCC project in the context of Chinese cultural diplomacy. Findings in this research provide the foundation for further considering lessons that can be learnt in this regard.

1.3.6 Limitations

This thesis has the following limitations. First, it studies the CCC project as part of Chinese cultural diplomacy, hence does not necessarily represent China's other cultural diplomacy initiatives as a whole. The analysis of the CCC project in this research draws on the case in Australia and, therefore, does not claim to be representative of all CCCs and perceptions of all participants from other host nations. It is also not intended to present definitive generalisations of CCCs worldwide, as each individual CCC faces a unique situation where resources and circumstances in the host country vary. Nonetheless, while main aspects and issues of CCCs identified in this research may be manifested differently in various geographical locations, they are pertinent to CCCs as a whole. This concerns what Helen Simons (2009, p. 165, italics in original) calls "concept generalization", meaning that "the *concept* generalizes even when the specific instance is different". In this sense, primary themes highlighted in the present research are potentially applicable to further in-depth case studies on CCCs elsewhere, through which more empirical evidence can be collected, analysed, and compared. Furthermore, despite that while a case study has limited generalisability, the value of it, as John Creswell (2013, p. 200) points out, is nonetheless to develop "naturalistic generalizations" that offer lessons that can be learnt from the case either for themselves or other applicable situations. In this light, the implications of the CCC project's establishment, operation, and programming based on this case study provides lessons that are meaningful to China's other cultural diplomacy practice.

A second limitation in this research is that there is lesser focus on interviewing Chinese officials, including those from the embassy and consulate in Australia as well as the CCCS. This is largely due to reluctance from Chinese officials to be interviewed. For example, the researcher approached the director of the CCCS (at the time of writing), who initially agreed to be part of this research but did not respond to further emails to arrange details of the interview. The researcher managed to confirm an interview with a former Chinese senior cultural diplomat in Australia. This participant only agreed to provide written answers to one of the seven questions on the interview list. This hesitance was, perhaps, partly related to the fact that these Chinese officials were contacted at a sensitive

time when Australia was in the process of changing government and the bilateral relations between the two countries were still strained, hence the unwillingness to engage in extensive discussions and comments regarding the Chinese government's cultural diplomacy operation in Australia. Such intent was also reflected, more broadly, in remarks made by Chinese Ambassador in Australia, Xiao Qian, who said in a public speech at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) that "I've been keeping quiet during the federal election", avoiding commenting on Australian domestic affairs.[18] The researcher acknowledges that this situation may have been slightly different since the meeting between leaders of the two countries in November 2022 at the Group of Twenty (G20) summit in Bali and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's visit to China in November 2023, following which China–Australia relations appeared to show signs of a thaw. However, the overall timeline of this thesis simply could not accommodate such a delay in collecting and analysing interview data. Despite this, such a limitation is largely compensated by information gathered from varied sources in this thesis, including policy/official documents, media/journalistic publications, and academic literature, which provide valuable insights into the development, operation, and programming of the CCC project from the Chinese government's viewpoint. Furthermore, as the CCC project is created abroad, it is reasonable and important to find out how it is perceived by its receiving audience whose views particularly contribute to answers to the second research question, thus justifying this study's interview focus.

Thirdly, following the merge of China's Ministry of Culture and China National Tourism Administration to form the MCT in 2018, there appears to be tourism-related elements included in the CCC project's operation and programming. The ministerial-level amalgamation has also led to some cases in which directors of CCCs simultaneously take charge of the China National Tourism Offices in certain host countries. The present study acknowledges this new feature, but will not delve into the tourism dimension of the CCC project, as this is still a relatively new development and requires more data and observation for in-depth analysis. Nonetheless, this is an area that deserves attention for future research on China's international promotion of its cultural and tourism resources.

1.4 An overview of the China Cultural Centre in Sydney

As recently announced by the MCT, there has been 45 CCCs established in different countries around the world by the end of 2022 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2023). As China's national

[18] This event was hosted by the Australia–China Relations Institute at the UTS on 24 June 2022. The recording of Ambassador Xiao Qian's full address can be accessed via the following link: https://www.uts.edu.au/acri/events/utsacri-address-chinas-ambassador-australia-xiao-qian. The transcript of Xiao's address can be found via the following link: https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/20220624%20UTS%20ACRI%20address%20-%20China%27s%20Ambassador%20to%20Australia%20-%20Discussion.pdf.

cultural organisations abroad, typically, only one centre will be set up in a host country, with the exception of New Zealand, where two CCCs have been established in Wellington and Auckland.

In Australia, the CCCS opened in 2014 (China Cultural Centre in Sydney n.d.), as the first centre in Oceania and the 19th of its kind established by the MCT. As reported by Wang Kaihao (2014) of the *China Daily*, the CCCS began its trial operation in May 2014 and hosted about 30 events including exhibitions, performances, and lectures in the following months. The CCCS was jointly inaugurated, alongside the Peking Park in Canberra and China Pavilion in the library of the UTS, by Chinese President Xi Jinping and then Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott in November 2014 (*Chinaculture.org* 2014). During Xi's visit, the two countries also elevated the bilateral relations into a comprehensive strategic partnership and announced the substantial completion of Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations.

Located at 151 Castlereagh Street in Sydney's central business district, the site of the CCCS occupies the entire second floor of an office building, taking up a total of 850 square meters (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2014a). The venue opens to the general public with free access. Inside the venue, there is an art gallery for visual arts programs, a multi-purpose hall with the capacity to host performances, seminars, press conferences, and film screenings. It is also equipped with classrooms for calligraphy and painting classes, and a library that houses over 7,000 books and digital collections (China Cultural Centre in Sydney n.d.).

Despite being a Chinese official cultural organisations in Australia, the CCCS was registered as an Australian public company, being the first CCC of this type at the time of its establishment (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2014a). While there is not much information regarding the reasons for this, one speculation that can be made is that the intention was to fast-track the establishment of the CCCS given that the registration process of a public company in Australia is commonly less complicated and time-consuming than that of a foreign government entity. This interpretation echoes China's national policy to accelerate the expansion of the CCC project worldwide and the MCT's call for diversifying the establishment model to this end, as will be discussed in Chapter 4. At a time when there was no CCC in Oceania, it can be presumed that there was a desire to fill this void in the region and thus to broaden the global network of the CCC project. The fact that the CCCS has been set up as a public company with an open setting in central Sydney is in stark contrast with other Chinese government entities in Australia, such as the embassy and consulates. This, at least from a superficial level, distances the centre from being associated with the Chinese government and potentially creates a benign impression of the CCCS among the Australian general public.

Unlike other previously established centres, the CCCS was the first one set up in a non-capital city. In the view of the MCT, this is because Sydney is the largest city and port in Australia as well as the centre of business, trade, finance, culture, and tourism of the country (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2014a). Furthermore, compared to Australia's capital city, Canberra, Sydney has a large population, rich cultural life, and large numbers of museums, galleries, universities as well as developed infrastructure (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2014a). Taken together, as the MCT states, setting up the CCCS in Sydney better reflects the overall objectives of the CCC project for achieving quality, accessibility, friendship, and collaboration (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2014a). Although the manifestation of these objectives cannot be solely based on the selection of a city but also largely depends on the operation of CCCs, it can be seen that these aspects have been considered and justified, at least theoretically, in the planning of the CCCS.

In President Xi Jinping's (2014) speech at the Australian Parliament in 2014, he saw the CCCS as a platform to enhance mutual understanding that would lead to more people between the two countries to support and contribute to the friendship and cooperation between China and Australia. Such a goal is echoed by Xiao Xiayong (n.d.), former Director of the CCCS, stating that the CCCS "is dedicated to enhancing the mutual understanding of the two nations and promoting the existing friendship between the two peoples". In the meantime, other aims of the CCCS can also be identified through the MCT's statement, which, in addition to mentioning its function in facilitating cultural exchange, also perceives the CCCS as a further development of China's "going out" policy and an authoritative channel for the Australian public and organisations to understand China (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2014a). It further emphasises the important role of the CCCS in improving the planning and layout of the CCC project globally and enhancing the dissemination and promotion of Chinese culture in Oceania (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2014a). These aims, compared with those outlined by Xi and Xiao before, appear to be more strategically oriented.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of nine chapters. Following the introduction chapter, Chapter 2 first discusses different views concerning the roles and forms of culture in the context of cultural diplomacy. It then critically engages in international debates about cultural diplomacy, distinguishing cultural diplomacy from other related terms, including public diplomacy, cultural relations, propaganda, and soft power. It further presents two theoretical perspectives—functional and idealistic understanding—of cultural diplomacy and explains how cultural diplomacy is understood in this study.

Facilitated by a review of China's foreign policy in the 21st century and its understanding of soft power, Chapter 3 discusses how cultural diplomacy is seen in China, particularly in relation to its purpose, actor, and approach. Based on the existing academic literature, this chapter also highlights

perceived limitations in Chinese cultural diplomacy and presents Chinese scholars' alternative thoughts on China's conduct of cultural diplomacy. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss cultural diplomacy as a core concept in this research, reviewing similar and diverging perspectives of theoreticians and practitioners from both inside and outside China. Taken together, these two chapters provide the theoretical background against which the CCC project's purpose, setup, working modes, and programs will be examined in the following chapters.

Chapter 4 begins by outlining the history and development of the CCC project, followed by an analysis of its aims, key relations, setup, and activities. It also points out practical issues of the CCC project in relation to its finance and staffing. Using data collected from policy documents, media reports, websites of CCCs and Chinese government departments, and semi-structured interviews in Australia, this chapter investigates the role, structure, and operation of the CCC project in the context of China's cultural diplomacy. It particularly addresses sub-question 1 of the first research question concerning the CCC project's purpose, and its operation from an administrative viewpoint. Based on Australian interviewees' perceptions of the CCC's establishment and programming, this chapter further discusses implications of these aspects on China's cultural diplomacy, explaining why the CCC project has so far attracted little controversy, particularly compared with the CIs. This analysis connects with sub-question 1 of the second research question.

Chapters 5 to 8 discuss three working modes of the CCC project and their associated cultural events. These analyses are mainly based on the case of the CCCS, while relevant information of other CCCs is also incorporated, wherever possible and appropriate, to contrast or support arguments made through the case study. Primarily using data collected from websites of the Chinese government and CCCs, media/journalistic reports, and semi-structured interviews, these chapters discuss the mechanisms, goals, and traits of the CCC project's working modes from the standpoint of the Chinese government, examine the aims, actors, approaches, and local reaction regarding specific cultural events under each working mode through the CCCS, and present views about the CCC project's working modes and associated activities from Australian interviewees. These chapters further address sub-question 1 of the first research question by analysing the purpose and operation of the CCC project from a programming perspective. They also respond to sub-question 2 of the first research question regarding what cultural programs are being delivered through the CCC project. Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 further shed light on implications of the CCC project's programming on China's cultural diplomacy by drawing upon the case in Australia, thereby offering insights into sub-question 1 of the second research question of this study.

Specifically, Chapter 5 explains the global coordination working mode, which involves the entire global network of CCCs to present themed cultural events at certain times. This chapter uses one of the first major events delivered through this working mode—the joint commemoration of the 400th

anniversary of the passing of Chinese playwright Tang Xianzu and William Shakespeare—as an example. Chapter 6 is focused on the second working mode of the CCC project through partnership with Chinese provincial-level governments. In this working mode, each CCC receives and presents cultural programs dispatched from its domestic partner, typically being a Chinese province, municipal city, or autonomous region on a yearly basis. Discussions in this chapter particularly draws from the CCCS's annual programming under this working mode from 2015 to 2021. Based on the case of the CCCS, these two chapters also discuss related activities, which have been conducted along the aforementioned working modes and demonstrated a third working mode of the CCC project—collaboration with local partners. This working mode contrasts with the first two in the sense that it involves local actors in conducting China's cultural diplomacy, and is further explained and analysed through additional cultural events in the following two chapters.

Chapters 7 and 8 continue the discussion about the CCC project's collaboration with local partners. An overview of this working mode is provided at the beginning of Chapter 7, extending what has been touched in Chapters 5 and 6 in this regard by further pointing out programming characteristics associated with this working mode. Following this, Chapters 7 and 8 examine two relevant cultural events—*Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* and *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* exhibitions—that are both presented at the CCCS. The programming approach of these exhibitions not only involves actors from local society, but also shows considerations about audience reception and attempts to facilitate dialogues and mutual understanding. These characteristics are not reflected in other cultural activities discussed in this thesis and warrant further attention and analysis through the lens of cultural diplomacy.

Chapter 9 concludes this study by presenting its main findings. It summarises implications of the CCC project's setup, operation, and programming for China's cultural diplomacy. This chapter further presents lessons that can be learnt from the CCC project in the context of cultural diplomacy and identifies possible areas for future research.

CHAPTER 2 THE CONCEPT OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

Cultural diplomacy as a concept and practice is not new in the realm of international relations. Gary Rawnsley (2019) reminds us that countries like China, India, France, and the US have a long history of practising cultural diplomacy. Early academic works such as *Cultural approach: another way in international relations* examined the cultural relations programs of France, the UK, Germany, the US, Soviet Union, Japan, and parts of Latin America (Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico) based on official documents (McMurry & Lee 1947). Later, John Mitchell, a former British Council official, analysed the history of cultural relations and attempted to draw distinctions among propaganda, cultural diplomacy, and cultural relations (Mitchell 1986). Since the 2000s, a series of studies have emerged in the field of cultural diplomacy. The Centre for Arts and Culture,[19] a US independent non-profit think tank that fosters public debate about cultural policy, produced a number of research reports on cultural diplomacy. These reports analysed recent patterns and trends in American cultural diplomacy (Cummings 2003; Sablosky 2003), conducted comparative studies on cultural diplomacy based on multiple countries (Wyszomirsky 2003), offered empirical cases on what makes cultural diplomacy effective (Schneider 2003), and explored the potential role of philanthropic foundations in supporting cultural diplomacy (Szanto 2003). More recently, there is also growing interest in cultural diplomacy in academic debates. For example, following a special issue entitled "Cultural diplomacy—beyond the national interest?", guest edited by Ien Ang, Yudhishthir Raj Isar and Phillip Mar (2015), the *International Journal of Cultural Policy* released four dedicated issues focusing on the topic of cultural diplomacy and international cultural relations from 2017 to 2020. With an interdisciplinary perspective, these issues covered both theoretical and practical aspects of cultural diplomacy and international cultural relations, as well as the function and operation of cultural policies across diverse geo-cultural contexts, highlighting the importance of cultural diplomacy in the 21st century.

Despite a long history and continued interest in this area, cultural diplomacy remains ambiguous and contested in its conceptualisation and practice. This chapter aims to clarify the concept of cultural diplomacy by unpacking some of the major debates in this field. More specifically, it begins by discussing the roles and forms of culture in the context of cultural diplomacy. These perspectives are of importance as they have influenced and led to different understandings of cultural diplomacy. The second part of this chapter explains the concept of cultural diplomacy by distinguishing it from other related terms, including public diplomacy, cultural relations, propaganda, and soft power. The third section presents two definitions of cultural diplomacy based on the analysis in this chapter, followed by a conclusion that summaries how cultural diplomacy is understood in this study. This

[19] Now known as the Americans for the Arts.

chapter elucidates the core concept in this research and, together with Chapter 3, sets up a theoretical framework for the present study.

2.1 The meaning of culture in the context of cultural diplomacy

2.1.1 The role of culture in international affairs

Before going further into discussions about cultural diplomacy, it is necessary to first look at what culture means in the context of cultural diplomacy. A pertinent angle is concerned with the role of culture in international affairs. One strand of understanding perceives culture as a means to achieve international and foreign policy goals, especially through cultural projection and cultural representation. Through the lens of international history, Eckart Conze (2004, p. 199) noted that such a functional role of culture could be seen in world exhibitions in the 19th century as states and governments instrumentalised culture to promote culturally formed images and strengthen "stability, security or even hegemony".

Some international scholars further contemplate the role of culture in reshaping the world order following the end of the Cold War. Akira Iriye (1997, p. 3), taking the position of cultural internationalism, sees culture as "structures of meaning", encompassing such aspects as "memory, ideology, emotions, life styles, scholarly and artistic works and other symbols". He applies the concept of culture in the context of international relations to describe the "sharing and transmitting of consciousness within and across national boundaries" (Iriye 2004, p. 242). In this sense, as Hwajung Kim (2017) comments, Iriye's understanding of culture and cultural interactions in a multi-cultural world represents the promotion of mutual understanding and intercultural cooperation in addressing global issues in the area such as the environment, human rights, and population explosion. Following this thought, César Villanueva Rivas (2010) champions a theoretical perspective of cosmopolitan constructivism, underlying the importance of people and cultures, and emphasising the role of cultural diplomacy in the intersubjective construction of ideas, norms and identities for facilitating cooperation, welfare and understanding. This viewpoint recognises the diversity among cultures, exchanges between societies and people-to-people interactions, all of which, as Villanueva holds, are conducive to establish common understanding. It also underscores that the primary aim of cultural diplomacy is to forge long-term friendship, mutual understanding as well as global peace and cooperation between countries and peoples in the world (Villanueva 2018).

2.1.2 Culture as the content in cultural diplomacy

Another perspective to understand culture is through the lens of forms. Harvard Professor Joseph Nye (2004, p. 11) understands culture as "the set of values and practices that create meaning for a society", manifesting in forms including both high culture that is attractive to elites and popular

culture which is centred on mass entertainment. Although John Brown (2020, p. 79) only includes the use of high art such as music, literature, and painting as cultural elements in defining what he calls “arts diplomacy”, others appear to hold that culture should be more than high art, suggesting a wider and more comprehensive understanding of culture to be employed in cultural diplomacy. For example, Mitchell (1986, p. 8) is of the view that culture consists of both “the intellect and the arts” and “a way of life and the values that this manifests”. To him, the purpose of cultural diplomacy and cultural relations is not just about showcasing high culture, but of equal importance to represent the living aspects of a nation (Mitchell 1986). Evan Potter (2009) notes that as popular culture spreads through the world, cultural diplomacy should not only include high art, such as symphony orchestra, ballet, and theatre performances, but also middle-brow or popular forms of entertainment including sports and gaming. It is worth noting that Potter (2009), slightly different from Mitchell, argues from an audience’s perspective that it is necessary for cultural diplomacy to shift the focus to popular culture which permeates the globe and increases in relevance in today’s world. He further states that this is not to say that traditional cultural diplomacy, which emphasises the use of high art, is to be abandoned, but it does mean that popular culture should be included in today’s cultural diplomacy for opening doors and reaching a wider audience beyond the elite group (Potter 2009). In other words, modern cultural diplomacy has to endeavour to engage with the general public, whose opinion and reaction have become more important in today’s international relations. Indeed, in the context of cultural diplomacy, as argued by Rawnsley (2021), it is up to the audience rather than the government to decide which messages to receive and internalise, and if they will change their attitudes accordingly. The present study holds that the content of cultural diplomacy should be understood in a broader sense and include cultural forms of both high art and popular culture.

To summarise, this section has briefly discussed two dimensions to understand the concept of culture in relation to cultural diplomacy, namely, its role and content. The rest of this chapter continues to examine the concept of cultural diplomacy by reviewing debates concerning its similarities and differences with public diplomacy, cultural relations, propaganda, and soft power, which oftentimes cause confusion in analysing and applying the concept of cultural diplomacy. In so doing, the following sections further help elaborate the rationale behind the chosen theoretical and definitional stance on cultural diplomacy in this study.

2.2 Cultural diplomacy and related terms: public diplomacy, cultural relations, propaganda, soft power

2.2.1 Cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy

The ambiguity in the concept of cultural diplomacy is perhaps first due to confusion with other cognate terms such as public diplomacy. Scholars (Goff 2020; Kong 2015; Mark 2009) have noted that there is a blurry line between the two terms. The vague distinction between them even

appeared in government documents, as a US State Department report described cultural diplomacy as the “the linchpin of public diplomacy” (US Department of State 2005, p. 1). It is common to see that cultural diplomacy is perceived, conceptually and practically, as a part of public diplomacy. Nicholas Cull (2008) offers a typology of public diplomacy that includes listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, and international news broadcasting. In practice, countries such as New Zealand, Canada, the UK, Australia, and Japan characterise and conduct cultural diplomacy within the scope of public diplomacy (Mark 2009). Notwithstanding these perceived overlaps, it is important to note that cultural diplomacy is not synonymous with public diplomacy, which was coined in 1965 by Edmund Gullion, who was the Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University and the founder of the Edward R. Murrow Centre of Public Diplomacy. According to an early brochure of the Murrow Centre,

> [p]ublic diplomacy … deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as between diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the processes of inter-cultural communications (Public Diplomacy Alumni Association 2008).

While the original use of the term was out of the need for the US Information Agency (USIA) to search for an alternative yet benign concept to substitute the malicious notion of propaganda (Cull 2020), public diplomacy now generally means a government’s communication with foreign audiences with the aim of positively influencing them (Mark 2010), seeking to create “a desired result that is directly related to a government’s foreign policy objectives” (McClellan 2004).

One way to understand the difference between cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy is to look at their scopes. It is evident, especially seen through Cull’s typology, that public diplomacy incorporates a wider range of elements which are beyond cultural diplomacy’s scope. Although one can argue that such elements could fall under the category of cultural diplomacy by employing a much broader definition of culture, Mark (2009) is of the view that the connection between these activities and a state’s culture is too weak to make them part of cultural diplomacy.

Compared to public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy is also less directly affiliated with policy or the promotion of the acceptance of policies (Schneider 2009). Instead, it pursues mutual understanding and therefore seeks to foster a context within which a country’s national interests and policies can be understood (Sablosky 2003). Thus, if public diplomacy attempts to, through the explanation of a country’s policies, convince the general public abroad, then cultural diplomacy underlines cultural understanding through cultural means, and the outcome of cultural diplomacy does not have to be an immediate agreement (Kong 2015).

This leads to a further difference between the two terms. The distinction was pinpointed in a report produced by a group of experts commissioned by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to identify the country's interests in culture and foreign policy. In particular, the report emphasised the importance of differentiating the role of public and cultural diplomacy by stating that "public diplomacy characterizes a country's need to directly address the citizens of another country, frequently and with powerful measures, with a view to attaining short-term goals. Cultural Diplomacy is the part of general diplomacy that is charged with fostering relationships with other countries that can be sustained in the long term using culture as a medium" (cited in Villanueva 2018, p. 686). This description distinguishes cultural diplomacy from public diplomacy in terms of their timeframes, as the former emphasises the long-term interchange among nations (Sablosky 2003) and is "less immediately interest-driven" (Bagger 2012, p. 45), while the later focuses on short-term effectiveness (Cull 2010).

It is worth noting that scholars in the field of public diplomacy now champion the notion of "new public diplomacy", which emphasises a two-way communication centred on dialogue and engagement (Cull 2010; Melissen 2005b; Pamment 2013). This new paradigm reorients public diplomacy away from a traditional focus on top-down communication to a greater emphasis on people-to-people engagement (Cull 2010), shifting it from "peddling information to foreigners and keeping the foreign press at bay, towards engaging with foreign audiences" (Melissen 2005a, p. 13). This paradigmatic change in public diplomacy reflects the impact of globalisation coupled with innovations in technology and media on a new international environment, in which non-state actors gain more powers in world affairs that has previously been dominated by nation-states (Fitzpatrick 2011). Rosenau (2003) captures the multiplicity of actors in today's world by noting the diversity of characters, such as educational and cultural organisations, NGOs, businesses, and even individuals, operating in world affairs in the era of globalisation. This phenomenon has resulted in the erosion of state control over diplomacy (Kelley 2010). Therefore, as Kathy Fitzpatrick (2011) argues, it is imperative for nations to pursue a more collaborative relationship with the general public abroad through engagement rather than simply telling one's story to the audience based on a one-way communication approach. In a broader sense, such a change in the understanding of public diplomacy echoes the current shift in diplomatic practice, as globalisation has led diverse actors into the diplomatic field which was traditionally restricted to diplomats and their fellow government officials. As innovative relationships develop among a heterogenous cast of diplomatic actors, the nature of diplomacy subsequently becomes more relational (Sending, Pouliot & Neumann 2011). As Goff (2020) argues, diplomacy itself evolves to include more actors from civil society and focus more on building bridges and forging understanding.

Notably, the “new public diplomacy” draws itself closer to cultural diplomacy in the sense that the former strives to foster mutual understanding and sustainable relationships between nations and the general public abroad by adopting a more dialogic and interactive approach. What is essential in this approach is dialogue (Fitzpatrick 2011), which should be considered as “a method for improving relationships and increasing understanding, not necessarily for reaching consensus or for winning an argument” (Cowan & Arsenault 2008, p. 19). This way of thinking appears to resonate with what has been discussed earlier regarding cultural diplomacy’s traits, such as mutuality-driven, open, and long-term oriented. It is in this light that Kim (2017), who attempts to address the theoretical complexity of the definition of cultural diplomacy, holds that there is an overlap between today’s cultural diplomacy and the “new public diplomacy”.

In sum, this study understands cultural diplomacy differently from public diplomacy, which, compared with cultural diplomacy, has a wider scope. Public diplomacy aims to influence the general public abroad positively through the promotion of governments’ policies for attaining short-term objectives that are associated with a country’s foreign policies. In comparison to public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy is less directly affiliated with promoting government policies. It seeks mutual understanding and to create a context which, as pointed out by Rawnsley (2021, p. 19), can serve as “the foundations for other forms of political and non-political interaction”. In terms of its timeframe, cultural diplomacy aims to foster a long-term relationship through cultural means as opposed to achieving an immediate agreement.

This study also acknowledges that globalisation, accompanied by developments in technology and media, has an impact on today’s world, in which non-state actors assume more powers and states have less dominance and control in international affairs and diplomacy than before. As a result, the nature of diplomacy has become more relational. In particular, public diplomacy tends to focus on a collaborative relationship with the general public abroad, and emphasises a two-way communication centred on dialogue and engagement. This current way of conceiving public diplomacy is regarded as the “new public diplomacy”, which draws itself closer to cultural diplomacy as it attempts to foster mutual understanding and sustainable relationships between nations and the general public abroad through a dialogic and interactive approach. It is through this angle that the present study recognises the overlaps between the two terms.

2.2.2 Cultural diplomacy and cultural relations

Cultural diplomacy and cultural relations are usually used interchangeably, causing confusion about what they actually mean. While both terms refer to interactions between modern states through culture and recognise the role of culture in international affairs, they are different from each other (Mitchell 1986).

Discussions about the distinction between these two terms typically lie in who the actor is. To some scholars, as Faucher (2016) points out, a defining feature of cultural diplomacy is state intervention. For example, John Mitchell (1986, p. 3) sees cultural diplomacy as “essentially the business of governments” whereas cultural relations “has a wide reference going beyond the governments and their agencies” and can be carried out by private or public institutions. In a similarly vein, Richard Arndt, a retired US cultural diplomat, also emphasises the government’s role in cultural diplomacy and holds that cultural diplomacy “can only be said to take place when formal diplomats, serving national governments, try to shape and channel this natural flow to advance national interests”, which contrasts with cultural relations that “grow naturally and organically, without government intervention” (2005, p. xviii).

Since actors in cultural diplomacy and cultural relations are perceived differently, distinct goals are connected with each of these terms. As Mitchell (1986) explains, cultural diplomacy has two layers of meaning, which include the making of cultural agreements between governments on the first level and the execution of these cultural agreements on the second level. Diplomats are usually the actor of implementing these agreements abroad with the aim to achieve goals that are in line with official policies and national interests (Mitchell 1986). On the contrary, cultural relations, in the view of Mitchell (1986, p. 5), flow from the government-initiated cultural agreements and do not pursue “one-sided advantage”, and are most effective when they seek to achieve understanding and cooperation between countries for mutual benefits. Therefore, he argues that cultural relations should be an open exchange rather than projecting a preferred image of a country, and that national problems should neither be concealed nor paraded in this process (Mitchell 1986). The benefit of cultural relations, emphasised by Mitchell (1986), is long-term relationships, which contrast with immediate national interests and that can thrive provided they are not dependent on politics. It is in this light that he opines that cultural relations work is best conducted by organisations that maintain a certain level of independence from the government (Mitchell 1986).

What is unconvincing about Mitchell’s characterisation of cultural relations is its idealistic purposes and perceived neutrality compared to cultural diplomacy. Firstly, as discussed before, cultural diplomacy in the contemporary world emphasises mutual understanding, open-mindedness, and long-term relationships, all of which are related to idealistic pursuits. Secondly, non-state actors, such as arts and cultural practitioners, do associate their practice with certain political values/objectives, which may be progressive and intense, and even contradictory to those of the governments’. Such examples include the academic and cultural boycotts against South Africa’s apartheid, and Chinese activist artist Ai Weiwei whose work is deeply political and critical of the Chinese government. In this sense, it seems premature to reckon that cultural relations organised and conducted by non-state actors are always neutral and non-political.

Additionally, Mitchell's description regarding the organisational independence in practising cultural relations work also seems vague. It is unclear what exactly such independence refers to, as he appears to consider cultural relations as another mode of cultural diplomacy for the former "employ the resources granted by governments and the benefits resulting from international agreements" (Mitchell 1986, p. 5). It is, thus, indeterminate as to whether the independence of an organisation should be based on its constitution or source of funding, or both. This vagueness has essentially blurred the distinction drawn by Mitchell between cultural diplomacy and cultural relations through the lens of actors and their corresponding goals.

Rawnsley (2019), on the other hand, provides a more specific explanation to clarify the term cultural relations in this regard. He argues that cultural relations operate without and sometimes in defiance of government intervention, through civil society as opposed to government-sponsored activities. Examples of cultural relations, as noted by Rawnsley (2021), are those taken by cultural industries themselves, daily interactions in civil society, engagement with overseas students and diaspora communities. Compared to Mitchell's account, Rawnsley's description is more decisive in specifying the nature of the actors in cultural relations from a theoretical perspective. Nonetheless, he admits that to distinguish cultural diplomacy and cultural relations in terms of their actors and goals is not easy in practice because the distinction between these terms is "one major site of fluidity" (Rawnsley 2019, p. 5).

The present study agrees with Rawnsley on the point that it has become difficult to separate governmental and non-governmental actors in today's international cultural arena. This is particularly true given that, as mentioned before, there are varied types of actors involved in cross-border cultural exchange due to a growing flow of people, products, media, and technology led by globalisation. Furthermore, the practice of cultural diplomacy depends heavily on the expertise and professionalism possessed by arts and cultural practitioners. As Jessica Gienow-Hecht and Mark Donfried (2010b, p. 10), long-time cultural diplomacy researcher and Director of the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy respectively, note, "unlike in other areas of diplomacy, the state cannot do much without the support of non-governmental actors such as artists, curators, teachers, lecturers and students". In addition, when conducting diplomatic activities, governments may proactively engage with non-state actors for achieving effectiveness and credibility which are hard to obtain today by the foreign government alone (Hartig 2015), as the general public tends to associate government-driven activities as propaganda and thereby with less legitimacy. This point will be further elaborated in the next section, which discusses issues related to cultural diplomacy and propaganda.

Furthermore, instead of considering the goals of cultural diplomacy and cultural relations separately, this study is supportive of a more dynamic perspective. This is because as non-state actors are involved as practitioners in contemporary cultural diplomacy, they may lead to certain implications

for the practice of cultural diplomacy. For example, while a government may aim to advance its economic and political objectives through cultural diplomacy, arts and cultural practitioners who participate in the practice might not be motivated by such lofty goals at all. As scholars note, artists are more concerned with mutual learning and intercultural experiences in the process of cultural exchange (Ang, Isar & Mar 2015; Rösler 2015). Instead of proselytising about their own values, artists, in fact, want to be influenced rather than influence (Channick 2005). Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that while non-state actors have broadened the range of participants in cultural diplomacy, they may also play a role in affecting the conduct of cultural diplomacy.

Taken together, this study agrees that although governments' involvement in cultural diplomacy is unlikely to disappear (Gienow-Hecht & Donfried 2010a), they are "no longer the exclusive actors of cultural diplomacy" (Kong 2015, p. 16). As Wang Jian (2006, p. 94) argues, "while government is still the driving force behind public diplomacy, the onus can no longer fall on the nation-state government alone". While Wang's argument is made in the context of public diplomacy, the point also applies to cultural diplomacy.

2.2.3 Cultural diplomacy and propaganda

Despite former Canadian diplomat Robin Higham simply regarding cultural diplomacy as "self-interested national-propaganda" (2001, p. 138), this study perceives the two terms differently. Kevin Mulcahy (1999a) argues that cultural diplomacy, such as exchanges and performing arts productions, should be distinguished from propaganda, which is typically embodied in informational and psychological activities, such as news and broadcasts with the aim of explaining a country's political objectives and policies abroad. Propaganda, as he notes, has an explicit and immediate political content, whereas cultural diplomacy adopts indirect methods including the free exchange of ideas, events, and peoples with long-range goals (Mulcahy 1999a).

In addition, scholars further distinguish the two terms based on their purposes. To Jan Melissen (2005a), a defining feature of propaganda is that it seeks to tell people what to think and aims to constrain and close the minds of targeted audiences abroad. Conversely, cultural diplomacy, as argued by Ljuben Tevdovski, former Macedonian Ambassador to Canada and archaeologist, promotes openness and diversity as the "audience is given opportunity to entirely disagree with the policies of a state, and still appreciate, cherish or enjoy segments of its culture" (cited in Kong 2015, p. 18). Similarly, Robert Albro (2012) holds that cultural diplomacy is fundamentally different from propaganda as the latter seeks to manipulate the general public for the purpose of control, oftentimes by means of intentional distortion or holding back key facts. Following this line of argument, Mitchell (1986, p. 28) is of the view that "cultural propaganda is at one end of a scale that passes through cultural diplomacy to cultural relations at the other", suggesting a progression in terms of the level of control expressed through these terms.

The differences with respect to the content, goals, and approaches of cultural diplomacy and propaganda also have implications on the issue of effectiveness. As Gienow-Hecht and Donfried (2010a) note, people tend to associate state-driven cultural diplomacy programs with propaganda, and thus to perceive such programs that are connected to a governmental agenda as less legitimate (Gienow-Hecht & Donfried 2010a). On the contrary, people are oftentimes more willing to accept cultural programs as benevolent activities when they are organised by non-state actors, albeit the aims of these events could be more radical and controversial (Gienow-Hecht & Donfried 2010a). As a result, these scholars argue that cultural diplomacy is more likely to be effective when there is less involvement of the government that aims to achieve its political or economic agenda (Gienow-Hecht & Donfried 2010a).

It is worth pointing out that parallel to the above moralist understanding of propaganda, which interprets the term as "intrinsically misleading and therefore morally reprehensible", the neutralist view towards the concept shows an opposing way of thinking (Brown 2006). A representative scholar that favours such a value-neutral understanding is Harold Lasswell, who holds that propaganda "as a mere tool is no more moral or immoral than a pump handle" (cited in Brown 2006). Rawnsley (2000, p. 1) echoes this view by arguing that propaganda is "merely the means to a predetermined end", and the concept should not be judged morally. While this study acknowledges the philosophical and ethical differences between the moralist and neutralist stances, it adopts the understanding that considers propaganda in a pejorative sense. This is because such an understanding is in line with how the general public perceives the term, as observed and articulated by Gienow-Hecht and Donfried in their research concerning people's propensity to link government presence and agenda in cultural diplomacy to sinister and illegitimate propagandistic actions. The reason for this correlation, as Nye (2004) explains, is concerned with the publics' general scepticism and mistrust towards authority. The present study also holds that this point is of great relevance to China's government-driven cultural diplomacy, which is oftentimes seen as propaganda campaigns overseas. This point will be revisited in the next chapter, which focuses on debates about China's cultural diplomacy.

To summarise, cultural diplomacy and propaganda are different in terms of their content, aims, and methods. Propaganda is concerned with advancing a country's political objectives and policies by controlling and constraining the public's mind through informational and psychological activities with explicit and immediate political content. Compared to propaganda, cultural diplomacy contains free exchange of ideas, events, and peoples sustainably and promotes a sense of openness over the course of such cultural encounters. In the contemporary world, people tend to associate the government's involvement and its agenda with propaganda due to the general public's incredulity and disbelief at authority. In this sense, state-driven cultural diplomacy is likely to be seen by the

pubic audience with less legitimacy. While recognising the alternative philosophical stance, which regards propaganda as a value-neutral communication tool, this study adopts the negative understanding of the term for analytical and practical reasons.

2.2.4 Cultural diplomacy and soft power

The development of Joseph Nye's concept of soft power was a turning point in terms of moving culture and international relations practice away from the term propaganda (Faucher 2016). In his book *Soft power: the means to success in world politics*, Nye explains two ways to achieve the outcomes one wants, one through inducements or threats, which is commonly known as hard power, the other through attraction, which is considered as soft power (Nye 2004). Contrary to hard power that relies on military and economic might to obtain what one wants, soft power rests on the ability to shape others' preferences, co-opting people rather than forcing them to achieve desired outcomes (Nye 2004). In this sense, Nye defines soft power as "the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment" (Nye 2008, p. 94). He further clarifies the concept by emphasising that soft power is more than influence, which after all can also be generated by the force of military threats and economic sanctions; nor is it merely concerned with persuading or moving people by argument, though that constitutes an important part of the term (Nye 2004). Soft power is also the ability to attract, and simply stated, "in behavioral terms soft power is attractive power" (Nye 2004, p. 6).

In his conceptualisation, Nye (2004) explains that a country's soft power comes from three sources: culture, political values, and foreign policies. A nation's cultural aspects, such as literature, art, education, films, fashion, popular music, which reflect a nation's values and ideas could be appealing to others, hence increasing the probability of generating preferred outcomes. Furthermore, Nye (2004) argues that a country's political values and domestic policies in areas including immigration, employment, education, health care or income equality could also be sources of soft power provided the government not only proclaim them but also act in accordance with them in governing the country. In addition, Nye (2004) notes the substance and style of a country's foreign policy are also a potential source of attractiveness on the condition that they are perceived as legitimate and possess moral authority. For instance, policies that are reflective of inclusiveness and far-sighted articulations of the national interest are more likely to be appealing to others than those that take a narrow and myopic point of view; foreign policies, as Nye (2004) continues to add, that manifesting widely shared values and ideals, such as democracy, human rights, and multilateralism are also more probable to gain attraction.

While, as Goff (2020) points out, it is common to invoke soft power in conversations about cultural diplomacy and to equate the two terms synonymously, this study is of the view that they should be carefully examined and distinguished. In Nye's explanation about culture as a source of soft power,

he notes that there appears to be confusion concerning the possession of cultural resources and the use of such resources to produce attraction for the obtainment of soft power. He denies a direct connection between the two aspects, noting that there is no guarantee that the possession of soft power resources will lead to the desired outcome one intends to achieve, and that the understanding of these sources needs to be situated in a given context (Nye 2004). That is to say that, firstly, cultural resources do not equate with soft power. A country's culture and values are not inherently appealing in different regions and among different groups of people. For example, American popular cultural elements such as films and music, usually associated in non-western cultures with materialism, individualism, and open attitudes towards sex and gender, appear to be not as favourable and welcome in Middle Eastern and South Asian countries, despite their popularity elsewhere in the world (Gil 2017).

Following this point, it is worth quoting Nye who notes the difference between soft power and cultural diplomacy in this regard. As he explains,

> The distinction between power measured in behavioral outcomes and power measured in terms of resources is important for understanding the relationship between soft power and cultural diplomacy. In international politics, the resources that produce soft power arise from the values an organization or country expresses in its culture, in the examples it sets by its internal practices and policies, and in the way it handles its relations with others. Cultural diplomacy is one of the public diplomacy instruments that governments use to mobilize these resources to produce attraction by communicating with the publics rather then [sic] merely the governments of other countries. If the content of a country's culture, values and policies are not attractive, public diplomacy that "broadcasts" them cannot produce soft power. It may produce just the opposite (Nye 2010, p. 121).

Although this study supports a more nuanced understanding with respect to the differences and overlaps between cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy, it follows Nye's interpretation in the sense that cultural diplomacy and soft power are different, and a nation's culture, depending on the context, may or may not contribute to the development of soft power.

Secondly, Nye's conceptualisation of soft power also alludes to the gap between cultural attraction and soft power. A country's cultural attraction or familiarity among others does not necessarily translate into soft power. For example, while it has been pointed out that Chinese culture, among foreign publics, enjoys a high level of acquaintance which may even turn into attraction, there is less evidence regarding how such cultural familiarity and appeal can transform into tangible outcomes and contribute to the state's political goals (Rawnsley 2021). In other words, a country's cultural attraction does not necessarily result in behavioural changes of others that are deemed as desired outcomes of that country.

Rawnsley (2021, p. 15) further articulates the difference between cultural diplomacy and soft power in this regard by noting that the former is "one of the instruments that can actually help achieve the

levels of familiarity and attraction that proponents mistakenly claim for soft power". This is first because, as Ang, Isar, and Mar (2015, p. 368, italics in original) emphasise, "cultural attractiveness per se is *not* soft power on its own", unless "it is deployed to achieve clearly defined policy objectives under a thought-out strategy". Secondly, following Nye's conceptualisation of the term, soft power is not merely about a country's culture, but also contingent on its political values and foreign policies (Ang, Isar & Mar 2015). That is to say that a government's behaviour at home and overseas, as well as the credibility and legitimacy of its behaviour, also affect a country's projection of soft power (Rawnsley 2021). As Nye (2008, p. 96) admits, "cultural soft power can be undercut by policies that are seen as illegitimate". A case in point here is the plummeting of America's attractiveness after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, an action that led to people's negative view towards the Bush's administration and its policies (Nye 2004). The present study holds that this point is of particular relevance in the context of China's cultural diplomacy, which, as the following chapter will show, is heavily influenced by and yoked to the concept of soft power, while facing credibility/legitimacy-based setbacks due to the country's polity and policies on the international stage and domestic front.

There is, however, another perspective from which to examine cultural diplomacy and soft power. Many governments now pursue soft power as a key objective of foreign policies by showcasing the appeal of their nations' culture (Ang, Isar & Mar 2015). Based on previous discussions about Nye's conceptualisation, this is evidently a distortion of his original conception of how culture can generate soft power. Though a misreading, this understanding, which tends to directly link a country's culture to its soft power, has a huge impact on various governments' design of their cultural diplomacy policies. For example, Hyungseok Kang (2015) observes that influenced by the increasing soft power discourse, post-industrial countries have been proactively instrumentalising their national culture and values to facilitate their economic and foreign policy goals. Koichi Iwabuchi (2015) agrees on the impact of the soft power idea on cultural diplomacy, noting that cultural diplomacy strategies that are based on the projection of a selected national image and the export of attractive cultural products are still prevailing in Japan and other East Asian countries. As a result, cultural diplomacy in the context of soft power is seen as "little more than nation-branding or a popularity contest" (Rawnsley 2021, p. 14), or the projections of the attractiveness of the so-called national culture (Ang, Isar & Mar 2015). To put it differently, such a perception of soft power has intensified a sense of cultural competition through cultural diplomacy among different countries in the world. Some scholars subsequently raise concerns about and even challenge this functional understanding of cultural diplomacy through the lens of soft power. Iwabuchi (2015) argues that Japan's unilateral pop-culture diplomacy is not successful in terms of facilitating intercultural dialogue, hindering meaningful engagement with foreign audiences. In a similar vein, Albro (2015) questions the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy based on projecting a spectacle abroad. He

critiques the assumption often held by diplomats that the communication of culture, which tends to be reified in images and ideas, is readily presentable and a one-track process. There is indeed no guarantee that the interpretation of a cultural product in a recipient country will be in line with the original intention of the sender (Ang, Isar & Mar 2015). Therefore, it is reasonable to question whether image projection through cultural diplomacy is effective at all in achieving its pre-determined objectives. In fact, Albro (2015, p. 390) has gone further arguing that when conducting cultural diplomacy through a soft-power-based approach of image projection, “the very meaning of culture in international affairs begins to look a lot like a zero-sum normative contest” as different countries adopt distinct conceptions and strategies of soft power for their own goals, consequently undermining intercultural dialogue and even re-entrenching national differences than to cross them.

It is in this light that Ang, Isar, and Mar (2015) argue that cultural diplomacy should shift from the focus on soft power projection that is centred on a one-sided/nation-centric approach to a more dialogic and collaborative approach. From a communication point of view, this approach is in contrast with the traditional communication method through which “carefully crafted *messages* disseminated via *mass media vehicles* to a *target audience* with the goal of *changing attitudes or behavior*” (Zaharna 2010, p. 94, italics in original). Scholars who champion a dialogic and collaborative way to perceive cultural diplomacy have typically focused in their empirical research on relational and open understandings cultivated through continued cultural exchanges (Carter 2015; Lowe 2015; Rösler 2015). While such engagement between peoples is not, and perhaps should not be, about leading to consensus or eliminating differences, the point of establishing such connections through cultural diplomacy is rather concerned with recognising diversity (Rawnsley 2021). Rösler (2015) echoes this by arguing that cultural diplomacy is to equip people with cross-cultural perspectives which help enhance a cosmopolitan capacity for them to interact with and understand various cultural practices. Although cultural diplomacy in this idealistic sense is not necessarily associated with a political or economic agenda, it may have long-term national benefits beyond narrowly defined political and economic interests of a country. As Rösler (2015) argues, cultural diplomacy raises people’s awareness of other cultural norms and, in the meantime, affords them the ability to communicate and interpret sensitively across diverse cultural terrains. Such intercultural capacities, according to Rösler (2015), is beneficial for a nation’s interest, such as peaceful international engagement. David Lowe’s study on Australia’s involvement in the Colombo Plan also demonstrates strong people-to-people relations developed with Asian countries, arguably laying the foundation to Australia’s later multicultural orientation (Lowe 2015).

These examples are especially relevant to today’s interconnected and complex world which is marked by culturally diverse realities of nations that extend beyond physical borders. Living in a post-9/11 world, this past tragedy still reminds us that a lack of cultural understanding can lead to an

international conflict that is worse and far less manageable compared with the clash between great powers during the Cold War. It also shows how crucial it is to seek new ways to approach cultural differences through sustainable dialogue and understanding between peoples and countries. Cultural diplomacy, in this sense, presents an opportunity to avoid or minimise such clashes, as it shows the willingness to engage with others with an open mind to distinct cultural practices as opposed to seeking conformity (Tomlinson 1999). As Rawnsley (2021) highlights, cultural diplomacy has the potential to be the forerunner to initiate other forms of discussion about points of difference.

In sum, this study sees cultural diplomacy and soft power differently from two dimensions. First, cultural diplomacy is not soft power in the sense that the former may facilitate the familiarity and attraction of a nation's culture among other countries, whereas the latter is ultimately concerned with the ability to shape what others want through attraction rather than threat or inducement. Second, pursuing soft power by projecting the attractiveness of national culture has become a key objective of foreign policies of many governments. Though a misinterpretation of Nye's original conceptualisation of how cultural resources can contribute to soft power, this understanding has a significant impact on how governments devise their cultural diplomacy policies, in which culture has been instrumentalised for achieving economic and political objectives in a unilateral fashion, hence heightening cultural competitions through cultural diplomacy among different countries in the world. The present study, however, perceives cultural diplomacy in a dialogic and collaborative way, which emphasises the forging of sustainable relationships and mutual understanding between countries and peoples. This understanding of cultural diplomacy is germane to today's interdependent and complicated world and has the potential to contribute to long-term national benefits beyond narrowly conceived economic and political interests.

2.3 Two ways to define cultural diplomacy

Following the above discussions, two definitions of cultural diplomacy can be identified. In line with a functional view about the role of culture in international relations, Mark (2010, p. 66) argues cultural diplomacy is "the deployment of aspects of a state's culture in support of its foreign policy goals or diplomacy". Mark's definition, as he further points out, highlights the "functional" aim of cultural diplomacy (Mark 2009, p. 9). As a result, cultural diplomacy tends to take place as a one-way projection of a national image through cultural activities for achieving national interests (Kong 2019). More specifically, Maack (2010) notes that cultural diplomacy is to facilitate an understanding of a country's ideals and institutions abroad through culture to contribute to that country's political and economic goals. Other scholars have offered empirical cases on how governments conduct cultural diplomacy with a functional mindset. For example, Mark (2009) observes that countries such as India, Australia, and Canada have utilised cultural diplomacy to project a modern image of themselves in an attempt to advance their economic interests and attract the foreign public,

competing for international investments, wealthy individuals, skilled migrants, tourists, students and the like. Iwabuchi (2015) notes that Japan has used cultural diplomacy to soften anti-Japan perceptions in the post-war period. Similarly, Kang (2015) points out that the South Korean government has consistently adopted a centralised and one-sided approach to conducting cultural diplomacy, aiming to build up national prestige and image abroad. In analysing Chinese and American cultural diplomacy, Albro (2015) highlights that both governments instrumentalise culture as spectacle in diplomacy and assume that such cultural display conveys the intended message in a unmediated way in a target country, though Albro himself counsels against the national image projection approach.

In contrast, the idealistic understanding of the role of culture in international relations relates to another group of scholars who hold a different perspective regarding cultural diplomacy. For example, American political scientist Milton Cummings defines cultural diplomacy as "the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding" (Cummings 2003, p. 1). He highlights the purpose of cultural diplomacy in fostering mutual understanding, which Mark (2009, p. 9) regards as the "idealistic" purpose of cultural diplomacy. Cummings' definition, as Goff (2020) points out, is inclusive of actors other than states, though it does not deny the role that governments play in cultural diplomacy. This differs from other scholars, represented by Ota (2010), who emphasise the role of non-governmental actors and dismiss the necessity of state activities in cultural diplomacy. Hu Wentao and Cynthia Schneider are scholars among those who follow Cumming's definition of cultural diplomacy.[20] They characterise cultural diplomacy as a two-dimensional engagement to foster mutual understanding between countries and peoples through means such as artistic expressions, educational and personnel exchange, with a long-term orientation (Hu 2007; Schneider 2003, 2009).

In short, under a functional understanding, cultural diplomacy instrumentalises culture for achieving economic and political objectives, typically through a one-dimensional projection of a country's national image through cultural activities. An idealistic view to cultural diplomacy sees it as a two-way engagement with the aim to foster mutual understanding between countries and peoples through a wide range of arts and cultural practice over a long period of time. Based on the analysis presented earlier, this thesis follows the latter school of thought and subsequently adopts Cumming's definition for cultural diplomacy.

[20] Cynthia Schneider was the US Ambassador to the Netherlands from 1998 to 2001.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed some of the major debates concerning cultural diplomacy. In doing so, it has articulated how this study understands the term by discussing the meaning of culture in the context of cultural diplomacy, and distinguishing the concept from other pertinent terms such as public diplomacy, cultural relations, propaganda, and soft power. To conclude, this section will summarise how cultural diplomacy is perceived and used in the present research by highlighting its purpose, actor, and approach.

This study holds that the aim of cultural diplomacy is to foster mutual understanding and long-term relationships between countries and peoples through cultural means, including both high art and popular culture. The purpose of cultural diplomacy reflects the current trend in diplomatic practice which becomes more relation-oriented and inclusive of non-state actors from civil society, due to globalisation and the development of technology and media.

As an increasing number of players have taken part in intercultural exchanges on the global stage, the actor of cultural diplomacy is no longer exclusively the government, which relies on arts and cultural practitioners to conduct cultural diplomacy and tends to proactively collaborate with non-state actors. One motivation for governments to seek such collaboration is because non-governmental actors may possess certain expertise and professionalism that are valuable for implementing cultural diplomacy. Furthermore, as the general public tends to associate government-driven cultural diplomacy with propaganda and perceive cultural programs that are related to a government agenda as having less legitimacy, working with non-state actors may help governments increase the effectiveness and credibility. This is because people are more willing to accept cultural activities as benign actions when presented by non-governmental actors.

This study sees that the conduct of cultural diplomacy is based on a dialogic and interactive approach for promoting mutual understanding. On the one hand, this approach is different from simply projecting a country's culture aboard for achieving political and economic objectives—a type of cultural diplomacy conducted by many governments following an inaccurate interpretation of the soft power concept. On the other hand, this approach is of particular relevance in a globalised era marked by increasing symbiosis and interconnectedness between countries and peoples and, at the same time, by conflicts and clashes dividing 'us' from 'them'.

Based on the above-mentioned aspects, this study follows an idealistic view regarding the role of culture in international affairs, and subsequently adopts Milton Cummings' understanding of cultural diplomacy, which is "the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding" (Cummings 2003, p. 1). The present research, therefore, does not follow a functional understanding of cultural diplomacy, which

denotes “the deployment of aspects of a state’s culture in support of its foreign policy goals or diplomacy” (Mark 2010, p. 66), underlying the government’s pursuit of the state’s political and economic goals by instrumentalising culture, typically through a one-track projection of a nation’s image abroad through cultural means.

The next chapter will examine China’s conceptualisation of cultural diplomacy through the lens of its purpose, actor, and approach, and how it relates to discussions in this chapter.

CHAPTER 3 CHINA'S UNDERSTANDING OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

This chapter first presents an overview of Chinese foreign policy in the 21st century, providing necessary background under which China conducts cultural diplomacy through its cultural initiatives abroad. It then presents a review of the Chinese understanding of soft power, a concept that reflects how the Chinese government perceives culture and heavily shapes China's conduct of cultural diplomacy. Based on this, the purpose, actor, and approach of Chinese cultural diplomacy will be closely analysed, followed by discussions about its perceived problems and alternative perspectives in the eyes of international and Chinese scholars. Analysis in the present chapter lays the foundation for understanding Chinese cultural diplomacy. Together with the previous chapter, it builds up a theoretical framework within which the China Cultural Centre project will be examined in the following chapters.

3.1 An overview of China's foreign policy in the 21st century

When the PRC was founded in 1949, the world was divided into a bipolar structure that was dominated by the Soviet Union on the one hand and the US on the other. At the time, China was facing a dire international environment to survive as it was largely isolated by the West and only recognised by a small number of countries from the Soviet camp (Zhao 2019), with which China aligned itself diplomatically. While China's international status improved between the 1960s and 1970s, the country remained poor and underdeveloped. This challenging situation was compounded by ideological and political struggles, manifested in radical movements, such as the calamitous Great Leap Forward (1958–1960) and Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) in the later years of Mao Zedong's leadership.[21]

In order to revitalise China's languishing economy after Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping initiated the Reform and Opening-up policy in 1978. This policy marked a radical change from that of the Cultural Revolution and heralded China's re-engagement with the world in the following decades. China gradually established a more interwoven relationship with the world, shifting away from being an inward-looking country towards one that sought to cooperate with foreign countries (Hartig 2015). A hallmark of Deng's foreign policy was the "keeping a low profile" (韬光养晦 *taoguang yanghui*) strategy, which called on China to hide its ambition and to bide its time, while building the country's

[21] The Great Leap Forward was a social and economic campaign launched by Mao Zedong with the aim to transform China from an agrarian economy to a modern industrial society. This plan eventually failed and caused millions of deaths due to the famine it created and resulted in enormous economic and environmental damage; The Cultural Revolution, formally known as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, was a decade-long period of socio-political chaos caused by Mao Zedong, who ultimately aimed to regain his central power and control over the Communist Party in China through such an event.

national strength for realising its great power dream (Zhao 2012). Implemented in the early 1990s, this strategy required China to avoid taking the lead in international affairs and focus on its immediate interests, such as economic development and political stability (Zhao 2012). Deng's foreign policy was largely adhered to in the next three decades until the end of former President Hu Jintao's term in 2012, followed by a gradual shift under current President Xi Jinping. It is necessary to understand China's broader foreign policy context in the 21st century, as it is connected with the discussion about the primary purpose of Chinese cultural diplomacy, which will be analysed later in this chapter.

3.1.1 Foreign policy in Hu Jintao's time (2002–2012)

Following Deng's "keeping a low profile" strategy, Hu Jintao continued to show willingness to integrate China into international society and foster a friendly and cooperative international environment for enhancing China's economic strength (Kong 2019). As Hu stressed in a meeting with Chinese diplomatic emissaries, China needed to maintain the "important strategic opportunity period" (重要战略机遇期 *zhongyao zhanlüe jiyuqi*) for its development, by ensuring a peaceful and stable international environment, a good-neighbourly and friendly environment in surrounding regions, a cooperative environment based on equality and mutual benefits, and an objective and friendly media environment (National People's Congress 2004). China's economy kept growing at a high pace over the course of Hu's leadership and led the country to become an economic superpower, affording China increasing influence on the global stage.

A rising China had, nonetheless, raised concerns in some parts of the world. This uneasiness was manifested in the idea, particularly among Western countries and China's neighbours, that an increasingly powerful China would become a source of regional and international instability (Yee & Storey 2004). China, under the leadership of Hu, was concerned with the image of a threatening China as it could engender belligerent policies from other countries, potentially disrupting Beijing's abilities to focus on its economic and security priorities in a peaceful international environment (Hartig 2015). It was against this background that China's diplomacy in the 2000s aimed at assuaging fears towards China's rise, hoping to shape a favourable external environment for its economic development (Kong 2021). In particular, Hu proposed the much-touted diplomatic slogans—"Peaceful Rise/Development" and "Harmonious World", attempting to shape China's international image as a peaceful and responsible country as it was ascending (Zhao 2012). By promoting these diplomatic slogans, China expected to convince the world that its development and rise to power would be a peaceful process, and that a prosperous and powerful China would benefit the world and uphold existing rules of international society.

3.1.2 Foreign policy in Xi Jinping's time (2012–present)

Since the beginning of Xi Jinping's administration, there has been continuity of certain diplomatic narratives from previous years. Xi himself and former Premier Li Keqiang still emphasised publicly, for example, China's "Peaceful Development" in their official speeches.[22] Clearly, this aligns with the preceding goal of portraying China's fast development and attainment of power in the world as benign and peaceful. However, compared to his predecessor, Xi has focused more on diplomacy, ushering in new concepts and initiatives at the beginning of his first term and shifting from a low-profile to a proactive foreign policy (Kong 2019; Wang, J 2019), namely, "striving for achievements" (奋发有为 *fenfa youwei*).[23] As Zhao Kejin (2014b) notes, China's diplomacy in previous years mainly focused on the importance for China to integrate into the world, with an emphasis on how China had been influenced by the changing world. This perception, according to Zhao (2014b), has changed as the current leadership under Xi Jinping sees China as a force that influences the world, hence China should take the initiative to act on the global stage. The reason for this shift, as argued by Wang Jianwei (2019), is largely due to Xi's assessment that China's current status has moved from the periphery to the centre of the world. Indeed, as Xi has explicitly said, China is now "closer than ever to the centre of the global stage, closer than ever to realising the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, more confident and able than ever to fulfill this goal" (cited in Chen & Xue 2015). Therefore, in the eyes of the current Chinese leadership, the low-profile diplomacy is no longer compatible with a China that is almost at the centre of the world with corresponding capabilities (Wang, J 2019). Accordingly, China's diplomatic strategy under Xi's leadership indicates China's desire to pursue diplomacy "as a major country with more influence, discourse power and responsibilities" (Wang, J 2019, p. 16).[24] As Wang Jianwei (2019) observes, Chinese scholars hold that China's diplomacy today is not merely focused on economic development but places more emphasis on reshaping the international order and system. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Xi has proposed a series of diplomatic concepts including the "China Dream", "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind", and the Belt and Road Initiative, aiming to enhance China's appeal and discourse power in the world that has long been dominated by Western concepts and theories of international relations (Wang, J 2019). While Xi's diplomatic concepts champion ideas such as peace, win-win cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, equality, and mutual respect and learning, they also reflect China's global visions as an alternative

[22] For instance, Xi Jinping stated in his speech at the Australian Parliament in November 2014 that China was committed to "peaceful development" (Griffiths 2014). During Li Keqiang's visit to Australia in 2017, he also noted that "China is firmly committed to being on a path of peaceful development" (Murphy 2017).
[23] Xi officially put forward this idea in the Central Committee of the CPC's Work Forum on Diplomacy Toward the Periphery in October 2013, soon after he took power.
[24] Simply put, discourse power (话语权 *huayu quan*) can be understood as the ability to set and shape global narratives (Jones 2021).

to the traditional Western norms that are mainly shaped by the US, and the aspiration to restore the nation's historic status in ancient times.

Overall, if Hu's call for more democratic international relations through a "Harmonious World" only hinted "a thinly veiled dissatisfaction with the current unipolar world order dominated by a perceived increasingly hegemonic United States" (Zhang 2007, p. 3), Xi has demonstrated a more forward-leaning posture to reshape international rules and norms by proactively championing his diplomatic concepts. Nonetheless, despite differences in Chinese foreign policy styles under the two leaderships, China's diplomatic practice has been mainly associated with its strategic aims, such as shaping a favourable international image, increasing its global appeal, and strengthening the nation's discourse power. These goals are linked to the primary purpose of Chinese cultural diplomacy and reflective of how cultural diplomacy is essentially understood from the Chinese government's point of view. This correlation becomes clearer as the following analysis of China's understanding of soft power and cultural diplomacy will show.

3.2 China's understanding of soft power

Accompanying China's development and foreign policy trajectory in the 21st century is a growing emphasis on the value of culture in its national strategy, in addition to the sole focus on its hard power, such as economy, technology, and the military. In particular, the idea of cultural soft power was officially written in Hu Jintao's report to the 17th National Congress of the CPC, in which culture was recognised as a key element in China's comprehensive national power.

First introduced to China in the 1990s by Wang Huning,[25] the concept of soft power started to gain traction in political discussions and government reports from the early 2000s and was formally incorporated into China's political lexicon in 2007 (Li 2008). Despite the popularity of the US-originated concept, the term has gradually developed its own characteristics in the Chinese context. The present study holds that it is important to understand how the concept is perceived in China before going into further discussions about Chinese cultural diplomacy. This is because, as scholars note, the idea of soft power has heavily influenced the Chinese perception of cultural diplomacy (Kong 2015), which is commonly considered in China as a tool to enhance the nation's soft power (Lai 2012a). The following section will discuss the characteristics of soft power from a Chinese viewpoint. More specifically, it explains the term's core element, connection with comprehensive national power, and domestic relevance. These traits facilitate further discussions concerning China's cultural diplomacy, which will be analysed in the next section.

[25] Wang Huning is a former academic at Shanghai's Fudan University and now a member of the Politburo Standing Committee of the CPC.

3.2.1 The core element of soft power

3.2.1.1 Two distinct views

One salient aspect in the Chinese discourse of soft power is the emphasis on the importance of culture (d'Hooghe 2011b; Glaser & Murphy 2009; Kong 2015; Lai 2012b; Li 2008), albeit a minority of Chinese scholars hold that the core of Chinese soft power lies on the political front. A representative figure championing the centrality of the political dimension in soft power is Yan Xuetong, an international relations scholar of Tsinghua University. He is of the view that China should increase its soft power by enhancing the country's political strength, which includes leadership determination, political system and principles, national strategy, and decision-making process, etc. (Yan 2007). Nonetheless, Yan's view has not been supported, at least publicly, by the Chinese government. For example, while Joshua Cooper Ramo (2004) coined the term "Beijing Consensus" to highlight China's development model including its economic and political policies in contrast with the "Washington Consensus", the Chinese government has so far not officially endorsed the term. This reluctance to develop soft power from a political perspective is, as suggested by scholars, due to China's comparative disadvantage in this area (Deng 2009), since China's political system is still facing difficulty to be widely acknowledged in international society (Hu 2008; Huang & Hu 2007).

In contrast, the highlighted role of culture in China's soft power understanding is discernible in Chinese leaders and politicians' pronouncements and discussions. When reporting to the 17th National Congress of the CPC in 2007, former Chinese President Hu Jintao urged China to "enhance culture as part of the soft power" (*China Daily* 2007). Similarly, Chinese President Xi Jinping, speaking at the 12th Collective Study Session of the Politburo of the CPC in 2013, vowed to "promote China's cultural soft power by disseminating modern Chinese values and showing the charm of Chinese culture to the world" (*China.org.cn* 2014).[26] Echoing Chinese top leaders' statements, high-level political discussions also underline the importance of culture in China's understanding of soft power. A case in point is the meeting held in 2007 by the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), which focused on the topic of Chinese culture as a main resource for building China's soft power.[27] As culture becomes the "centrepiece" of China's soft power (Wang 2011, p. 12), "cultural soft power" has gradually replaced the term "soft power" in China's political and intellectual discussions (Kong 2015).

[26] Initiated by Hu Jintao in 2002, the Collective Study Sessions of the Politburo are meetings at which top experts and scholars in China are invited to deliver speeches to Politburo members on a topic in which they specialise. These meetings have the symbolic and demonstrational effect of setting up examples for lower-level officials and signalling current policy focuses and intentions of the central leadership (Liu 2007).
[27] See documents of the meeting via http://www.cppcc.people.com.cn/GB/34961/90780/90789/index.html . CPPCC is a political advisory body in China and a central part of the CPC's United Front system. CPPCC is chaired by a member of the Politburo Standing Committee of the CPC.

3.2.1.2 The emphasis on Chinese traditional culture

While the notion of culture can be rather broad in the Chinese context and inclusive of other aspects, such as ideology and political system (Guo 2006), following on from the emphasis on culture, Chinese traditional culture is considered in both the Chinese political and academic sphere as a central element of China's soft power. As Li Mingjiang (2008) notes, Chinese traditional culture has been underlined as the most valuable source of Chinese soft power, as it is proudly perceived, from a Chinese perspective, as representative of the nation's long history, wide-ranging traditions, symbols and textual records. Similarly, Hartig (2015) holds that it is understandable that the Chinese government relies on traditional cultural elements for building soft power, as Chinese traditional culture boasts the nation's long cultural history, is less controversial since it is apolitical, and is more authentically 'Chinese' compared to contemporary Chinese culture, which is influenced by ideas and concepts from Western culture. Apart from these broad reasons for China's emphasis on its traditional culture in the context of soft power, specific motivations can also be identified.

First, it is perhaps not surprising that China is enthusiastic about promoting its traditional culture when it comes to soft power, which is perceived as connected with Chinese classical thought. As Hu Jian (2018b) argues, although originally conceptualised in the West, the concept of soft power had already been widely discussed and practised in China over 2,000 years ago. For instance, Confucius held that a state's leadership status should be achieved through moral examples as opposed to force (Barr 2011). Mencius, who inherited and developed Confucius' ideology, advocated that a true king governs the world in a non-coercive way and would win people's hearts through benevolence without resorting to force (Bell 2008). Sun Tzu, a Chinese military strategist in the Warring States era (403–221 BCE), argued that the "[u]ltimate excellence" in a war is defeating the enemy without fighting (不战而屈人之兵 *buzhan er quren zhibing*) (Sun & Minford 2002, p.10). To realise this goal, it is essential to "appeal to the enemy's rationality, morality, values and aspiration" (Barr 2011, p. 26). It is observable that these Chinese traditional and philosophical values have parallels to the idea of soft power. Such similarities between the essence of Chinese classical thought and the soft power concept partly explain China's emphasis on traditional culture in its understanding of the term.

Furthermore, China's embrace of soft power coincides with the strategic need for easing anxieties from other parts of the world about the country's rise. Commonly held by Chinese leaders and academics, building soft power dispels what Chinese analysts see as misperception of China, countering the "China threat" theory and fostering a favourable image of China in the world (Gil 2017; Li 2008). In practical terms, Chinese traditional culture is considered helpful and used by the Chinese government to this end, particularly in Hu Jintao's era, as shown in Chapter 1.

China's focus on traditional culture in viewing soft power is also linked to its pursuit for greater international discourse power, not least in Xi's time, as indicated in the introduction chapter. As Li (2008) notes, from a Chinese perspective, traditional culture and values provide alternative approaches to addressing global issues such as environmental degradation, social ethics, and international and regional conflicts that have emerged in the process of Western civilisation. These problems, according to Ye (2021), have shown the drawbacks of Western capitalism and provided the opportunity for China to contribute its solutions and wisdom, based on the nation's traditional culture and values, to resolve common challenges (such as climate, resources, politics, economy, terrorism, and security) in a globalised era. This attempt to create globally shared vocabularies for elevating China's international status is related to China's intention to increase discourse power. As China pursues greater influence in the world, achieving discourse power is important as its major power status is unlikely to be acknowledged by other states without the ability to offer some guiding moral or cultural ideals of universal value for international society (Luo 2006).

3.2.1.3 Problems with China's focus on traditional culture

Despite the above reasons, some scholars raise concerns about China's heavy reliance on traditional culture in producing soft power. For example, Wang Yiwei (2008) of Renmin University notes that it is a mistake for Chinese leaders to assume that China's historical significance, including its history and civilisation, will automatically bring the country contemporary influence. This disconnection, as Wang (2008) further explains, is manifested in paradoxical views, such as Westerners tend to be more interested in Chinese history and culture than today's China as it is perceived mostly from a political perspective and less so from a cultural perspective.

It is further pointed out that there is a dilemma of employing Chinese traditional culture to obtain soft power. First of all, as China desires to present itself as a modern and developed country in the contemporary world, this national image is somewhat inconsistent with that portrayed through its past. As Liu (2021) argues, the Chinese government attempts to promote a national image that comprises inherently conflicting aspects including Confucianism, Maoism, socialism, capitalism, modernism, and globalism. Hu Jian (2009) argues that China's modernisation has separated the nation further away from its traditional culture and spirit. Instead of inheriting and developing its traditional cultural resources, as Hu (2009) further explains, China has borrowed Western cultural values and been heavily influenced by them in modernisation. Ramo (2007, p. 16) also observes that when it comes to promoting Chinese national culture, China typically turns to "old and unsurprising clichés of opera, martial arts and tea" rather than its contemporary aspects. Nonetheless, as he argues, this over-emphasis on Chinese traditional values could be problematic as they are "straining under the pressures of change, urbanisation, and development", and hence may fail to reflect a "fresh and emerging China" to the world and even cause miscalculation or

oversimplification of a contemporary China (Ramo 2007, pp. 15-8). It is in this light that he holds that China should promote the contemporary side of its culture, which “is drawing fans from around the world” (Ramo 2007, p. 16).

Ramo’s argument is, nonetheless, not supported by other scholars, including Liu (2021), who is of the view that China, unlike its neighbouring countries Japan and South Korea, lacks the connection with the world through its contemporary and popular culture, consequently leading to the country’s dependence on promoting its culture from a traditional dimension. However, it is worth noting that, from a practical point of view, recent studies have shown that the Chinese government has actively incorporated contemporary cultural elements in its diplomacy abroad, in an attempt to pursue cultural soft power (Yao 2017), and engage with the foreign public by accommodating their artistic preferences through specific cultural presentations and narratives (Maags 2014). It remains, though, unclear the extent to which China adopts this method to connect with overseas audiences through cultural diplomacy since limited research has focused on this tendency. However, the present study argues that this aspect in China’s cultural diplomacy is worth continued observation as it reflects China’s adaptation in conducting cultural diplomacy in the 21st century by, at least, starting to consider audience reception of such cultural activities. This point is broadly related to the international perspective discussed before, which calls to broaden the range of cultural genres in the practice of cultural diplomacy so as to increase the possibility of connecting with the general public.

Another problem in China’s use of traditional culture for soft power gains is related to China’s behaviour both internationally and domestically. On the global stage, China, stoked by a strong sense of nationalism, has recently engaged in a more combative tone and aggressive behaviour in dealing with international affairs. Pertinent examples include the so-called “wolf-warrior diplomacy” which typically chastises other countries’ criticisms towards China, territorial disputes with neighbouring countries including Vietnam and the Philippines in the South China Sea, and the economic punishment on Australia for its call for an independent investigation in the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic. While China’s strident tones and assertive behaviours in the international community have certainly shown its confidence in today’s world, they contrast with what the Chinese government promotes through its traditional cultural values. As Zhu Zhiqun (2020) points out, “[a]s a nation proud of its glorious ancient civilization, China should remain humble, benevolent, and magnanimous”. Such discrepancies between China’s words and deeds can also be seen on the domestic front, where the government’s proclaimed values, such as harmony and benevolence, contradict its restrictions on online freedom of speech, arrest of political dissidents, and crackdown on Chinese human rights lawyers and activists. This inconsistency hinders China’s pursuit of soft power, as Nye (2012) argues that “[g]reat powers try to use culture and narrative to create soft power that promotes their national interests, but it's not an easy sell when the message is

inconsistent with their domestic realities". Overall, while China intends to enhance its soft power through traditional culture, this attempt is hinged on, and oftentimes undermined by, the state's domestic and foreign policy, which according to Nye, are the other two soft power sources. This point shows the challenges China faces in developing soft power caused by the country's policies both internally and externally, as indicated in the previous chapter.

3.2.2 Soft power and comprehensive national power

In China, soft power is also understood as part of comprehensive national power (综合国力 *zonghe guoli*), which, as Lampton (2008, p. 20) notes, "shapes the way Chinese understand their national circumstance and strategy". According to Luo Yuting (2010), comprehensive national power consists of both hard power and soft power. Hard power includes components such as the military, economy and technology, while soft power is comprised of the elements related to culture, values, development model, and diplomatic influence (Luo 2010).

To become a great power, China acknowledges that it needs strong comprehensive national power by lifting both hard and soft power (Li 2008; Shambaugh 2013; Wang & Lu 2008). Nonetheless, China concedes that its soft power "lags behind both its own hard power growth and that of the soft power of other major powers", causing an unbalanced national comprehensive power composition "that is detrimental to China's aspirations towards higher international status and greater international influence" (Li 2008, pp. 296-9). That is to say that, from a Chinese perspective, soft power is inseparable from China's rise, which should not rest only on its economic, scientific, technological, and military power. In line with the dominant understanding in China that culture lies at the heart of soft power, the Chinese government announced in the *National Planning Guidelines for Cultural Development in the 11th Five-year Plan Period* that culture, which was increasingly intertwined with economics as well as politics and closely connected to technologies in today's world, was playing an important role and becoming one of the measurements of a nation's comprehensive power.[28] The same document also highlighted the goal to increase Chinese culture's global influence to match the country's economic and international status. In a similar vein, the significance of cultural soft power has been underlined by Xi Jinping, who states that it still embodies "the essence" and "is at the highest level" of a country's comprehensive national power, as reported by *People's Daily Online* (Qian 2014).

This understanding that soft power is a significant part of national comprehensive power for attaining China's great power status also reflects the trend in today's international competition. As the role of traditional means of power, such as military power, is dwindling in today's world due to the diminishing possibility of major warfare, soft power as represented by culture, ideology, and

[28] Full document is available via http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2006/content_431834.htm.

institutions, has become a field of competition for countries in the world (Li 2009).[29] Soft power is, therefore, an irreplaceable component of national power and for a nation to project its might in international affairs in addition to military and economic power (Zhao 2009). This is apparent through Japan's attempts to develop soft power by promoting its pop culture worldwide. As Iwabuchi (2015) observes, the Japanese government's pop-culture diplomacy was institutionalised with the "Cool Japan" policy in the early 2000s to capitalise on the popularity of Japanese media culture in global markets. Similarly, since the mid-2000s, the South Korean government promoted the "Korean Wave" as a national success story internationally to enhance its national image and prestige (Kang 2015). In fact, the context in which East Asian countries have become enthusiastic to improve their national image by advancing their cultural products and industries globally has thereby led to a soft power competition in the region in the 21st century (Iwabuchi 2015). Given the competitive and sometimes tense relations among countries in East Asia, China wants to gain and maintain its influence in the region, hence the motivation to embrace and boost soft power (Gil 2017). As Huang Renwei (2003) argues, to build up cultural competitiveness is of equivalent importance to build a strong military. It is in this light that the Chinese government holds that to win the international competition in a complex environment, it requires a country to possess not only strong economic, technological, and defensive power, but also strong cultural power (State Council 2006).

3.2.3 Soft power and its domestic dimension

The Chinese understanding of soft power also shows a focus on the domestic front (Barr 2011; Gil 2017; Hartig 2015; Li 2008), which is not included in Nye's original conceptualisation of the term. As Hartig (2015, p. 65) observes, domestic discussions related to China's soft power involve elements such as national cohesion and construction of political institutions. Gil (2017) notes that soft power is regarded as an important means in China for shoring up national ethnic cohesion through the promotion of Han culture. Li (2008, pp. 300-2) points out that to Chinese leaders, soft power is to "fend off excessive influence and penetration of foreign cultures in China", particularly those ideologies or beliefs that, in their opinion, could weaken the Chinese identity and harm the legitimacy of the ruling party. Michael Barr (2011) echoes this by arguing that China's domestic need for soft power is to help the CPC to bolster its legitimacy and acceptance among Chinese people. In a similar vein, Kingsley Edney (2015) argues from a regime security perspective that China's domestic interpretation of soft power is concerned with generating national cohesion and enhancing the legitimacy for the CPC to govern, thus shaping China's approach to soft power accordingly. Culturally speaking, driven by these sources of domestic insecurity, building cultural

[29] The researcher acknowledges that regional conflicts are still present in today's world. Nonetheless, they are not full-scale/global warfare, which, in general, countries in the world still try to avoid and would less likely to resort to as their first choice in dealing with international affairs and competition.

soft power in China involves protecting Chinese culture from external threats while, in the meantime, increasing its international competitiveness and influence (Edney 2015).[30]

These domestic concerns are also reflected in Chinese academic discussions, notably from a cultural perspective. Chinese scholars and analysts typically view major world powers, such as European nations and the US, with apprehension, as they believe these countries have been pursuing soft power by promoting their political system, democratic ideology, and culture which could pose a threat to the Chinese leadership's legitimacy and China's national cohesion. For example, Li Zhi (2005, p. 58) sees America's pursuit of soft power through culture in the world as "cultural export", "cultural infiltration", "cultural invasion" to other countries on a persist basis. Lu Shiwei (2012) further warns of the danger of cultural hegemony from the US and other western countries, as Chinese core values are facing the challenge of being westernised. This, to other Chinese scholars, may consequently weaken Chinese national identity and cohesion, decreasing comprehensive national power and causing political instability (He, Zhou & Xiang 2005).

Following this line of argument, Chinese scholars have discussed China's cultural soft power in relation to the country's domestic cultural securities. For example, to build cultural soft power, Zhang Guozuo, Director of the Center of Chinese Soft Power Studies and former Deputy Director of the Theoretic Bureau in China's Publicity Department, holds that it is important to cultivate and practice the "socialist core value system" (社会主义核心体系 *shehui zhuyi hexin tixi*) and the "socialist core values outlook" (社会主义核心价值观 *shehui zhuyi hexin jiazhiguan*); develop cultural industries; promote the essence of Chinese traditional culture, guard against and discern impurities; and strengthen ideological and political education in universities (*People's Daily Online* 2015). Wang and Shi (2015) argue that ideology is the key to enhancing cultural soft power, and China needs to continue to maintain socialist ideology's persuasiveness domestically, and its influence and competitiveness internationally. Wu (2014) is of the view that while China cannot close itself up to protect its cultural security in a globalised world, it is critical to enhance publicity and education regarding socialist core values as the foundation to resist decadent cultures from outside China. While these views are less likely to be recognised in the international realm, they are readily accepted in China's domestic discourse of developing the state's cultural soft power (Hu, J 2018b), which, in addition to making use of soft power resources internationally through diplomatic practices, is also concerned with establishing and enhancing such resources within China (Edney 2012). Analysing from a domestic perspective, Edney (2012) notes that cultural soft power is associated with China's cultural construction (文化建设 *wenhua jianshe*), which forms part of the CPC's overall

[30] Edney (2015) has noted that on the topic of cultural security, Chinese academics oftentimes do not draw a clear line between culture, value, and ideology. The researcher follows this point when discussing the issue of cultural security in China, as it is in line with how the notion of culture is understood as a broad concept in Chinese academic and political discussions.

ideology of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and involves producing national cohesion and strengthening the CPC's guiding role in shaping China's cultural development.

To recapitulate, this section has discussed the Chinese understanding of soft power through its core element, connection with comprehensive national power, and domestic dimension, which represent Chinese characteristics in understanding soft power. The Chinese perception of soft power has essentially reflected how the Chinese government perceives and instrumentalises culture in a broader sense, subsequently influencing how China considers the purpose and approach of cultural diplomacy, to which the following section will turn.

3.3 China's understanding of cultural diplomacy

The below section explains how cultural diplomacy is viewed in China, particularly in relation to its purpose, actor, and approach. By reviewing relevant research on this topic, this section further discusses the challenges of Chinese cultural diplomacy, and how Chinese scholars re-envisage the country's cultural diplomacy strategy.

3.3.1 The purpose of China's cultural diplomacy

Discussions about the purpose of Chinese cultural diplomacy are typically linked to enhancing China's cultural soft power with one particular objective of national image building, which according to Wang Chen (2010), former Director of the State Council Information Office, is "an important hallmark of national cultural soft power". For example, Zhang Dianjun (2012) points out that cultural diplomacy is an important way to develop China's cultural soft power and shape a positive national image in the world. Liu and Qu (2013) argue that the goal of cultural diplomacy concerns improving China's international image, and increasing China's cultural soft power and global influence. To Fan Yongpeng (2013), Deputy Director of the China Institute at Fudan University, cultural diplomacy shoulders the task of establishing a sound national image and increasing a country's appeal and influence on the global stage. These views are not only circulating within Chinese academic circles, but are also shared among Chinese political leaders. Chinese leaderships have expressed strong rhetoric that emphasises cultural diplomacy's strategic need regarding image building. Such a narrative is reflected in Hu Jintao's term, during which the Sixth Plenary Session of the 17th Central Committee of the CPC announced the decision to present China as a culturally advanced, democratic, open, and progressive country in the world (*Xinhua News Agency* 2011).[31] Chinese President Xi Jinping has urged his colleagues to strive to build a beautiful image of the nation

[31] In 2011, the 17th Central Committee of the CPC held the Sixth Plenary Session, which was centred on the topic of culture and considered as a "new milestone" in China's cultural development (Han 2011).

through its glorious history and excellent culture of the Chinese nation and people.[32] He has even gone further to specifically stress that China should be portrayed on the international stage as "a civilised country with a rich historical deposit, diverse yet unified ethnicity, and heterogeneous but harmonious culture"; "an oriental country featuring good government, developed economy, splendid culture, stable society, united people, and beautiful natural landscape"; "a responsible country that commits to peaceful development, promotes common development, upholds international justice, contributes to mankind"; and "a socialist country that is increasingly open, approachable, promising, and vibrant" (*Xinhuanet* 2013).

One motivation that drives China's international image shaping effort through cultural diplomacy is that China feels itself not understood and rightly represented on the global stage. From a Chinese perspective, the reason why many Western countries fear China's rise is because they lack knowledge of China and, therefore, hold misunderstandings about the country. As Sun Jiazheng, former Minister for Culture, notes, the real cause for the "China threat" theory is that China is not understood by the foreign public (*Chinanews* 2009). In particular, Chinese scholars and politicians tend to attribute the root for misperceptions of China to an inadequate degree of Chinese cultural consciousness. For example, Hu (2018a) argues that as Western countries have a very limited understanding of Chinese culture, they fail to grasp China's behaviour which is influenced by such a cultural environment, therefore leading to a series of misconceptions including the "China threat" theory, "China arrogance" theory, "China uncertainty" theory, and "China aggression" theory. This point is supported by Zhang Zhizhou (2012), who is of the opinion that international concerns regarding China's development represent a misinterpretation of China's foreign policy, and a lack of understanding of China's long-held culture of harmony. In this light, the late Wu Jianmin, former spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry and former ambassador of China to the Netherlands and France, averred that the promotion of Chinese culture abroad was to dispel misunderstanding and bias from westerners, hence a good remedy for dissolving the "China threat" theory (*Xinhuanet* 2006). Likewise, Meng Xiaosi (2005), former Vice Minister for Culture, asserts that it is important to use the means of cultural exchange and Chinese culture to introduce an authentic and objective China to the general public abroad, explaining China's pursuit of peace, development, cooperation and resolving conflicts caused by ignorance and bias.

While China attempts to foster a favourable international perception, the country's image problem seems to persist. Such examples can be seen from China's CIs being labelled by the US government as a "foreign propaganda mission" (*BBC News* 2020) or "tools of cultural invasion" (Liu

[32] Xi made the statement at the 12th Collective Study Session of the Politburo of the CPC in 2013, shortly after he took office as the Chinese president. The theme of the study session was about promoting China's cultural soft power. A summary of Xi's speech at the session is available at http://en.qstheory.cn/2020-11/13/c_607602.htm.

2010), and Xi Jinping's signature BRI being described as "Global Trail Of Trouble" (Shepard 2020) or "debt trap diplomacy" (Eales 2021). In addition, according to a poll conducted by the Lowy Institute regarding the trust in countries to act responsibly in the world, 84 per cent of Australians did not have a positive attitude towards China (Lowy Institute 2021). A closer review of the poll reveals that 47 per cent of Australians had no trust in China at all. This unfavourable view of China is broadly consistent with the Pew Research Centre's survey on an international scale, showing that large majorities of the advanced economies, such as the US, Japan, Germany, Australia, Sweden, and South Korea, see China in a negative light (Silver, Devlin & Huang 2021). Despite a slight improvement in the Australian public's attitude to China since the bilateral relations between the countries started to thaw at the end of 2022, Australians' concerns and mistrust towards China remain high. This is demonstrated in the 2023 Lowy Institute poll that 75 per cent of Australians still hold the view that it is "very" or "somewhat" likely that China will become a military threat to Australia in the next two decades (Lowy Institute 2023a), while confidence in Chinese President Xi Jinping remains extremely low at 11 per cent, only ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin (7 per cent) and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un (3 per cent) (Lowy Institute 2023b). In a global context, the Pew Research Centre's 2023 survey shows a similar outcome, suggesting that China's international behaviour is largely perceived negatively in the world, with a median of 67 per cent of people from 24 countries hold "unfavourable" perceptions of the country (Silver, Huang & Clancy 2023). More specifically, 57 per cent of people think that China "interferes in the affairs of other nations a great deal or fair amount", 71 per cent say that China "does not contribute to global peace and stability", and 76 per cent consider that China "does not take into account the interests of other countries in its foreign policy" (Silver, Huang & Clancy 2023).

Reflecting on China's image predicament, Chinese scholars and analysts tend to seek answers by focusing on discourse power, which, as Zhang Dianjun (2010) notes, facilitates the establishment of a country's image. He further argues that Western countries oftentimes get to construct the image of other countries in today's world, as they possess stronger economic foundation and advanced information technology, and control international discourse power. Following this line of argument, Meng Xiangfei (2020) holds that compared to Western countries, China's lack of discourse power puts itself in a passive situation where the country's image is still largely shaped by others, giving rise to the contrast between China's real image and that portrayed in the Western media. He attributes China's poor international image to the exaggerated and distorted information about China in negative foreign publicity, which has "bred misunderstandings and even twisted attitudes toward China among many Westerners" (Meng 2020, p. 57). Facing various criticisms from Western countries, the Chinese feel that their voices cannot be heard in the international arena because of the dominant discourse power held by the West, hence the need for China to develop its cultural power and make itself heard in the world (Deng & Zhang 2009). In this light, cultural diplomacy, as

Chinese scholars understand, should also aim to improve China's global discourse power (Lu 2012; Yang & Mu 2019; Zhang, D 2010; Zhang, Z 2012).

To increase China's global discourse, Fan (2013) argues that China should conduct cultural diplomacy by promoting Chinese ideas and values. He categorises cultural diplomacy into artistic, civilisational, and ideational dimensions, and holds that it is the ideational dimension, which incorporates philosophical, scientific, and ideological aspects, that can produce discourse power and influence people's thoughts and behaviours (Fan 2013). Meanwhile, Fan (2013) laments that China's cultural diplomacy is very weak from an ideational perspective, and Chinese thoughts have yet to make more contributions in the world compared to those of the West. Although he admits that to compete for a country's international discourse power and shape globally recognised values through an ideational-level diplomacy is much harder to succeed compared to the other two levels, Fan (2013) maintains that as China aspires to become a global power, it should concentrate its efforts on promoting Chinese ideas and values through cultural diplomacy. It is in this way, as he continues to argue, that China can take a leading role or at least be on equal terms with the West in the field of global discourse, ultimately increasing the state's soft power and achieving national interests (Fan 2013). It is worth noting that Fan's viewpoint about China's cultural diplomacy resonates with similar trends in Chinese foreign policy and soft power strategy, both of which, as indicated earlier, seek to enhance China's international appeal and influence by promoting certain narratives that incorporate Chinese cultural ideas and values.

Overall, discussions about the purpose of Chinese cultural diplomacy reflect a strong strategic underpinning. Former Chinese Vice Minister for Culture, Meng Xiaosi (2005, p. 7), states that cultural diplomacy is "to achieve certain goals around foreign relations and diplomatic arrangements". In the meantime, Chinese academics echo the government's rhetoric and regard cultural diplomacy as an instrument to serve China's national interests and diplomatic goals. For example, in his book *Cultural diplomacy: an interpretative mode of communication*,[33] Li Zhi (2005, p. 24) of the Communication University of China notes that cultural diplomacy aims to serve a state's "political" or "diplomatic" ends. Likewise, Wu (2012, p. 41) argues that the ultimate goal of cultural diplomacy is to safeguard and promote national cultural interests, and to achieve a country's external cultural strategy through cultural exchanges, as opposed to merely enriching and developing cultural interactions through such activities. These national interests and diplomatic objectives, as explained by Lu (2012), involve fostering an objective and friendly international opinion environment for China's economic and social development by promoting Chinese cultural ideas and countering negative perceptions of China in the world; improving China's global reputation by shaping a civilised, advanced, peaceful, cooperative, and responsible national image;

[33] This is one of the first books dedicated to the topic of cultural diplomacy in China.

enhancing China's cultural soft power, national spiritual cohesion, and international discourse power; and maintaining the country's cultural security and sovereignty.

As reflected in the above analysis, the purposes of China's cultural diplomacy are largely in line with the Chinese perception of soft power, which aims to shape China's international image and strengthen its global discourse power for serving the country's foreign policy objectives. The way China sees the goal of cultural diplomacy aligns with what has been discussed in Chapter 2 as the "functional" perspective. Nonetheless, it contrasts with the internationally prevailing understanding of cultural diplomacy, which concerns fostering mutual understanding and warns of the risk of undertaking cultural diplomacy by instrumentalising culture merely for political and economic interests.

3.3.2 The government as the main actor

From the Chinese government's perspective, Meng Xiaosi (2005) holds that cultural diplomacy activities possess four characteristics: first, they have explicit diplomatic goals; second, the actor of such activities is official or supported and encouraged by the government; third, they have a certain target audience at a certain time; and fourth, they are public relations activities practised through the form of cultural expressions. Li Zhi (2005, p. 24) provides an academic understanding and defines cultural diplomacy as "a sovereign state's use of cultural approaches for achieving certain political goals or external diplomatic strategy". Other Chinese scholars share the view that the Chinese government plays a leading role in conducting cultural diplomacy. For example, Shi Shantao (2008) argues that as cultural diplomacy constitutes an important part of a country's overall diplomacy, it emphasises the role of the government in foreign relations. Similarly, Ouyang An (2014) holds that the actor of cultural diplomacy is the government, who is the main driver of cultural diplomacy activities. Li Dejun (2018) is also of the opinion that the government is the only dominant player in the process of cultural diplomacy. While recognising the increasing influence of non-state actors in cultural diplomacy, Li (2018) argues that their role in cultural diplomacy is subject to permission and delegation from the government.

Some Chinese analysts also see the Chinese government's leading role in cultural diplomacy as an advantage. For example, Zhang Dianjun (2012) notes that it ensures efficient and swift mobilisation of all resources and power needed for cultural diplomacy. According to Li Defang (2012), the Chinese government's direct involvement in conducting cultural diplomacy provides immense support in human resources and finance, therefore achieving large scale and wide influence for Chinese cultural diplomacy.

Zhao Kejin (2014a) further points out that the Chinese government's role in organising cultural diplomacy activities has become a marked characteristic of China's cultural diplomacy. As he

observes, China's cultural diplomacy initiatives are primarily planned, promoted, and hosted by the Chinese government, with very little role played by civil society, enterprises, and social organisations. It can be seen that there is a strong emphasis on the role of government in both Chinese official and academic views about cultural diplomacy. The Chinese perception of the actor in cultural diplomacy appears to differ from the international understanding and trend, which, as discussed in Chapter 2, suggests that the government is no longer the solely dominant player in contemporary cultural diplomacy, while non-state participants' role and value have been largely acknowledged.

Related to China's state-led cultural diplomacy is the Chinese government's view and implementation of international cultural promotion, which are closely related to China's internal politics and influenced by how culture and soft power are interpreted domestically. As Edney (2015) argues through the lens of regime security, the party-state desires international recognition and appeal for supporting statements that China's international status has improved, hence bolstering its legitimacy to rule in China. From a cultural perspective, this internal political need partly motivates the Chinese government to drive cultural diplomacy for gaining appeal and influence externally, so as to strengthen its credibility to govern domestically. Such dynamics can be captured in China's official rhetoric concerning the promotion of Chinese culture abroad. For instance, in 2003, Li Changchun, then member of the Politburo Standing Committee of the CPC and top official in charge of publicity, called the Party members to broaden international cultural exchange while combining it with external publicity, and to increase the attraction of cultural publicity through major state-run media concerning foreign affairs (中央主要涉外媒体 *zhongyang zhuyao shewai meiti*) for gaining more readership and influence overseas (*Xinhuanet* 2007). According to Li, these efforts aimed to foster a favourable international public opinion environment for "building a moderately prosperous society in all respects" (全面建设小康社会 *quanmian jianshe xiaokang shehui*). In the 12th Collective Study Session of the Politburo of the CPC in 2013, Xi Jinping urged Chinese officials to promote contemporary Chinese values and ideas, which are represented by the "socialist values with Chinese characteristics", in all aspects of international exchange and communication (*Xinhuanet* 2013). Following Xi's speech, Cai Wu, then Minister for Culture, called to facilitate the understanding and identification of Chinese core values in Chinese culture through cultural exchanges, and thus to obtain international influence and discourse power (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2014b).

These examples have demonstrated how the Chinese government perceives and undertakes cultural promotions abroad, in a way that any effort to increase China's global appeal and impact is to a large extent associated with domestic politics and publicity, albeit such attempts are focused on the international audience. As Zhao (2014a) argues, improving political legitimacy of the Chinese government is a strategic motivation for China to conduct cultural diplomacy, which is expected to

dispel the “China threat” theory and gain, from international society, the recognition and acceptance of China’s socialist system and development path led by the CPC, while strengthening national cohesion and cultural confidence for its domestic authority. In a similar vein, Voci and Hui (2018) note that China’s culturally oriented interpretations of soft power appear to actively serve, or be subsumed by, the interest in the state’s ideologies and policies. Klimeš (2017) further points out that the construction of China’s external discourse for enhancing its cultural appeal is conceptualised as an extension of domestic ideological work.

In sum, the Chinese government plays a central role in driving China’s cultural diplomacy overseas. Nonetheless, China’s top-down strategy of managing and guiding culture and cultural activities in the government’s favour bears the question of whether this method can work in the international field. In Nye’s original conceptualisation of soft power, he holds that it is civil society rather than the government that has produced much of America’s soft power (Nye 2004). He warns that governments could lose credibility by attempting to control cultural resources of soft power and suggests that governments should leave culture out of their direct influence. As discussed in the previous chapter, contemporary debates about cultural diplomacy remind us that state-led cultural diplomacy practice risks being associated with propaganda and government agenda, hence may undercut its legitimacy and credibility. As today’s cultural diplomacy tends to include more non-state actors and reduce the government’s direct involvement for improving its effectiveness, the Chinese government’s leading role in conducting cultural diplomacy may hinder its international cultural endeavours. As Hartig (2013b) bluntly points out, as long as China’s effort to increase its global cultural appeal and influence is guided by ideological and centralised principles of the Chinese government, “China will struggle to become a ‘cultural power’”.

3.3.3 A quantity-driven approach

In her research on China’s cultural diplomacy, Liu (2021) highlights China’s state-centric system that features concentrated state power and national investment and mobilisation, and that under which a numerical measurement is adopted for assessing the implementer’s political achievements. Likewise, Barr (2015, p. 187) also identifies a similar approach in China’s conduct of cultural diplomacy by noting the “extent to which it attempts to overtly quantify its cultural power”. These views reflect the way through which China popularises its culture worldwide, typified by state-driven cultural initiatives on the one hand, and the fixation on their increasing number and growing presence on the other.

The emphasis on numbers and scale in China’s cultural diplomacy approach can be seen in a *People’s Daily*’s article which exemplified the “remarkable achievements” of China’s cultural exchanges and promotions abroad. To China, these successful results were mostly evidenced by the number and scope of cultural activities held overseas. As the article highlighted, in 2017, the

Happy Chinese New Year event, a large-scale initiative of the MCT for promoting Chinese culture abroad by celebrating China's Spring Festival,

> was held overseas more than 2,000 times in over 500 cities across 140 countries and regions, reaching 280 million people overseas. These events were reported by over 1,000 global media outlets, reaching an audience of 3 billion. It has become a significant platform to showcase the charm of Chinese culture to the world (*People's Daily Online* 2018).

As Klimeš (2017, p. 142) notes, this kind of rapid expansion of China's state-sponsored cultural initiatives, "which allegedly produce an avalanche of events that draw in massive audiences", shows a "typical self-praising official evaluation of China's rising cultural influence". In the area of media and communications, a similar approach manifests in China's race to establish media outlets abroad as it vies for international discourse power (Klimeš 2017). The Chinese government committed approximately 6 billion USD in 2009 to increase the state's media presence around the world (Sun 2015). By 2010, *Xinhua News Agency*, *China Central Television*, *China Radio International*, and *China Daily*, all of which are major state-owned media, had established new branches in their international sectors (Shambaugh 2013).

To understand the rationale behind this quantity-driven approach, it is helpful to look at how the Chinese government and analysts view "cultural soft power" through the lens of comprehensive national power. Chinese scholars believe that the term can be measured, though such understanding contrasts with how Nye perceives it as largely intangible. This is not surprising as the idea of comprehensive national power shows "how Chinese analysts think about their current national circumstances in quantitative terms" (Lampton 2008, p. 20). They have further developed various index systems to evaluate China's cultural soft power.[34] Despite different indexes, these systems all seem to indicate that the concept is readily quantifiable. For example, Hu Jian's (2014) system attempts to assess China's cultural soft power based on indexes such as the number of cultural and educational institutes, investments in education and technology, gross cultural consumption, international trade in cultural products, cultural brands and companies listed on Forbes Global 2000, entrepreneurship and national attitude, cultural attraction, foreign tourists and the percentage of foreign residents, and living quality of national citizens. The problem of such an evaluation system is that it is difficult to convert such measurements as entrepreneurships and cultural attraction into numbers in the first place, and it is also unclear about the direct correlation between the quantity of museums, libraries, theatres and the obtainment of cultural soft power.

Yet this perceived connection between numbers and cultural influence is still widely accepted not only by Chinese scholars in their assessment of cultural soft power, but also among Chinese policymakers in terms of how to increase China's cultural appeal and strength globally. According to

[34] See Tang (2008), Hua (2013), Hu (2014).

Zhao Qizheng, former Director of the State Council Information Office (1998–2005) and former Director of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Committee of the CPPCC (2008–2013), China has a significant deficit in cultural trade and needs to put concerted efforts to redress the imbalance, as "China cannot become a cultural superpower until China has a sufficient market share in the world's culture market" (cited in Deng & Zhang 2009, p. 145). Cai Wu, former Chinese Minister for Culture, asserts that China is "going to use culture trade to occupy the market, to increase competitiveness, and to attract audiences" (cited in Zhao 2013, p. 21). In terms of policy, the CPC's 11th Five-year Plan urged to expand China's cultural presence in the international cultural market over the period of 2005 to 2010 (Lai 2012a). Specifically, the *Outline of the Cultural Development Plan During the National 11th Five-year Plan Period* proposed to enhance the promotion of Chinese culture and cultural products in the world through overseas festivals, develop international sales networks for Chinese cultural products, and support major overseas-oriented cultural enterprises (Li 2009). Similarly, the *Outline of the Cultural Reform and Development Plan During the National 12th Five-year Plan Period* called to proactively increase the scale of the export of cultural products and services, including those such as copyright trade, books, newspapers, journals, audio-visual products, and electronic publications, thereby reducing China's cultural trade deficit (*Xinhua News Agency* 2012). China's attempt to build up cultural soft power through a market-oriented expansion of Chinese cultural products and industries demonstrate a quantity-driven mindset when it comes to the development of the country's cultural attractiveness and impact in the world. Such an approach, as shown above, consequently leads to the focus on the number and scale as measurements of China's cultural diplomacy performance.

Taken together, China's cultural diplomacy tends to correlate the increase of cultural attractiveness and strength with the growth of quantitative measurements. Such a way of thinking is rooted in the perception of the Chinese government and analysts that culture, as an important part of comprehensive national power, is readily measurable. The rationale behind China's quantitative approach contrasts with the contemporary understanding of cultural diplomacy, which, as shown in Chapter 2, places more emphasis on qualitative outcomes such as audience engagement through a dialogic and cooperative manner.

3.3.4 Challenges of China's cultural diplomacy

Following the above discussions about China's understanding of cultural diplomacy, scholars also point out issues concerning Chinese cultural diplomacy. This section will present a review of these problems in relation to the purpose, actor, and approach of Chinese cultural diplomacy.

While the existing academic literature shows that China conducts cultural diplomacy with the aim of explaining itself to the world, dispelling misunderstandings from other countries, improving national image in the international community, and increasing global discourse power, the foundation of

these purposes is oftentimes challenged by other scholars, particularly from overseas where China's cultural diplomacy is enacted. For example, researching what exactly it is that foreigners do not understand about China and the sources of such misunderstanding, international relations scholar and China specialist David Shambaugh (2013) finds in his interviews with Chinese officials that rarely have they offered a concrete example of something that is misunderstood about China beyond disagreeing with the Chinese government's policy. He argues that it seems in Chinese culture and official thinking, misunderstanding of China equals disagreement with or criticism towards Chinese official policy, whereas understanding of the country equals agreement (Shambaugh 2013). While he admits that there is undoubtedly a lack of understanding in the West about China as the country is highly complex and opaque, Chinese officials and pundits seem to have their work cut out for them in more effectively explaining China to the world (Shambaugh 2013). In Hartig's (2015) research on CIs, he challenges China's pronouncement to introduce a 'real' China to the world, but rather to present a politically correct version of the country. This tendency, according to Hartig (2015), is ultimately caused by the authoritarian political system and the broader credibility problems China's public diplomacy faces in relation to the country's domestic affairs and international behaviour. He further argues that this inconsistency has essentially led to the perceptual gap between how China wants to present itself globally and how the world actually sees it (Hartig 2015). Hartig (2012) has, therefore, concluded that regardless of how many CIs are promoting Chinese language and culture in the best possible way, as long as the Chinese government is still arresting human rights lawyers, censoring journalists, and covering up disasters and the like, all efforts by the institutes to shape China's international image can only hit a wall.

Some scholars point out the problem concerning the Chinese government's presence in its cultural diplomacy abroad. As Chinese researchers argue, the state-led cultural diplomacy has rendered strong official overtones (官方色彩 *guanfang secai*), hence reducing the credibility, objectivity, and acceptance of China's cultural diplomacy activities (Li 2012; Zhang, D 2010). Others from outside China similarly consider that the Chinese government's deep involvement impedes the effectiveness of the country's cultural diplomacy. For example, Barr (2015) notes that the Chinese way—regarding culture as something that can be managed and controlled by the government—seems to fail for many of its cultural endeavours have been top down. Liu (2021) echoes this by arguing that a state-led approach to implementing cultural diplomacy tends to generate negative effects, particularly for China, whose identity as a polity reduces the cultural appeal of its identity as a civilisation. This, as Ingrid d'Hooghe (2011b) explains, is firstly a result of the non-democratic nature of the Chinese government and its non-transparent political system which cause the problem of legitimacy of the government; and furthermore a consequence of the Chinese government's "well-known use of propaganda in recent history to deceive both its own population and the international community", seeking to shape a preferred image by manipulating information from China to the

world (2011b, pp. 183-4).[35] Indeed, as discussed before, China's attempt to promote its culture overseas is concomitantly connected with explanation of the ideology and governance mechanisms of the party-state, consequently rendering China's state-run cultural diplomacy "a political or even propagandistic dimension" (Kong 2021, p. 32). It is in this sense that the Chinese government's active engagement in driving cultural diplomacy tends to be perceived by the international audience as propaganda, which also undermines the reception of such cultural efforts.

A further problem that can be identified in studies on China's cultural diplomacy is concerned with its effectiveness in relation to the quantitative approach. Although some scholars are supportive of the view that China's cultural activities abroad have helped China gain a positive reputation in certain parts of the world including Africa and Latin America (Ding 2008; Kurlantzick 2007), others show sceptical views towards its performance. For example, Shambaugh (2013) argues that while China has developed a large number of international cultural activities, it has achieved very limited influence on global cultural trends, minimal soft power, and a mixed-to-poor international image in public opinion polls. To many international analysts, it is precisely this quantity-based strategy that hinders the efficacy of Chinese cultural diplomacy. Scholars argue that despite huge investment in promoting its culture worldwide, China's international image has not improved proportionately abroad (Nye 2015; Shambaugh 2015). In Shambaugh's (2015) view, this discrepancy between China's investments and returns is because the Chinese government treats the attainment of its global attractiveness and influence the same way it contracts high-speed rail or builds infrastructure—by investing money and expecting to see development. Yet, as he further notes, such appeal and impact in international society cannot be bought, and must instead be earned. It is further noted that China's state endeavour in increasing its global cultural footprint has even been perceived as "new sources of anxiety for the West", which sees such actions as "imperialistic in design and intent" (Sun 2015, p. 401). More specifically, Sun points out that China's state-owned media expansion abroad has been read "as a covert attempt to move propaganda offshore, export communism, and take over the symbolic space of the free world", and only to "reinforce the West's fear of a 'China threat'". Liu (2021) echoes the above criticisms of China's quantitative strategy in implementing cultural diplomacy, noting that China's cultural diplomacy approach places an emphasis on quantity at the expense of quality. She argues that cultural promotion cannot be planned out numerically and made sure that targets to be met. Instead, Liu suggests a more qualitative method by focusing on the localisation of cultural programs to suit distinct target audiences (Liu 2021), as they are active meaning makers when consuming cultural products and essentially determine the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy (Ang, Isar & Mar 2015). This emphasis

[35] Although d'Hooghe's point is contextualised in public diplomacy, it applies to the field of China's cultural diplomacy which also experiences such negative effects generated by the Chinese government's involvement.

on the engagement with the receiving audience of cultural diplomacy resembles the dialogic and cooperative approach in contemporary cultural diplomacy, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Reflecting on China's cultural diplomacy, a number of Chinese scholars suggest that China should shift from a quantity-based approach to an audience-oriented strategy, among other considerations concerning the purpose and actor of China's cultural diplomacy. The following section will discuss how these scholarly views form an alternative Chinese perspective of cultural diplomacy.

3.3.5 Rethinking China's cultural diplomacy

It is worth noting that some Chinese scholars perceive cultural diplomacy differently compared to those mentioned before, and their understandings of the concept seem to shift away from a purely instrumental perspective. For example, Hu Wentao (2007) argues that cultural diplomacy is an activity that aims to promote mutual understanding between peoples from different countries, through learning and promoting each other's culture. Gao Fei and Peng Xin (2021) of the China Foreign Affairs University hold that cultural diplomacy is the interaction of ideas between countries through means such as education, academic exchange, and arts exhibitions and tours.[36] It aims to create a favourable condition for mutual understanding and a harmonious atmosphere for communication and exchange, maximising understanding and trust, reducing conflict, and promoting collaboration between countries (Gao & Peng 2021). According to Wang Mian and Fan Hong (2019), cultural diplomacy is not simply about cultural export or assimilation, but rather an interactive and interpersonal process to obtain cultural recognition from both sides based on a collectively constructed cultural identity. In a similar vein, Lu Shiwei, former Consul-General of China in Penang and senior research fellow of the Charhar Institute, opines that cultural diplomacy seeks commonalities and to promote cultural development between two different cultures, instead of aiming to eliminate or assimilate the other cultures (2012).[37] Yang Yue (2021), associate professor of the China Foreign Affairs University, interprets cultural diplomacy through the prism of dialogue between civilisations, which is underpinned by a multicultural perspective as well as respect for commonalities and differences between cultures. In her view, the practice of cultural diplomacy helps enhance the understanding of one's own cultural values and improves the consciousness of other cultures, ultimately contributing to the cultivation of globally shared values and a peaceful international environment based on the coexistence of diverse civilisations (Yang 2021). As Yang

[36] The China Foreign Affairs University is the only Chinese university directly affiliated with China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

[37] The Charhar Institute is a think tank in China, with a strong research focus on public diplomacy. It was founded in 2009 by Dr Han Fangming, former Deputy Director of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Committee of the CPPCC. One of the main academic journals the institute produces is the *Public Diplomacy Quarterly*, the editor-in-chief of which is Zhao Qizheng, former Director of the State Council Information Office and former Director of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Committee of the CPPCC. The strategy of public diplomacy that the institute had promoted was written in the report of the 18th National Congress of the CPC in 2012, reflecting the think tank's influence on China's national policy.

(2021) further argues, despite the fact that pursuing coexistence and a peaceful world order through cultural diplomacy is more aligned with the interest of international society, it is not in conflict with individual country's self-interests, which are essentially dependent on a harmonious and peaceful international environment. While this group of scholars do not necessarily dismiss the ultimately nationalist nature of cultural diplomacy, they tend to place more emphasis on a mutual and interactive process through which cultural diplomacy takes place.

Accordingly, some scholars highlighted the importance of the target audience in Chinese cultural diplomacy. Wang and Fan (2019) argue that cultural diplomacy, as many countries have shown through their practices, usually will not achieve desirable outcomes when it adopts a one-way approach and fails to include the receiving audience. Li He (2016), Deputy Director of the China National Centre for Culture Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), notes that the country's cultural promotion abroad is obsessed with infrastructure construction and growth targets in relation to its global expansion and presence, while neglecting the actual influence and effectiveness.[38] Li (2016, p. 24) suggests that Chinese culture should not only be "going out" but also "going in" to overseas audience's hearts and minds. This shift, according to Li (2016, p. 26), requires establishing cultural and emotional bonds between peoples through shareable values that highlight "inclusiveness", "common challenges and problems", and "historical resources". In addition, Li Zhi (2005) holds that China should adapt its approach to carrying out external cultural promotion in a way that avoids ideological and political content and a one-way indoctrination, and that adopts a two-way communication strategy with more non-state actors involved in practice. These arguments are supported by other Chinese analysts' opinions featured in China's state-owned media, *People's Daily*, highlighting the importance for Chinese cultural diplomacy to recognise and respect the aesthetic preferences and habits of audiences in the host nation, and adjust cultural programs abroad accordingly (Gong & Guan 2016).

Subsequently, other Chinese scholars and analysts reflect on China's cultural diplomacy by focusing on its actor (Hu 2007; Li, H 2016; Lu 2012; Wu 2012). Although these intellectuals acknowledge the Chinese government's leading role in cultural diplomacy, they put forward a more inclusive approach for the government to work with non-governmental actors both domestically and overseas. For example, Hu (2007) notes that while, traditionally, the actor of cultural diplomacy largely refers to the sovereign country, contemporary cultural diplomacy tends to include actors of both the officials and non-officials, such as artists, academics, and cultural and educational workers outside of the government. Wu (2012) advocates a more flexible way to conduct cultural diplomacy by involving both the government, who provides the overall guidance, and non-governmental actors,

[38] Li He's analysis of China's international cultural strategy is part of a lecture series for training Chinese cultural diplomats.

who could help the government with the much-needed knowledge of local cultural demands and markets. Similarly, Li (2016) is of the opinion that China's cultural diplomacy should rely on both overseas Chinese who are familiar with the language and culture of local society, and foreigners who follow China's development and work in local organisations. Lu (2012, p. 52) shares the view of collaborating with non-governmental actors including influential enterprises and cultural organisations abroad as well as international students in implementing China's cultural diplomacy, so as to "water down official overtones", reduce the negative influence caused by the government's presence, and prevent Chinese cultural promotions abroad from being labelled as cultural exports.

In sum, the above section presents alternative perspectives from a group of Chinese scholars in relation to cultural diplomacy's purpose, actor, and approach. Among these views, cultural diplomacy is considered as an interactive process to foster mutual understanding and learning and to promote trust and collaboration between peoples and countries. When it comes to the implementation of cultural diplomacy, although the leading role of Chinese government is noted, the value of non-state actors is emphasised as well. The need to understand and engage with overseas audiences in cultural diplomacy practice is also underlined. These understandings deserve attention as they are put forward by intellectuals, some of whom have official or semi-official titles, from state-funded universities and influential research institutes in China. Opinions of these academics reflect certain standpoints within the Chinese government and their suggestions have the potential to be taken up by China's decision-makers and subsequently translated into policies.

3.4 Conclusion

China's foreign policy in the new millennium has shifted from a more defensive stance to foster a positive international image to a rather proactive approach to enhancing its global appeal and discourse power. In this broad context, the concept of soft power has been recognised and adopted among Chinese leaders and intellectuals to achieve the above strategic goals, primarily through the promotion of Chinese culture worldwide. China's understanding of soft power has diverged from the term's original conceptualisation and demonstrated its unique characteristics, reflecting the indispensable role of culture in China's national strategy and how the Chinese government instrumentalises culture for serving its strategic purposes. These traits of soft power in the Chinese context have influenced the way in which China conducts cultural diplomacy, which is commonly seen as a tool to increase China's soft power.

Chinese policymakers and scholars tend to perceive cultural diplomacy through a functional lens, considering it as a way to counteract negative perceptions of China, present the country in a positive light, and improve China's discourse power in the world. To undertake cultural diplomacy, the Chinese government assumes a leading role in driving China's cultural promotions abroad and

attempts to control and guide culture in its own favour. Meanwhile, it also appears to adopt a quantitative approach, which correlates the growth of number and scale with the rise of cultural influence and competitiveness. It is with such a mindset that China has launched many of its cultural initiatives and programs abroad. China's prevalent understanding of cultural diplomacy shows differences compared with how contemporary cultural diplomacy is understood, which, as discussed in Chapter 2, highlights a dialogic and interactive approach to fostering mutual understanding between peoples and countries, and the role of non-state actors in the practice.

While researchers from inside and outside China have noted perceived problems in relation to the purpose, actor, and approach of Chinese cultural diplomacy, a group of Chinese scholars have called for changes in Chinese cultural diplomacy strategy. Their views underline an interactive process with an emphasis on fostering mutual understanding, the inclusion of non-state actors, and the receiving audience. These perceptions align with the current trend in undertaking diplomatic practice, which, as shown in the previous chapter, has become more relation-oriented and inclusive of participants other than the government. Nonetheless, there is limited research focusing on how China would incorporate such different understandings in its cultural diplomacy. If China is to shift from simply shipping its culture abroad to sending its culture into the hearts and minds of foreign audiences, it is then important to understand from empirical research what this is like on the ground. In particular, how are such perspectives related to the CCC project in relation to its purpose, operation, and programming? What are the subsequent implications and lessons for China's cultural diplomacy? These inquiries echo the research questions of this thesis and the answers to which will contribute to further understanding of Chinese cultural diplomacy in the 21st century.

By reviewing how cultural diplomacy is perceived in both international and Chinese contexts, the present and previous chapters have established a theoretical framework, within which the CCC project will be examined in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 4 AN OVERVIEW OF THE CHINA CULTURAL CENTRE PROJECT

As mentioned in Chapter 1, there is currently limited in-depth academic research on the China Cultural Centre project in the context of Chinese cultural diplomacy. To bridge this gap, this chapter maps out the development, purposes, key relations, setup, and activities of the CCC project through the lens of academic discussions and, where appropriate, highlights the distinctive features of CCCs through comparisons with other cultural diplomacy initiatives, particularly China's well-known language and culture promotion project, the CIs.[39] This analysis facilitates a deeper understanding of the CCC project in relation to the theoretical framework set up in the previous two chapters and, in particular, explains why it has thus far evaded controversy from foreign audiences. This chapter mainly uses data collected from interviews in Australia with former cultural diplomats, academics, arts administrators, and artists, as well as documents and information published by the Chinese government, CCCs, and the Chinese media. It finds that despite its close affiliation with the Chinese government, the CCC project's setup and activities have so far helped it avoid much criticism from overseas. This, however, does not necessarily demonstrate its success as a cultural diplomacy initiative partly due to the practical challenges it faces.

4.1 The development of the China Cultural Centre project

The initiation of the CCC project can be traced back to 1988, when China established its first two centres in Mauritius and Benin in Africa. This, as Lei Tongling (2016), a former employee of both CCCs, explained, was because Mauritius had a stable political and economic environment and a large Chinese community, while Benin had a friendly relationship with China. From a diplomatic point of view, the choice of African countries as a testing ground for the CCC project also aligned with China's traditional focus on engaging with the so-called "Third World" countries, including in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The diplomatic importance of connecting with countries in these regions can be observed from Deng Xiaoping's statement in his meeting with the Secretary General of the United Nations in 1982, as he characterised China's foreign policy as anti-hegemonism, maintaining world peace, and enhancing solidarity and cooperation with "Third World" countries (Deng 1994). The Chinese government, perceiving China as a member of the "Third World" camp, announced in the First Plenary Session of the 6th National People's Congress in 1983 that strengthening solidarity and cooperation with "Third World" countries was the basic standpoint of China's diplomatic work (我国外交工作的基本立足点 *woguo waijiao gongzuo de jiben lizudian*) (Zhao 1983). While these two CCCs started early, conducting cultural activities including martial arts

[39] Such discussions are mainly presented in sections 4.5 The setup of CCCs and 4.6 Activities delivered at CCCs.

and Mandarin courses as well as Chinese New Year celebrations, they stopped operating due to "economic reasons" (Chen 2019, p. 37) for some years and the establishment of the CCC project became stagnant from the late 1980s to the early 2000s.

The development of new CCCs globally did not recommence until 2002. This timing is not coincidental and should be understood in reference to China's growing emphasis on the role of culture in its national strategy and increasing efforts in promoting Chinese culture abroad since the turn of the century. As culture became a key element in the competition of comprehensive national power, the Chinese government launched the "going out" strategy in the cultural realm in 2002. The implementation of this strategy (in the cultural sphere) was officially written into former Chinese President Jiang Zemin's report at the 16th National Congress of the CPC in November 2002 as "an important measure taken in the new stage of opening-up" (对外开放新阶段的重大举措 *duiwai kaifang xin jieduan de zhongda jucuo*) (Jiang 2002). It is also important to note that the year 2002 marked the starting point of Hu Jintao's term, during which, as discussed in Chapter 3, Hu, as then Chinese President, placed significant emphasis on developing China's soft power and incorporated cultural soft power in his report at the 17th National Congress of the CPC in 2007.

It was against this background that the Chinese government stressed the urgency to accelerate the establishment of CCCs abroad in the *Decision of the Central Committee of the CPC on Major Issues Pertaining to Deepening Reform of the Cultural System and Promoting the Great Development and Flourishing of Socialist Culture*, which was passed at the Sixth Plenary Session of the 17th Central Committee of the CPC in October 2011 (*Xinhua News Agency* 2011). It is worth pointing out that China also started to sign agreements with foreign countries, such as France, Germany, and Japan, to establish cultural centres on reciprocal terms since 2002 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2012c). This, perhaps indirectly, facilitated more CCCs to be built in the world as well, particularly in those countries that had an interest in setting up cultural centres in China to promote their cultures. As a result, from 2002 to 2011, seven new CCCs were built in Cairo, Paris, Malta, Seoul, Berlin, Tokyo, and Ulaanbaatar respectively, bringing the total number of overseas CCCs to nine.

There is a marked growth in the quantity of CCCs since 2012, driven by a series of state-level policies. Following the national directive to speed up the construction of CCCs, the *Outline of the Cultural Reform and Development Plan During the National 12th Five-year Plan Period* provided specific instructions for establishing CCCs, requiring "holistic planning of the publicity and cultural system and local cultural resources" (统筹宣传文化系统与地方文化资源 *tongchou xuanchuan wenhua xitong yu difang wenhua ziyuan*), and aiming to build CCCs into a comprehensive platform that is geographically well laid-out, multi-functional, and with rich content for showcasing and

experiencing Chinese culture abroad (*Xinhua News Agency* 2012). Following this, the MCT released its own plan for cultural reform and development during the 12th Five-year Plan period, in which one main objective was to increase the number of CCCs up to 30 by the end of 2015 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2012a). In particular, the MCT emphasised in this plan to strengthen holistic planning in building the CCC project and advance the establishment of CCCs in countries including Thailand, Singapore, Spain, Russia, Canada, Mexico, Serbia, and Nigeria (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2012a).

At the end of 2012, the State Council further approved the *Overseas China Cultural Centres Development Plan*, according to which China aimed to establish 50 CCCs abroad by 2020, with an expectation of building three to five centres on an annual basis (*People's Daily Online* 2012). More specifically, the same plan urged to accelerate the setup of CCCs in China's neighbouring countries, increase their number in developing countries, and strengthen the effort to establish CCCs in developed countries, especially the great powers in today's world and where major international organisations are based (*People's Daily Online* 2012). Such a global layout gives the development of the CCC project a strategic flavour, as it broadly echoes China's overall diplomatic strategy, which regards major countries as the key, neighbouring countries as the priority, developing countries as the foundation, and multilateral settings as an important platform. These developmental priorities have been reflected in practical terms. For instance, the fast construction of CCCs in Laos, Nepal, and Sri Lanka in 2014 was, as stated by Yan Dongsheng, then Deputy Director of the Finance Department of the MCT, an example of implementing China's strategic deployment in its diplomacy for strengthening work concerning neighbouring countries (周边国家工作 ***zhoubian guojia gongzuo***) (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2015). Another example can be seen from the establishment of the CCC in Brussels, a city that is in close proximity to important international institutions, including the headquarters of the European Commission, European Parliament, as well as diplomatic corps and media of European countries. From the MCT's point of view, this geographical location provides China's diplomacy a strategic edge as the centre's promotion of Chinese culture and China's views not only can reach politicians, academics, and cultural figures in Belgium, but also staff members from the European Union and diplomats from other countries (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2016a). The strategic deployment of the CCC project was further manifested in the MCT's *One Belt One Road Cultural Development Action Plan (2016–2020)*. The document underlined the prioritisation of setting up CCCs in countries along the One Belt One Road route, including Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Serbia, Latvia, Turkmenistan, and Israel (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2016b).[40]

[40] At the time of writing, CCCs have been established in all these countries, except Indonesia, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan.

The momentum for the Chinese government to expand the CCC project abroad continued, as reflected in China's national policies in the following years. In 2013, the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the CPC passed the *Decision of the Central Committee of the CPC on Major Issues Pertaining to Deepening Reform of the Cultural System*, in which social organisations and state-owned enterprises were encouraged to take part in developing CCCs abroad *(China Economic Net* 2013). While this appeared to be a signal to increase the role of non-governmental actors in undertaking China's cultural diplomacy, the same document also stressed the guiding role of the government in expanding international cultural exchanges, enhancing international communication capacity and the international discourse system, and promoting Chinese culture abroad, hence suggesting that those non-state participants should still be led and supervised by the government. Another way to perceive this policy is concerned with the need to harness sufficient resources to buttress the proliferation of CCCs abroad, because, as noted by Jocelyn Chey (2008), setting up and sustaining global cultural diplomacy initiatives will incur significant costs in relation to staff and infrastructure. Following the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the CPC, the MCT started to seek collaboration with other stakeholders, notably provincial and municipal governments, to speed up the establishment of overseas CCCs since 2014. This collaborative model, as former Chinese Vice Minister for Culture, Ding Wei, noted in an interview, took advantage of resources, such as personnel, material, and finance, from Chinese local governments (Wang, J 2014). It further led to the setup of a number of CCCs in the world, including ones in Brussels, Belgium (co-built with Shanghai Municipal Government), Den Haag, the Netherlands (co-built with Jiangsu Provincial Government), Athens, Greece (co-built with Beijing Municipal Government), Budapest, Hungary (co-built with Suzhou Municipal Government), and Belgrade, Serbia (co-built with Shandong Provincial Government).

In 2017, the MCT issued its *Cultural Development and Reform Plan During the 13th Five-year Plan Period*, which called to continue to expedite the development of the CCC project, reiterating the aim to set up 50 CCCs worldwide by 2020, encouraging and guiding local governments and state-owned enterprises to participate in the construction and management of CCCs, and preparing to establish the headquarters of CCCs (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2017). It should, however, be noted that despite high anticipation from the Chinese government, the goal of building 50 CCCs globally was not realised. As reported by the MCT, there were 45 CCCs established abroad by the end of 2020 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2021a), as listed in Table 1 below. While there was no official explanation regarding why the target number was not met, Jiagu Richter (2022) suggested that this was due to disruptions and delays in construction caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering the time of the deadline, this is a reasonable speculation. Despite this, the intention to keep expanding the CCC project internationally remains a priority of the Chinese government, as demonstrated in the MCT's latest goal, announced in its *Cultural and Tourism Development Plan for*

the 14th Five-year Plan Period, to increase the number of CCCs to 55 by 2025 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2021b). As of the time of writing, the global network of the CCC project is spread across Europe (18 centres), Asia (16 centres), Africa (6 centres), Oceania (4 centres), and the Americas (1 centre).

Table 4.1 Geographical locations (countries/cities) of China Cultural Centres in the world [41]

Europe	Asia	Africa	Oceania	Americas
Athens	Amman	Benin	Auckland	Mexico
Belgrade	Bangkok	Cairo	Fiji	
Berlin	Hanoi	Mauritius	Sydney	
Bern	Kuala Lumpur	Nigeria	Wellington	
Brussels	Kuwait	Rabat		
Bucharest	Laos	Tanzania		
Budapest	Nepal			
Copenhagen	Pakistan			
Den Haag	Phnom Penh			
Luxembourg	Seoul			
Madrid	Singapore			
Malta	Sri Lanka			
Minsk	Tel Aviv			
Moscow	Tokyo			
Paris	Ulaanbaatar			
Riga	Yangon			
Sofia				
Stockholm				

4.2 The purpose of the China Cultural Centre project

According to their official website, the establishment of a CCC symbolises deeper bilateral relations between China and the host country, with the purpose of strengthening cultural exchange and cooperation between the two countries and enhancing mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples (China Cultural Center 2015).[42] More specifically, CCCs set out four objectives for their work, namely, quality, accessibility, friendship, and collaboration (China Cultural Center 2015). That is to say that, as stated on their website, CCCs aim to provide high-level

[41] Compiled based on information published by the headquarters of China's overseas cultural and tourism organisations: https://cice.org.cn/portal/site/zongzhan/bsc/bsc.jsp. The location of each CCC follows the official naming of the centre reflected on this website.
[42] See footnote 9.

services and cultural activities to the public through professional standards and well-prepared organisation, cater for people from all walks of life and welcome visitors of different ages and occupations to attend their activities, deepen mutual understanding and enhance friendship with the host country and general public abroad through their events, and establish partnerships with local organisations for promoting cultural exchange and fusion (China Cultural Center 2015). Based on these descriptions, the purpose of the CCC project is rather idealistic and in line with the internationally prevalent understanding of cultural diplomacy, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Parallel to the above-mentioned purpose, other goals can also be identified. When asked about the reason for setting up the CCCS, a former senior Chinese cultural diplomat in Australia noted that "it aims to promote cultural exchange and cooperation between China and Australia, and to help the Australian public understand China in a positive way and know a true China" (Interviewee 13). While this interviewee's response acknowledged an idealistic purpose, it also showed that this was not the only motivation for establishing the CCC in Australia. As the same respondent further explained,

> in recent years, some right-wing Australians and media often make noises and drum up the so-called influence and infiltration implemented by China in Australia, leading to a negative perception of China among the local public. In this situation, China should proactively present itself globally, take the initiative to enhance positive promotions, and introduce a real China to the Australian public. Therefore, this is the purpose for establishing the China Cultural Centre in Australia. The aim of the China Cultural Centre is to introduce Chinese culture, history, national characteristics, and the development status of contemporary China to the Australian people, and to facilitate a basic and authentic understanding of China among the general public in Australia (Interviewee 13).

It is discernible that this interviewee's explanation reflected a strategic motivation of the CCC project in relation to image shaping through China's cultural diplomacy. This strategic narrative is further manifested in Chinese domestic discussions, not least among Chinese government officials who are in charge of CCCs. For example, Zheng Hao, Deputy Director of the MTC's Bureau of International Exchange and Cooperation (BIEC), which functions as the administering agency of CCCs, stated that the Chinese government highly valued the development of the CCC project as a national platform to showcase China's image in the world, and perceived it as a critical part for strengthening China's international communication capacity and promoting Chinese culture globally (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2016a). In an interview with *People's Daily*, Ding Wei, former Chinese Vice Minister for Culture, asserted that accelerating the establishment of CCCs abroad was an important means to effectively improve China's cultural soft power and enhance Chinese culture's international communication capacity (Wang, J 2014). When asked on the same occasion about the function of the CCC project, Ding averred that an essential mission of CCCs was to "tell the Chinese story well, spread Chinese voice well, explain Chinese characteristics, values, and ideas" (Wang, J 2014). It is in this sense that CCCs are also seen as China's "overseas cultural front" (海外文化阵地 *haiwai wenhua zhendi*), which, as stressed by former Chinese Minister for Culture, Cai Wu (2014),

in a meeting with directors of overseas CCCs, needs to be guarded due to attempts from foreign hostile forces to westernise and divide China, particularly through ideational and cultural realms. These above aims of the CCC project contrast with the idealistic intention mentioned before and reflect a strong sense of strategic thinking, echoing a functional understanding of cultural diplomacy, which, as discussed in Chapter 3, prevails in Chinese political and academic discussions.

The perception that the CCC project is more strategically driven can also be identified in interviews in Australia, despite the fact that it has been promoting itself abroad as an organisation that aims to foster mutual understanding and friendship with the host country and foreign public. For example, one participant of a past event at the CCCS perceived the aim of the CCC project as associated with China's effort in national image building. As this respondent shared, "I would think it's to illustrate and highlight the positive side of China" (Interviewee 11). Other interviewees noted the connection between the CCC's purpose and China's soft power push as well as the Chinese government's agenda. When asked about the aim of the CCCS, one Australian academic, who saw the organisation as "an agency of the Chinese government", argued that "I don't think there is any confusion about that. It's part of the soft power strategy of the Chinese government" (Interviewee 5).

As this interviewee further elaborated,

> the Chinese Cultural Centre is not actually interested in the relationship between Australia and China. It's interested in promoting Chinese culture in Australia, and if the consequence of that is better relationships, that's great, but that's not really the primary goal. It's more about asserting the nature and quality of Chinese cultural histories (Interviewee 5).

An Australian scholar of Chinese visual art broadly held that the CCC project was part of China's "cultural outreach" and the very reason for its existence was "to promote China and Chinese culture, Chinese tradition, but also, of course, Chinese policy, and that is an inevitable aspect of that" (Interviewee 12). The bluntest description concerning the CCC's purpose was from a Chinese-Australian artist, who characterised it as "China's external propaganda agency" (Interviewee 4).

From a programming perspective, the strategic narrative related to the aim of the CCC project is also reflected in certain activities conducted at CCCs abroad. For instance, several CCCs, including those in Australia, Laos, and Denmark, hosted a talk on the BRI in 2015. This event was coordinated by the MCT and the lecture was delivered by Professor Wang Yuzhu, Director of the National Institute of International Strategy (NIIS) of the CASS, an academic and research institute directly affiliated with the State Council. In his speech in Sydney, Wang stressed that China's BRI was not a Chinese version of the Marshall Plan, neither was it a reconstruction of the tributary system or neo-colonialism (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2015g). On the contrary, as he explained, the BRI was predicated on ideas such as peace, cooperation, openness, tolerance, and mutual benefit, and realised through regional cooperation and mutual development (China Cultural

Centre in Sydney 2015g). It is noticeable that the way Wang explained the BRI was closely in line with how Xi Jinping introduced and framed this global project, as discussed in Chapter 1. As a semi-official scholar dispatched by the MCT, Wang's lecture served as China's effort to ease overseas concerns regarding the state-driven BRI, and its attempt to convince more partners, including Australia, which at the time of the event had signed a China–Australia FTA and announced its participation in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, to join China's global initiative.

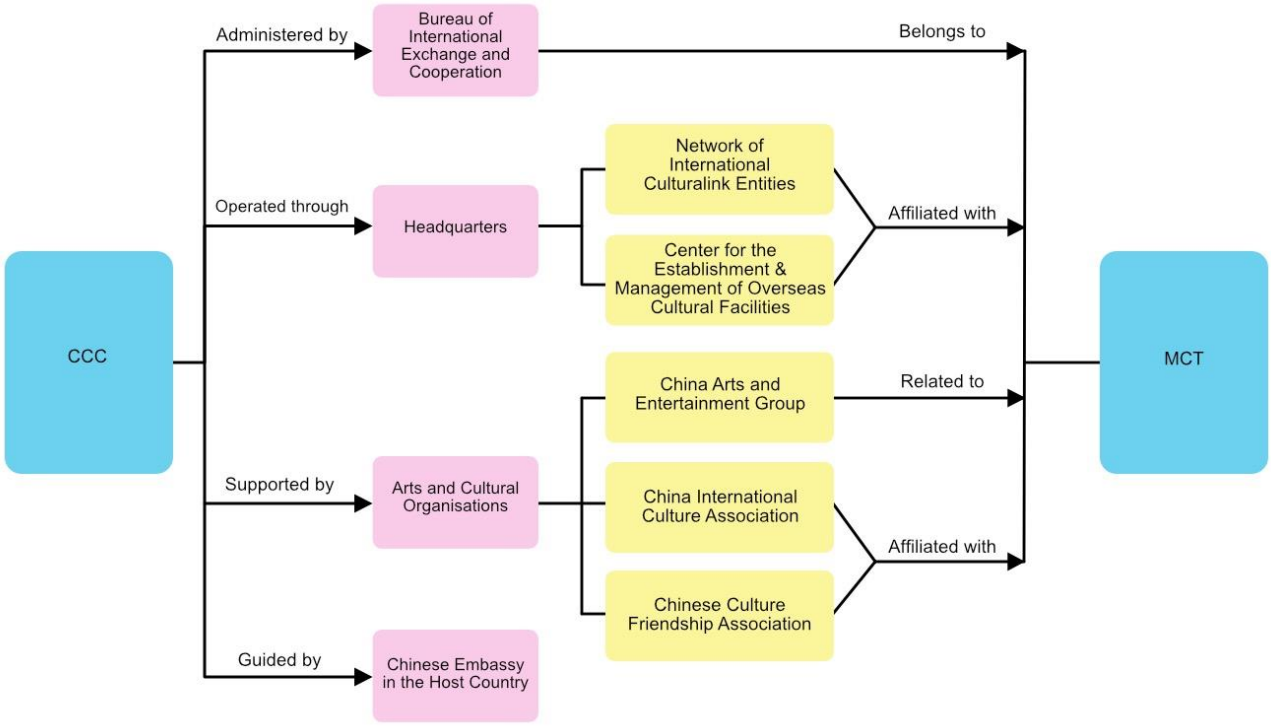
Other events with similar strategic purposes include the global campaign for the Beijing Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2022 through all CCCs abroad. This coordinated promotion aimed to, as stated by former Chinese Vice Minister for Culture and Tourism, Zhang Xu, contribute to the global publicity and promotion of the Beijing Winter Olympic Games, effectively telling the story of China and the Winter Olympic Games in Beijing, fostering a favourable international environment for this event, and further increasing the global attention on and influence of Beijing's Winter Olympic Games (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2022). Furthermore, in 2021, a series of activities celebrating the centennial of the CPC were held at CCCs in Hanoi, Amman, Luxemburg, Brussels, Rabat, Ulaanbaatar, Nigeria, Tanzania, Tel Aviv, Wellington, Athens, Seoul, etc. (locations are presented in accordance with official names of these CCCs), showing how China stood up, grew rich, and became strong under the leadership of the CPC and explaining the history and development of the CPC (*China Culture Daily* 2021). CCCs have functioned as a platform in the above-mentioned events, demonstrating their role in facilitating China's strategic objectives of building a positive national image, promoting Chinese ideas and values, and gaining influence in the world.

Taken together, informed by interviewees, Chinese domestic discussions, and specific activities delivered at overseas CCCs, it can be said that the operation of the CCC project is closely connected with China's strategic pursuits and underpinned by a functional understanding of cultural diplomacy.

4.3 Key relations of the China Cultural Centre project

As China's state-driven cultural initiative abroad, CCCs are related, structurally and administratively, to the MCT and its affiliated agencies. These government entities have played a key role in establishing and operating CCCs. Apart from these connections, the operation of CCCs also involves other MCT-affiliated/related organisations, which oftentimes interact with CCCs from a programming perspective. In addition, the running of CCCs also intersects with Chinese diplomatic missions in host countries. To further understand the CCC project, this section explains its connections with these government bodies and organisations, as illustrated in Figure 1, and their responsibilities in relation to CCCs.

Figure 4.1 The China Cultural Centre project's key relations



4.3.1 The Ministry of Culture and Tourism

A key affiliation of CCCs is that with the MCT, under which they are established and operated. The MCT appoints their directors who assume the overall responsibility for managing CCCs abroad (Ruan 2015). It also dispatches its personnel as staff members of CCCs in the world.

The MCT is in charge of administering China's cultural and artistic affairs.[43] It plays a prominent role in China's cultural diplomacy, driving the promotion of Chinese culture abroad by integrating and coordinating cultural resources nationwide, and leading cooperation with other ministries, departments, and affiliated organisations. Echoing the "going out" policy in China's cultural sectors in the early 2000s, the MCT has established a series of working mechanisms to ensure that Chinese cultural promotions abroad are implemented in a planned and sustainable way. One mechanism that is of particular relevance to CCCs is the coordination system between the MCT and cultural departments/bureaus of provincial-level governments. It aims to encourage and coordinate local governments to take part in the country's external cultural work (Zhang, X 2010). This

[43] The MCT is under the State Council, which is the chief administrative authority of China. Without delving too deeply into Chinese politics, it is necessary to note the difference between the role of state and party in China's political system, which is dominated and controlled by the latter as opposed to the former. In practical terms, the party sets policies, which are executed by the state government. This party/state relation manifests at all administrative levels in China, broadly including those of provincial, prefectural, country, and township. As this thesis is not centred on the topic of the Chinese political system, it does not specifically distinguish the party and state in its discussions but acknowledges the essentially different natures of the two in the context of Chinese politics.

mechanism is related to one of the CCC project's working modes, in which CCCs collaborate with corresponding Chinese provincial-level governments to conduct cultural activities abroad on a yearly basis. This working mode and its associated programs will be further examined in Chapter 6.

Another mechanism that concerns CCCs is the coordination system for domestic and overseas communications, which requires heads of the cultural office of Chinese embassies and directors of CCCs to return to China annually to discuss their work and missions, exchange information, and learn about relevant Chinese policies (Zhang, X 2010). In addition, the MCT has also established the inter-ministry joint meeting system for external cultural work in 2010. The system aims to strengthen the organisation of and guidance on external cultural work from a national level, enhance cross-departmental communication, cooperation, and coordination, integrate resources and ensure complementarity, form concerted efforts in promoting Chinese culture abroad, improve China's cultural soft power, and serve the country's overall diplomacy (General Office of the Ministry of Culture 2011). A fourth mechanism led by the MCT is the coordination system between the Ministry and its affiliated organisations, which are expected to proactively undertake cultural exchange with foreign countries and help improve the overall efficacy of China's international cultural exchange (Ye 2010).[44]

When interviewed by the MCT-run *China Culture Daily* in 2010, then Chinese Vice Minister for Culture, Zhao Shaohua, said that these mechanisms would lead to effective planning and coordination of cultural resources among different ministries, between central and local governments, governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as home and abroad (Zhang, X 2010). She further noted that they helped improve the situation where different ministries and departments used to conduct external cultural work separately (Zhang, X 2010). In Zhao's view, the establishment and operation of these working mechanisms generated joint force and allowed China's cultural promotions abroad to be carried out in a planned, systematic, and productive way (Zhang, X 2010).

It is important to note that these MCT-driven mechanisms have, to a large extent, influenced CCCs' operation and programming, especially in their interaction with the MCT and cultural departments/bureaus of Chinese local governments. This will be further discussed in Chapters 5

[44] These organisations primarily involve public institutions directly under the MCT (文化和旅游部直属事业单位 *wenhua he lüyoubu zhishu shiye danwei*) and enterprises directly under the MCT (文化和旅游部直属企业单位 *wenhua he lüyoubu zhishu qiye danwei*). The former includes organisations such as the China National Opera & Dance Drama Theatre, China National Theatre for Children, China National Symphony Orchestra, National Theatre of China, National Ballet of China, China National Academy of Painting, while the latter encompasses China Oriental Performing Arts Group, China Cultural Media Group, China Digital Culture Group, and the like.

and 6, which are focused on two working modes of CCCs and their associated programming. The following section will continue to discuss CCCs' relations with other key agencies.

4.3.2 Bureau of International Exchange and Cooperation

The BIEC is part of the MCT and assumes an essential role in carrying out China's cultural diplomacy overseas.[45] Among its main duties, such as stipulating policies for and guiding China's international cultural and tourism exchange and cooperation, the BIEC is responsible for administering cultural and tourism organisations established by foreign countries in China and China's cultural and tourism institutions overseas (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2019a). The role of the BIEC is primarily concerned with initiating relevant policies and plans for China's international cultural exchange and promotions, including the supervision of CCCs. It is in this sense that the BIEC contrasts with another two relevant agencies from an operational perspective.

4.3.3 Network of International Culturalink Entities

While the BIEC takes up a guiding role in administering CCCs, two other organisations that are directly affiliated with the MCT manage CCCs on a more practical level. The Network of International Culturalink Entities (中外文化交流中心 *zhongwai wenhua jiaoliu zhongxin*) (NICE), established in 1998, previously functioned as the headquarters of the CCC project (*Chinaculture.org* 2017a). Adhering to the principle of "serving the overall diplomacy of the state and promoting cultural exchange between China and foreign countries", the NICE undertakes the work of planning, developing, producing, and supplying cultural exchange products for Chinese embassies, consulates, and CCCs abroad (*Chinaculture.org* 2017a). It takes further responsibilities to support and maintain the operation of CCCs by organising, developing, and delivering cultural exchange projects, including performances, exhibitions, lectures, teaching, and trainings (*Chinaculture.org* 2017a). The NICE takes part in a multitude of cultural events, such as the coordination of the MCT's Happy Chinese New Year event, which involves cooperation with overseas CCCs and Chinese provincial-level governments.

4.3.4 Center for the Establishment & Management of Overseas Cultural Facilities

The other organisation related to CCCs is the Center for the Establishment & Management of Overseas Cultural Facilities (文化和旅游部海外文化设施建设管理中心 *wenhua he lüyoubu haiwai wenhua sheshi jianshe guanli zhongxin*) (CEMOCF). Founded in 2013, the CEMOCF is primarily in charge of basic construction of CCCs and cultural offices of Chinese embassies abroad (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2021c). It shoulders tasks of formulating relevant policies and technical standards, constructing overseas cultural infrastructure as well as organising and managing their

[45] Formerly known as the Bureau for External Cultural Relations, the BIEC also functions as the Office of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan Affairs within the MCT.

maintenance and redevelopment (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2021c). Its duties further include administering, operating, and maintaining fixed assets, as well as conducting research, consultation, exchange, and training concerning relevant technology (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2021c). The CEMOCF has led a number of projects specifically pertinent to CCCs, including the redevelopment of the CCC in Copenhagen's venue and the building of the Permanent Exhibition Hall of the 6th National Congress of the CPC on its original meeting site (Wang 2015), located on the outskirts of Moscow.[46]

Authorised by the MCT in 2019, the NICE and CEMOCF began to jointly work as the headquarters of Chinese cultural and tourism organisations overseas. Some of its primary responsibilities related to CCCs include building content and infrastructure as well as enhancing branding and standardisation of programs for China's cultural and tourism organisations abroad (NICE and CEMOCF n.d.). The headquarters are specifically tasked with, among other duties, developing and managing the program resource database, taking part in the organisation and delivery of the "globally coordinated signature events" (全球联动品牌活动 *quanqiu liandong pinpai huodong*) held at overseas cultural and tourism organisations, and undertaking work related to the annual cooperation between the MCT and Chinese local governments (NICE and CEMOCF n.d.). The "globally coordinated signature events" are related to CCCs' global coordination working mode, which will be analysed in Chapter 5, together with its associated events.

4.3.5 Other cultural organisations related to/affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism

4.3.5.1 China Arts and Entertainment Group

Next to the above-mentioned bodies, there are also several organisations that are listed on the official website of CCCs as supportive institutions. One of them is the China Arts and Entertainment Group (中国对外文化集团有限公司 *zhongguo duiwai wenhua jituan youxian gongsi*) (CAEG). It was established in 2004 by combining the China Performing Arts Agency (CPAA) and China International Exhibition Agency (CIEA), both of which were under the former Ministry of Culture, and became the largest state-owned creative enterprise in China. When the CAEG was created, it had the State Council as the investor, former Ministry of Culture as the administrative supervisor, and

[46] Since its completion in 2016, the exhibition hall, which is thus far the only permanent site exhibiting the history of the CPC outside China (Wei 2016), has been managed and operated as a branch of the CCC in Moscow. The agreement to establish the Permanent Exhibition Hall of the 6th National Congress of the CPC was made by then Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2010 (Wei 2016). In 2013, Xi and Putin signed an addendum to the agreement to mutually set up cultural centres in each other's country, declaring that the exhibition hall would be administered and run as a branch of the CCC in Moscow. In the same year, Xi attended the launching ceremony of the construction of the exhibition hall with Olga Golodets, who was then Russian Deputy Prime Minister (Wei 2016). In 2016, the newly-constructed exhibition hall was unveiled by Golodets and Liu Yandong, then Chinese Vice Premier and member of the Politburo of the CPC (Wei 2016).

the Ministry of Finance as the state-assets supervisor (State Council 2004). In 2021, the CAEG was incorporated into the Bauhinia Culture Holdings Limited (紫荆文化集团有限公司 *zijing wenhua jituan youxian gongsi*) (China Arts and Entertainment Group n.d.), which is a cultural enterprise based in Hong Kong and Shenzhen, Guangdong Province and fully owned by the Chinese government. The CAEG describes itself as the "national team" and "main force" in China's international cultural exchange and trade, with the mission to "effectively tell the Chinese story and spread the Chinese voice", "proactively participate in further building China's international communication capacity", and contribute to "a higher and more multi-dimensional level of China's external publicity" (China Arts and Entertainment Group n.d.). The CAEG has developed a number of international cultural exchange brands including the "Charms of China", which aims to promote Chinese performing arts among prominent theatres worldwide (Mu & Xiao 2019), and "Dancing China" which, as the name suggests, is specifically focused on the promotion of Chinese dancing programs towards the mainstream audience abroad (Xue 2018). A number of cultural programs under these brands, produced by Chinese arts and cultural troupes of national and local levels, have been hosted at CCCs. For example, inspired by murals in the Mogao Grottoes of Dunhuang and produced by the Song and Dance Theatre of Gansu Province, the Silk Road Dance Drama has been delivered at CCCs in Wellington, Bangkok, and Paris. The Tales of Twelve Chinese Zodiac, performed by the China Oriental Performing Arts Group, has been presented at the CCC in Singapore.

4.3.5.2 China International Culture Association

Another organisation concerned with CCCs is the China International Culture Association (中国对外文化交流协会 *zhongguo duiwai wenhua jiaoliu xiehui*) (CICA), which, established in 1986, is registered as a non-profit social organisation. According to its website, the CICA aims to enhance mutual understanding and friendship between Chinese people and peoples from other countries (China International Culture Association n.d.-b). The organisation has initiated a few cultural programs including the China Culture Volunteers, which, run from 2012 to 2018, selected and sent experts in calligraphy, art, drama, music, dance, and folk art to impart Chinese cultural knowledge and skills to the overseas audience at Chinese embassies, consulates, and CCCs (China International Culture Association n.d.-a). In 2023, the CICA is the organiser of the MCT's Happy Chinese New Year programs, which are widely featured through the global network of the CCC project. While the CICA claims to be a non-governmental social organisation, it is, as stated on its website, conducting people-to-people cultural exchange under direct guidance and support of the MCT (China International Culture Association n.d.-b). The CICA is indeed guided, if not fully controlled, by the MCT, given that recent leaders of the organisation have all been senior MCT officials, including Luo Shugang, former Chinese Minister for Culture and Tourism, and Zhang Xu, former Chinese Vice Minister for Culture and Tourism.

4.3.5.3 Chinese Culture Friendship Association

An additional relevant group to CCCs is the Chinese Culture Friendship Association (中华文化联谊会 *zhonghua wenhua lianyihui*) (CCFA), which was formed in 1987. The CCFA consists of experts and scholars in the arts and cultural circle, cultural academic institutions, and leaders of cultural groups as well as cross-strait cultural exchange organisations (Chinese Culture Friendship Association 2016). It aims to promote cross-strait cultural exchange and cooperation as well as Chinese culture by connecting the Mainland and Taiwan as well as people in different fields of work from inside and outside China (Chinese Culture Friendship Association 2016). While the CCFA has a distinct focus on the cross-strait cultural exchange, it has also collaborated with CCCs on arts and cultural programs. For example, its recent online exhibition, which celebrated the arrival of the Year of the Tiger as part of the Happy Chinese New Year event, was held in CCCs in Yangon, Seoul, Tel Aviv, Malta, and Madrid (Huang 2022). Similar to the CICA, the CCFA's presidency has also been assumed by high-ranking officials from the MCT, including Zhang Xu, and former Chinese Vice Minister for Culture, Zhao Shaohua, with the organisation listed on the MCT's website as a social group under the administration of the Ministry (Ministry of Culture and Tourism n.d.).

Some scholars see organisations such as the CICA and CCFA as "private enterprises", further arguing that CCCs' collaboration with these non-governmental groups helps them gain trust and credibility in promoting China's soft power abroad (Zhang & Guo 2017, p. 171). While agreeing that non-state actors, as discussed in Chapter 2, may help increase credibility in cultural diplomacy practice, this study does not see the CICA and CCFA, in the strict sense, as non-state actors that function as independent entities, as shown by the fact that both organisations are guided by the MCT and led by its senior members. As Hartig (2014, p. 341) notes, although there are various Chinese actors that describe themselves as non-state, "they are not totally independent from the state and are normally somehow supervised by the state" because of "the nature of the political system" in China. Therefore, d'Hooghe (2011a) holds that the role of Chinese non-state actors in China's diplomatic activities is limited. However, the attempt to increase such actors in Chinese cultural diplomacy shows China's awareness of how cultural diplomacy is understood and practised in contemporary international society, and intention to reduce the likelihood of its cultural programs being perceived as less legitimate by the foreign public due to obvious government affiliations. Nonetheless, as international scholars point out, this does not necessarily change the nature of China's public and cultural diplomacy, which remain largely planned and conducted by the state government (d'Hooghe 2011a; Hartig 2014; Klimeš 2017; Wang 2011).

4.3.6 The Chinese embassy

As China's national cultural centres abroad, the operation of CCCs also involves guidance by the Chinese embassies, particularly their cultural office, in host countries (Ruan 2015; Wang, S 2019).

This hierarchical relationship is clearly illustrated in a structural chart posted on the website of the CCC in Mexico.[47] Such connections between CCCs and Chinese overseas embassies are further manifested in various practical forms. For example, CCCs in Mauritius and Benin are listed as part of Chinese embassies in these two countries, as shown on the websites of Chinese embassies in Mauritius and Benin respectively (Embassy of China in Benin 2020; Embassy of China in Mauritius 2020). The Chinese Embassy in Mauritius has even listed the CCC in Mauritius as its "Cultural Section", albeit located outside the embassy. The connection between CCCs and Chinese embassies abroad can also be identified from the fact that, on some occasions, the cultural counsellor of the Chinese embassy concurrently holds the directorship of the CCC in that host nation. For instance, as of 2022, cultural counsellors of Chinese embassies in Sweden, Egypt, South Korea, and Mongolia, just to name a few, are also directors of CCCs in those countries. Moreover, from a programming perspective, the CCCS supports the Chinese Embassy in Australia by taking part in its China Day event, which claims to promote Chinese culture to the Australian public during the Chinese Spring Festival (Embassy of China in Australia 2018). Similarly, it offered its venue to hold the Chinese Consulate in Sydney's commemorative event for the 70th anniversary of the victory of "Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and World Anti-Fascist War" (Consulate-General of China in Sydney 2015).

4.4 The China Cultural Centre project's strong government affiliation and lack of controversy abroad

So far, this chapter has discussed the development, purposes, and key relations of the CCC project. Seen from its development and primary purpose, the recommencement and global expansion of the CCC project is largely driven by the Chinese government as well as its numerical targets and closely connected with the state's strategic motivations. Administratively speaking, CCCs are connected with various government bodies and state-affiliated organisations, as demonstrated in their key relations. These aspects reflect the traits of Chinese cultural diplomacy, as discussed in Chapter 3, and ultimately show the CCC project's strong link to the Chinese government through different dimensions.

Government links, as Jeffrey Gil (2017) notes, are not uncommon in similar cultural diplomacy initiatives, such as the Cervantes Institute, Alliance Française, and the Japan Foundation. Furthermore, it may also be understandable that government-affiliated cultural organisations tend to be strategically underpinned. As one senior Australian arts leader commented broadly on the operation of foreign cultural institutes, "it's understood and appreciated that any of the cultural arms of foreign governments are there to work sympathetically and symbiotically with the role of

[47] See: http://www.ccchinamexico.org/es/AboutUs/Others.

projecting those nations overseas" (Interviewee 3). Nonetheless, these traits, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, lead to certain implications for cultural diplomacy. As Gienow-Hecht and Donfried (2010a) have warned, people tend to associate state-driven cultural diplomacy with propaganda, perceiving such initiatives connected to a governmental agenda as less legitimate. This issue is particularly relevant to China, as explained by Ingrid d'Hooghe (2011b), because while the state is rarely trusted as the messenger by foreign audiences, the Chinese government is trusted even less, essentially due to the character of its non-transparent political system and a state-centred hierarchical model of diplomacy. Following this argument, it has been further pointed out by Liu (2021, p. 145) that when China's state-sponsored cultural diplomacy is conducted in a politically and ideologically different context, there tends to be an association between the Chinese government and the communist party, which "is synonymous with authoritarian rule and a threat to democracy". Cultural activities with links to China's state government, as Liu notes, are, therefore, prone to be regarded in such a context as "dangerous communist propaganda" (Liu 2021, p. 145).

The consequences of such government affiliation in Chinese cultural diplomacy can be seen in China's CI project, which, partly because of its link to the Chinese government, has been accused by critics of being "a way for Beijing to spread propaganda under the guise of teaching, interfere with free speech on campuses and even to spy on students" (Jakhar 2019). Compounded by geopolitical factors, concerns regarding the CI project's connection with the Chinese government have further led to some institutes' closures in North America, Europe, and Australia,[48] federal investigations into CIs following the introduction of the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme in Australia (Hunter 2019), and more recently, the British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's call to ban all CIs in the UK (Clarence-Smith 2022).

On the contrary, CCCs, as noted by scholars (Liu 2021; Zhang & Guo 2017), have so far caused little controversy and resistance in their host countries, despite close affiliation with the Chinese government. The argument about the lack of criticism and resistance the CCC project has received abroad has been made by those researchers in comparison with CIs. This point was also largely supported by interviews in Australia (Interviewee 1; Interviewee 4; Interviewee 5; Interviewee 6; Interviewee 7; Interviewee 9; Interviewee 10; Interviewee 12). It is worth mentioning that these interviews were conducted before Australia's federal election in May 2022, when bilateral relations between China and Australia were at one of their lowest points since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1972. The China–Australia relationship had been strained in the wake of a series of issues, including Australia's ban on Chinese telecommunication companies Huawei and ZTE from constructing Australia's 5G network in 2018, Australia's call for an independent investigation into the

[48] For a closer examination of CI closures see Gil's (2022) research "The fall of Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms? An analysis of closures and future directions".

origins of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, and, subsequently, China's trade sanctions on a range of Australian goods, including barley, beef, coal, timber, lobsters, and wine, etc.[49] Several interviewees acknowledged tensions between China and Australia and indicated that, because of the CCC project's connection with the Chinese government, it could attract concerns and criticisms in Australia under the current political climate (Interviewee 4; Interviewee 5; Interviewee 6; Interviewee 12). As one Australian interviewee noted, "this is a climate where there is increasing suspicion towards organisations that are affiliated with the Chinese government", and as a result, "anything that is seen to be affiliated with the Chinese government is likely to be controversial under the current global geo-political situation" (Interviewee 12). However, these interviewees also held, concurrently, that the CCC had not engendered any major controversy in Australia, not least compared with CIs (Interviewee 4; Interviewee 5; Interviewee 6; Interviewee 12). A former Australian cultural diplomat to China believes that a CCC in a particular country is less controversial because of "how it has been set up and what it has done" (Interviewee 9). It is in this light that the following sections will discuss those aspects that lead to this contrast by examining the setup and activities of the CCC project.

4.5 The setup of China Cultural Centres

Establishing cultural institutes as a national platform for conducting cultural diplomacy has been a common approach adopted by many countries in the world. Such examples include the British Council, Goethe Institute, Alliance Française, Japan Foundation, and the Korean Cultural Centre, just to name a few. Similarly, China has developed the CCC project as its cultural diplomacy platform abroad.

According to Zhao Shaohua, former Chinese Vice Minister for Culture, the establishment of CCCs is based on mutual consent between China and host countries, commonly confirmed in forms such as the agreement on setting up cultural centres in a reciprocal or unilateral way, the signing of memoranda of understanding, or the exchange of diplomatic notes between the two governments (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2012b). The point that CCCs are established on the basis of mutual agreement between the Chinese and foreign governments, as argued by some scholars (Guo & Li 2018, p. 48), shows the "legitimacy" for CCCs to promote Chinese culture in host nations as government-affiliated organisations. For this reason, Zhao Shaohua avers that China's establishment of CCCs in foreign countries is not "cultural infiltration" (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2012b).

[49] At the time of writing, China has eased restrictions imposed on coal imports from Australia since 2020 (Xu 2023) and lifted its ban on Australian timber imports (Dziedzic, Breen & Miles 2023) and barley (Tillett & Smith 2023).

In practice, CCCs are registered in different host countries in various forms that include as a diplomatic institute, charity organisation, non-for-profit organisation, and public company (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2015). According to the MCT, a CCC is oftentimes set up in the centre of the capital or major city of its host country and preferred to be located in an area that is convenient for public transport, close to cultural and educational precincts, equipped with quality public facilities, and suitable for holding events and conducting cultural exchange activities (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2015). For example, the CCCS is located in Sydney's central business district, with close proximity to renowned cultural institutes and landmarks, such as the Sydney Opera House and Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW), while the CCC in Paris is set along the Seine River, one of the top tourist attractions in France.

Currently, there are three models to set up the venues of CCCs. The first is to construct on purchased land in host countries (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2015). For instance, CCCs in countries such as Mauritius, Benin, Egypt, Germany, Thailand, and Mexico have used such a model to build their venues (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2015). A second approach, adopted by those such as CCCs in Paris, Malta, Seoul, Madrid, Moscow, and Copenhagen, is to purchase an existing building as venues for CCCs (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2015). In addition, some CCCs also rent a site for their operation. CCCs in countries including Japan, Mongolia, Nigeria, Australia, Sri Lanka, Laos, Pakistan, and Nepal have chosen this method (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2015). This flexibility in setting up venues aligns with the aim of expediting the expansion of CCCs in the world. When asked by a journalist from the *China Economic Net* about how China would meet the goal of establishing 50 CCCs by 2020, Yan Dongsheng, former Deputy Director of the Finance Department of the Ministry of Culture, regarded the implementation of multiple models to build CCCs' venues abroad as one of the measures that had increased the construction efficiency and contributed towards reaching the expected development target by 2020 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2015).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, typically, only one CCC will be set up in a host country. This largely explains why the CCC project, though initiated earlier, has a much lower number compared with the CI initiative, whose growth is less constrained in a numerical sense as it is university rather than country-based. Despite this contrast, Zhang and Guo (2017) hold that the CCC project's comparatively slower growing pace has led to less criticism. As Liu (2021, p. 68) argues, just as the Chinese old saying goes, "a tall tree catches the wind" (树大招风 *shuda zhaofeng*), the CI project is more liable to controversy as it has a considerably larger presence than the CCC project.

A related aspect concerns where CCCs have been set up globally. As shown in Table 4.1, presented earlier in this chapter, the current global network of the CCC project is spread across five continents, with Europe and Asia being the primary locations where CCCs are established.

Noticeably, there is no presence of CCCs in the US and Canada in North America, where China's cultural diplomacy has arguably been the most controversial. This is demonstrated by Gil's (2022) research, which reports that America and Canada are the top two countries where the vast majority of closures of CIs occurred (the former has shut down 89 out of 122 whereas the latter has terminated 5 out of 14, as of the publication time of Gil's research). While there is no direct evidence showing that the lack of CCCs in this region is an intentional act of the Chinese government, it does explain, in part, why CCCs have received little criticism in comparison to CIs. Nonetheless, the quantity and geographical locations are not the only aspects related to a less critical reaction towards the CCC project from overseas; other factors including the structure of CCCs also has an impact in this regard.

From a structural perspective, CCCs are set up as standalone organisations, which are a physically independent entity without fixed partners in host countries. China's approach to establishing CCCs is similar to that of the European countries, in the sense that European cultural institutes, such as the Alliance Françoise, Goethe Institute, and British Council, as Hartig (2015) explains, are created abroad as standalone branches by an operational headquarters in the home country. However, the structural approach of CCCs appears to be different from that of CIs, which are initiated under cooperative agreement between Chinese and international partner organisations under the guidance of Hanban (Hartig 2015), and usually located on foreign university campuses.[50] As a former Australian cultural diplomat to China explained this difference,

> comparing the two, the cultural centre is different in that it doesn't have a governing body which represents both the Chinese side and the Australian side, that, in most cases, that's the university that hosts a particular Chinese Confucius Institute (Interviewee 7).

To this interviewee, CCCs' structure, which does not have a local host like CIs, affords it more "flexibility" and "independence" (Interviewee 7). This point was echoed by former Director of the CCC in Mauritius, Jiang Zhenxiao, who argued in an interview with the *South China Morning Post* that the structure of CCCs gave them more control on the planning and delivery of events, particularly compared with CIs, which needed cooperation and approval from partnered institutions in host nations to hold activities, and thus may face more limitations (Gan 2015). These constraints are especially manifested in recently renegotiated agreements between CIs and Australian universities, including the University of Melbourne and the University of Queensland. While the former maintains the "right to determine the content of the curriculum and the manner of instruction for all programs administered by the institute", the latter claims that the development of its CI's

[50] According to China's *Global Times*, Hanban changed its name to the Centre for Language Exchange and Cooperation, which was launched under the Ministry of Education in 2020 (Chen 2020). It also transferred its responsibility for operating the CIs to the Chinese International Education Foundation, which, according to the *Global Times*, was a non-governmental organisation initiated by universities and companies (Chen 2020).

content “will be solely under the University of Queensland’s ambit and control” (Hunter 2019). Such limitations do not seem to apply to CCCs, which, as standalone organisations, have the full right to run their programs.

A few interviewees held that the structure of CCCs was beneficial in the sense that it helped avoid potential controversy. As a Chinese–Australian artist suggested, CCCs’ setup was similar to that of other foreign cultural institutes of other countries, including the US and Germany, and therefore followed “international convention”, making it less controversial (Interviewee 4). Likewise, another respondent noted that

> the Cultural Centres are much closer and much more similar to other bodies, let us say the Deutsch Institute [sic] or the Japan Foundation [from] other countries, which have cultural centres in Australia. It’s a structure which Australia was already familiar with because it had been done by other countries, so they understood what the Cultural Centre was about (Interviewee 7).

It is in this sense that the same respondent argued that this structure of CCCs made them “more transparent, more easily understood” in comparison to CIs, which the general public tended to feel “are hiding behind the walls of the university. And therefore, they don’t understand quite what they are about or how they are operating” (Interviewee 7).

In line with these views, one Australian academic agreed that the CCC was less controversial than CIs in Australia, as a result of its standalone structure. To this interviewee, as CIs are established within the university, they could be perceived by some as an organisation designed to “infiltrate Australian educational institutions … whereas the Cultural Centre doesn’t infiltrate anyone” (Interviewee 5). The same respondent went further emphasising that the CCC would have engendered similar controversy as received by CIs from a structural point of view,

> if the China Cultural Centre was located inside the Art Gallery of New South Wales and claimed to control everything about Chinese art and culture that the gallery did, then that would be the equivalent, but it isn’t and it doesn’t (Interviewee 5).

This response indicates that the perception that CCCs are less intrusive is, one the one hand, related to how it has been set up, and, on the other hand, connects with what activities they engage in and how they are conducted, to which the following section will turn.

4.6 Activities delivered at China Cultural Centres

Without going into too much detail about the CCC project’s programming, which will be examined in Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 based on the case of the CCCS, this section discusses programs at CCCs in a general sense. It further explains why CCCs have largely avoided criticism in relation to its activities and delivery approach, particularly compared with CIs.

According to their official website, CCCs deliver a range of cultural events including performances, exhibitions, art festivals, talks, cultural and sports contests (China Cultural Center 2015). They also host courses related to Chinese language and culture as well as sports and exercise, and provide information services through its library to the public in the host country (China Cultural Center 2015). At first glance, these activities are not very different from those carried out at CIs, which conduct Chinese language courses and cultural events such as exhibitions, screenings, and talks (Hartig 2015). However, as some researchers raise the question, why do CCCs appear to receive less criticism, while CIs lead to more controversy and resistance with similar programming (Zhang & Guo 2017)?

The reason for this contrast may first be seen in the emphasis of activities. Despite some overlap, scholars have suggested that CCCs' activities are primarily centred on the arts and culture (Guo & Zhang 2016), whereas the CIs' are mainly focused on the element of language (Liu 2021). In the view of a Chinese-Australian artist, CCCs' activities rightly reflected its nature as a cultural centre set up by a foreign government, similar to those established by other countries such as the US and Germany (Interviewee 4). This, as the same interviewee pointed out, gave CCCs "legitimacy" in their host countries (Interviewee 4). In a similar vein, an Australian musician indicated that CCCs' focus on arts and cultural activities matched their name—China Cultural Centre, which appeared to be "self-descriptive" of the organisation's purpose and nature (Interviewee 6). Based on the experience of interacting with the CCCS, this interviewee alluded that the consistency between its activities and naming helped enhance the credibility as the centre "seems quite honest and could not possibly be hiding any agenda at all, just simply promoting the culture of China in Australia only" (Interviewee 6). In contrast, the same respondent added that as the purpose and nature of CIs was not reflected in its naming, this disconnection invited suspicion of the "aim and agenda" of such a Chinese government-sponsored organisation, especially with the "China bashing" going on in Australia (Interviewee 6).

Following this point, a senior Australian arts leader observed that the CCC project was more involved in "presentational, cultural activity, whether it be through music, dance or visual arts", while "Confucius Institutes are primarily academically orientated" (Interviewee 3). In other words, CCCs' approach to delivering events is largely through presentation of arts and cultural programs, whereas CIs conduct language-based activities through tertiary education in host universities. The difference between these two approaches, as perceived by a former Australian cultural diplomat, lay in the fact that the former was easier to be separated from politics compared to the latter (Interviewee 9). This, to some extent, is true, as in the case of CIs' teaching in foreign universities, Chinese classes could be taught by teachers dispatched from China who "may implicitly try to persuade the students to see the stance of Chinese government" (Liu 2021, pp. 66-7), especially given Hanban's control on

vesting and recommending teaching candidates to overseas CIs and its training of teachers before sending them abroad (Liu 2021). As one Chinese CI Director in the UK stated,

> we have to have a firm stand about the "five positions"—Tibet, Taiwan, Xinjiang, Falun Gong and democratic movement, there are principles that we must stick to as government-sponsored teachers … we are state-sponsored, so the minimum we should do is not harm national interest. This is the bottom line (cited in Liu 2021, p. 131).

It is in this sense that one Australian interviewee was of the impression that

> the Confucius Institutes are very much about shaping an understanding of Chinese culture within a much more contemporary political framework in the sense that the interests of the Chinese state are much more to the fore in the Confucius Institute, so they are in the Cultural Centre. [It] doesn't mean they're not in the Cultural Centre, it's just they're not so apparent in the Cultural Centre (Interviewee 5).

Indeed, as China's state-driven cultural organisations abroad, CCCs are closely connected with China's national interests, as demonstrated in its development and strategic aims discussed earlier in this chapter. It is also safe to assume that CCCs' directors and managerial staff, who are appointed by and dispatched by the MCT, would uphold, at least publicly, those "five positions" as articulated by the Chinese CI Director in the UK. However, it is CCCs' approach to presenting the arts and cultural programs in their venues that makes such politically related issues less prone to be exposed and confronted in host countries, notably compared with the CIs' conduct of teaching activities within a higher education setting abroad.

It is precisely CIs' delivery approach to language teaching programs that has subsequently spurred concerns about ceding control of academic freedom and integrity. Such controversies are manifested in arguments such as CIs allow the Chinese government to gain influence over the study of China and Chinese language in foreign universities (Brady 2008), and they could inhibit "the candid discussion, inquiry, and research that are essential to university life" due to university staff's potential self-censorship on sensitive topics in the eyes of the Chinese government (Jensen 2012, p. 294). Consequently, concerns like these have engendered implications including calls from the Canadian Association of University Teachers (2014) and the American Association of University Professors (2014) to terminate CIs in Canada and the US respectively. Therefore, Liu (2021, p. 67) notes that conducting teaching activities on a host university campus is why the CI project is perceived as "more intrusive".

Taking a broader perspective, one interviewee noted that sponsored by and connected to the Chinese government, CIs' conduct of language teaching was "incompatible" with a Western tertiary environment, which supported academic freedom and freedom of speech—things that the Chinese educational and political systems lacked (Interviewee 4). As the same participant noted,

> in the Chinese [political] system, there are many forbidden areas [for open debates], which are not supposed to exist in universities [in Western countries]. Therefore, it is inevitable that [CIs] would face intense clashes against the system adopted by Western universities. I'm not commenting on who is right or wrong, but at least they are incompatible. Whereas the China Cultural Centre opens on the street, it can promote whatever it wants and I don't think it contradicts anything (Interviewee 4).

In this light, this interviewee suggested that the CCCs' presentation of arts and cultural activities, coupled with their standalone structure, helped evade the "clashes" that campus-based CIs would "inevitably" have with the Western educational institution (Interviewee 4).[51]

While the setup and activities of the CCC project have so far contributed to the avoidance of controversy, there are, however, practical issues that it faces. The next section will shift to discussions in this regard.

4.7 Practical issues of the China Cultural Centre project: funding and staffing

On a practical level, the development and operation of CCCs are not without practical predicaments. These problems may be manifested in different forms but are primarily related to two general aspects, namely, funding and staffing.

4.7.1 Funding

The funding of the CCC project mainly comes from the Chinese government. Supported by China's Ministry of Finance, the MCT has set up a dedicated fund to cover expenses related to the establishment and operation of CCCs (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2015). In 2015, the MCT announced that the government had accumulatively invested approximately 1.33 billion CNY (approximately 214 million USD) by the end of 2014 for establishing overseas CCCs (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2015). According to the MCT, the 2015 budget for CCCs' establishment, operation, and delivery of activities was 360 million CNY (approximately 51 million USD), a 181 per cent increase compared to the preceding year's budget (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2015). Despite this, researchers have long argued that the CCC project is under-funded (Chen & Wang 2019; Ruan 2015; Wang, S 2019; Wei & Chen 2015). Its lack of financial support is evidently shown when juxtaposed with the CI project, which, as Chen and Wang (2019) reported, received approximately 319 million USD from the Chinese government for its development in 2015, more than six times higher compared to that received by the CCC project in the same year.

[51] It should be noted that despite negative perceptions of the CI project mentioned in this section, there have been few proven instances where a CI has proactively engaged in conducting inappropriate activities or influenced activities at foreign universities.

While there is little detail regarding the funding for setting up and running CCCs published in recent years, some pertinent information can be gleaned from the MCT's annual budget, particularly in the category of "diplomatic expenditure". This section reflects costs incurred by personnel, operation, and conduct of relevant activities in relation to China's CCCs and national tourism offices abroad. Based on figures drawn from the MCT's budget from 2019 to 2022, the researcher has compiled Table 4.2 below, which provides a broad picture of China's financial support for overseas cultural and tourism organisations, the majority of which are CCCs.

Table 4.2 The Ministry of Culture and Tourism's budget for diplomatic expenditure in recent years

Diplomatic expenditure (Unit: Ten thousand CNY)			
Year	**Total**	**Basic expenditure**	**Program expenditure**
2019	45,490.64	7,365.64	38,125.00
2020	36,705.32	6,596.32	30,109.00
2021	21,664.82	6,006.82	15,658.00
2022	18,281.20	2,123.20	16,158.00

It is clear that the central government's annual budget for its overseas cultural and tourism organisations has shrunken significantly in recent years, reflecting a sharp decline in the CCC project's annual budget. This is in stark contrast with the funding situation of cultural diplomacy initiatives of other countries, such as the UK and Japan. According to the British Council's *2021–22 Annual Report and Accounts*, it received a grant-in-aid income of 183 million GBP (approximately 222 million USD) from the British government, a slight increase compared to a government subsidy of 145 million GBP (approximately 170 million USD) the institute had received in the previous year (British Council 2022). Looking at China's neighbour Japan, it also provides a large government endowment of 78 billion JPY (approximately 568 million USD) to support the operation of its cultural diplomacy initiative abroad, the Japan Foundation (Japan Foundation n.d.). While the MCT admitted that one reason for the decreasing funding in the 2020 budget was due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused significant disruption and cancellation in live events, it also noted consistently in its budget reports from 2020 to 2022 that the reduction in diplomatic expenditure had followed the central government's call to "tighten the belt" (过紧日子 *guo jin rizi*) and cut back on general expenditures.[52]

These aforementioned figures, trajectory, and comparisons with cultural diplomacy initiatives from China and other countries have first shown that the CCC project indeed faces funding challenges,

[52] See the departmental budget of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism from 2020 to 2022. These budget reports are available to the general public and can be obtained online by searching "文化和旅游部 [year] 年度部门预算".

and secondly, this lack of financial support from the Chinese government is likely to continue. Such funding issues could lead to implications in terms of sustainable development and programming of the CCCs in the world. As reported by Li and Su (2012), Bian Yanhua, former Chinese Ambassador to Mauritius, admitted that insufficient funding had hindered the upgrade of technology and infrastructure in the CCC in Mauritius. In a similar vein, Bai Guangming, former Director of the CCC in Mauritius, expressed his hope in an interview for a larger budget to develop more varieties of cultural activities to appeal to the local audience, who were not attracted to the existing cultural programs such as the Chinese New Year celebration events, as they were not new anymore (Zhang & Guo 2017). Furthermore, Lü Jun, former Chinese Minister-Counsellor for Culture in France, suggested that the lack of financial support from the Chinese government had affected the number and duration of programs held at the CCC in Paris (Li & Su 2012).

From the Chinese government's point of view, it has so far attempted to address the funding issue in two ways, both of which have been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. On the one hand, the Chinese government has encouraged social organisations and state-owned enterprises to participate in the development of CCCs. On the other hand, the MCT has sought collaboration with Chinese provinces and cities to co-establish CCCs abroad. These measures to broaden the source of funding for the establishment and operation of CCCs present uncertainties. First, despite the Chinese government's call to include more actors in developing CCCs, there has been very few cases in this regard. Given the Chinese government's leading role in driving China's cultural diplomacy, it remains to be seen how and the extent to which non-state actors, such as social groups and enterprises, can be incorporated in such a process. Secondly, although the MCT has managed to establish several CCCs in collaboration with Chinese local governments in the past years, it is unclear whether or not Chinese provinces and cities will continue to have the financial viability to support such a collaborative model. This is a particularly relevant question as fiscal pressure on Chinese local governments is intensive in the wake of China's long-held zero-tolerance stance towards the COVID-19 pandemic, manifested in that all 31 Chinese provincial regions logged a financial deficit in the first seven months of 2022, with the exception of Shanghai *(Bloomberg News* 2022). More recently, China's state media *Economic Daily* (2023) even calls Chinese local governments to pay greater attention to their debt issues, which would easily evolve into a "grey rhino" with "huge potential risks" once government debt management relaxes.[53] Despite these unpredictabilities, the CCC project's finances are a worthwhile aspect to observe, as it matters in terms of the sustainability of cultural diplomacy, which, as discussed in Chapter 2, requires a long-term focus to generate returns.

[53] The "grey rhino" is a metaphor for obvious but ignored threats that are of an enormous impact.

The funding problem of the CCC project is, to some degree, related to a broader dilemma in cultural diplomacy concerning its emphasis on building relationships over a long period of time. This long-term focus makes it difficult to determine cultural diplomacy's immediate effectiveness and, subsequently, tends to result in its low standing in a state's diplomatic strategy, not least in a time that "diplomatic services have to deal with a wider range of issues within a shorter timeframe and on tighter budgets" (Mark 2009, p. 3). This is perhaps why even though cultural diplomacy is normally supported by various countries in principle, it does not have a high priority in diplomacy (Riordan 2003). But more importantly, scepticism about cultural diplomacy's impact on the target audience put it in a predicament where cultural diplomacy has to constantly justify its legitimacy for financial resources from the government, which typically holds reservations about providing funds to such activities (Hartig 2015).

4.7.2 Staffing

Next to the CCC project's funding is another practical issue concerning the quantity and quality of staff. Some researchers have pointed out that CCCs are not equipped with enough staff and it is common to see one staff member assume multiple roles in their daily operation (Ruan 2015; Wei & Chen 2015). This staffing issue, as Ruan (2015) notes, may risk the quality of CCCs' work as a small number of people are overloaded with the planning and delivery of a series of events. As Wu (2018) points out, most CCCs only have one librarian, who is oftentimes overwhelmed by multiple tasks, including procurement, cataloguing, shelfing, borrowing, consulting, and event organisation. According to Wang Song's (2019) research based on multiple CCCs in Europe, the lack of staff partly leads to delays in updating information and events on websites and social media platforms to the local public. The main cause for insufficient staff at CCCs is related to systemic reasons. Currently, managerial-level staff, such as directors and program managers at CCCs are dispatched by the MCT. They are personnel selected primarily from the MCT or cultural departments/bureaus of Chinese provinces/cities. This way of deployment, according to Ruan (2015), impedes the provision of sufficient human resources to CCCs in a timely fashion. A further reason is that there is limited posting capacity allocated to China's cultural organisations abroad, thus also constraining the number of people that can be sent out to CCCs (Ruan 2015). In addition, some scholars consider the CCC project's under-funded budget as another reason for the shortfall of staff (Wei & Chen 2015). This may well be a relevant argument in the sense that the insufficient funding allocated to the CCC project cannot afford to increase the posting capacity for more employees.

Another relevant issue is concerned with staff quality, which is mainly reflected in the lack of professional and specialised employees at CCCs in their host countries. One noticeable aspect is the language barrier. For example, as Zhang and Guo (2017) find in their research, former Director of the CCC in Benin, Bai Guangming, speaks little French, which is the official language of the

country, hence hindering his communication with local Beninese. Other scholars have found that the librarian in the CCC in Bangkok cannot speak Thai, creating an obstacle to interact with and serve local visitors (Wang et al. 2021). The shortage of staff with foreign language capacities has also been pointed out by Chen (2019), who identifies a high demand in minority language speakers among CCCs. This issue is manifested, perhaps indirectly, in that while English and Chinese are commonly used by CCCs to promote cultural activities in host nations, other local languages are not always visible. For example, websites of CCCs in Luxembourg, Kuala Lumpur, and Phnom Penh do not include the official languages of their host countries.[54] While CCCs in Copenhagen and Stockholm have featured Danish and Swedish in limited areas on their websites respectively, a large proportion of program content and news remains in English and Chinese. Similarly, CCCs in Malta and Mauritius only use English and Chinese on their websites without including other major languages used in local society.[55] This situation could limit the effectiveness of CCCs' promotion, particularly in countries which have an official language other than/in addition to English, or have multilingual environments (Wang, S 2019).

A further aspect is concerned with CCC staff members' relevant knowledge and skills. As Wu (2018) points out in his research on CCCs' libraries, the majority of librarians lack the expertise and skills in working in a library environment and they are typically people dispatched from the MCT, accompanying family members of CCCs' staff, or contractors and volunteers from host countries. In this light, Wu (2018) has questioned the competency of such staff in terms of providing professional consulting services to local customers. More broadly, researchers have also noted that CCCs are generally short of experts in new media and communications, event planning (Wang, S 2019), as well as the international cultural market (Ruan 2015).

These issues are ultimately reflective of China's lack of professionals and experts in the field of cultural diplomacy. As Wu Baiyi (2016) points out, one shortcoming of Chinese cultural diplomacy is that it has a small number of cultural talents, an unbalanced talent structure, and insufficient cultural leaders and high-level specialists. To Wu (2016), this impedes the implementation of cultural diplomacy in a broader sense. Following this point, some Chinese scholars call for a more inclusive approach to conducting cultural diplomacy by involving other actors who possess relevant knowledge and skills (Li, H 2016; Wu 2012).

[54] Official languages in Luxembourg are Luxembourgish, German or French. The CCC in Kuala Lumpur is based in Malaysia, where the official language is Malay. The CCC in Phnom Penh is located in Cambodia, the official language of which is Khmer.
[55] For example, the CCC in Malta's website does not include Maltese, a major language used for many purposes in Malta. The website of the CCC in Mauritius does not feature French, which is widely spoken in Mauritius.

One of the ways in which CCCs attempt to address these issues is to recruit local employees who have the language skills and knowledge of local society. For example, the CCC in Benin hired a Beninese employee, who had studied in China for more than a decade and held a PhD in Diplomacy of Contemporary China. As a locally engaged staff member, Maurice Gountin assisted with translation, interpretation, teaching and programming activities, and public relations at the CCC in Benin (Zhang & Guo 2017). Similarly, the CCCS employed local staff as programming and administrative assistants. According to some Australian interviewees, these locally hired employees played an important role in contributing to the CCC's work in Australia, as they had the language skills (Interviewee 10), an understanding of the local community (Interviewee 8), and a relevant educational background in the arts and culture (Interviewee 2). In spite of such advantages, Chen (2019, p. 38) argues that CCCs "cannot completely rely on foreign employees in host countries". This, as he further explains, is based on security and confidentiality concerns in China's conduct of external cultural work. Such an argument is, to some extent, understandable, given the Chinese government's tight control over China's cultural diplomacy and the nature of the CCC project as a state-led cultural initiative. However, it is important to emphasise that the relevant skill-set and familiarity of the local milieu are critical elements and should be considered as key criteria when it comes to CCCs' staffing, whether they be dispatched from China or hired locally. This is because, as discussed in Chapter 2, cultural diplomacy is not merely a one-way cultural presentation but based on fostering mutual understanding, therefore requiring continued interaction and engagement with local audiences in host nations.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the CCC project through the lens of its development, purposes, key relations, setup, and activities. Driven by a series of policies of the Chinese government, the recommencement of the CCC project started as China placed more emphasis on the role of culture in its national strategy and initiated the "going out" policy in the cultural sectors in the new millennium. China has, since then, put increasing efforts into promoting Chinese culture abroad, with the aims of shaping a positive image, championing its ideas and values, and obtaining influence in the world. These strategic aims are an integral part of the establishment of CCCs, as reflected in views concerning their purposes held by Chinese policymakers and Australian interviewees, and in certain programs delivered at CCCs, hence demonstrating a functional understanding of cultural diplomacy.

From an administrative perspective, CCCs are supervised by the MCT's BIEC and operated through its headquarters formed by MCT-affiliated entities. This administrative structure shows China's centralised method to running its cultural diplomacy initiatives, consistent with China's top-down approach to undertaking cultural diplomacy, as discussed in Chapter 3. The operation of CCCs also

intersects with other public institutions, enterprises, and non-governmental organisations. These actors, though not part of the Chinese government, are typically connected with or under the guidance of the MCT, further suggesting the Chinese government's leading role in driving the country's cultural diplomacy.

Despite CCCs' strong affiliation with the Chinese government, as manifested in its development, strategic purposes, and key relations, it has thus far largely evaded criticism from the public abroad, especially compared with the CI project. This, as analysed in this chapter, is related to their setup and primary focus on presenting arts and cultural programs in host countries, leading to a less intrusive and controversial perception from the foreign audience.

However, the CCC project's lack of controversy does not necessarily equate to its success as a cultural diplomacy project. This is, on the one hand, because the development and operation of CCCs face practical issues, such as funding and staffing. On the other hand, it is also concerned with the aim of cultural diplomacy—fostering mutual understanding, as discussed in Chapter 2. As Richter (2022) rightly points out, a country's cultural diplomacy, though part of the diplomatic strategy of the state, can only be successful when it promotes understanding and dialogues with people in the receiving country. While the recommencement and expansion of the CCC project has a marked focus on numerical targets and speed in its development, have China's cultural practices facilitated engagement and enhanced mutual understanding with the public in the host country? It is in this sense that the success of the CCC project is dependent on and remains to be examined regarding how it interacts with the local audience through cultural programs, and the foreign public's response to such endeavours.

To further understand the CCC project, the following chapters (5, 6, 7, and 8) will look closely at its three working modes and their associated programming through the case of the CCCS. The examination of these dimensions further addresses research questions outlined at the outset concerning how the CCC project works and the types of programs it delivers. It also sheds light on implications of those aspects for the CCC project as part of Chinese cultural diplomacy.

CHAPTER 5 THE CHINA CULTURAL CENTRE PROJECT'S WORKING MODE 1: GLOBAL COORDINATION—A CASE STUDY OF THE QUATERCENTENARY COMMEMORATION OF TANG XIANZU AND WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S PASSING

While the previous chapter introduced the China Cultural Centre project through the lens of its development, purpose, key relations, setup, and programming focus, Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 will further examine its working modes and associated cultural programs based on the case of the China Cultural Centre in Sydney, which was chosen for both practical and methodological reasons, as explained in Chapter 1. These chapters will provide more details concerning the operation and programming of the CCC project. In particular, the present chapter is focused on the global coordination (全球联动 *quanqiu liandong*) working mode, which involves the entire global network of CCCs holding cultural events in a coordinated period of time. This working mode is exemplified by the joint commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the passing of Chinese playwright Tang Xianzu of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) and his contemporary, William Shakespeare. This commemorative event was held at all CCCs in the world in 2016 through the MCT's coordination. In addition, under the same theme of commemorating Tang and Shakespeare, the CCCS organised its own supplementary event. The analysis in this chapter is based on information and reports published by the Chinese government and media as well as the CCCS, and interviews conducted in Australia. It also draws on academic debates about Tang and Shakespeare in relation to their global cultural influence, and perspectives from Chinese scholars and politicians regarding Tang as a Chinese cultural symbol in the contemporary world.

The case study shows that the commemoration of the quatercentenary of Tang and Shakespeare's passing through the feature exhibition, *Dialogue Across Time and Space*, was conducted with a strong functional purpose and through a top-down approach. In the planning and delivery of this cultural program, a marked emphasis was also placed on quantity in relation to the perceived impact. These aspects represent the characteristics of the global coordination working mode, which is typically associated with uniform themes prescribed by the MCT and a quantity-driven mindset for gaining perceived influence of events. This one-way projection of a vetted cultural program does not reflect what cultural diplomacy is really about—"the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding" (Cummings 2003, p. 1), as discussed and defined in Chapter 2. Nonetheless, the concurrent activity on the same theme, separately-organised by the CCCS, showed a different approach in the context of cultural diplomacy, namely one focusing more on the value of local collaborators and a dialogic format.

5.1 An overview of the global coordination working mode

One of the working modes through which the CCC project operates is the global coordination approach. This mechanism was initiated in 2016 and is led by the MCT, particularly through the guidance of its BIEC and the organisation of the NICE, to undertake cultural events in a concentrated period of time at CCCs worldwide. Based on reports from the *China Culture Daily* (Ma 2018) and the MCT (2019b), four major events, complied in the below table, have been launched under this working mode.

Table 5.1 Events conducted at China Cultural Centres through the global coordination working mode

Event Name	Year
Dialogue Across Time and Space Homage to the 400th Anniversary of the Death of Tang Xianzu and William Shakespeare	2016
China Intangible Cultural Heritage Weeks	Since 2017
Mid-Autumn Festival: A Moonmoment to Remember	Since 2017
China Tourism and Culture Weeks	Since 2019

In addition to these events, there also appears to be other activities that have been delivered at CCCs via a similar approach, though not formally reported by the MCT or Chinese media as initiatives carried out through this working mode. For example, the celebration of the 95th anniversary of the CPC involved all 25 CCCs in 2016 (Bei 2016), the global promotion of the Beijing Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2022 was conducted by leveraging the global network of CCCs (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2022), and the Tea for Harmony—Yaji Cultural Salon events were planned in 2023 to be held at China's overseas diplomatic, cultural, and tourism organisations, including CCCs, to promote Chinese tea culture (NICE and CEMOCF 2023).

A prominent feature of events organised through this working mode is that each of them has primarily been implemented through a top-down approach with a unified theme prescribed by the MCT. It is also noticeable that these themes are largely associated with China's overall diplomacy and national policies. Such connections can be observed, for example, in the Mid-Autumn Festival: A Moonmoment to Remember event. According to its official website, the 2021 programs, centred on the Mid-Autumn Festival and tapping into Chinese traditional culture, were focused on sharing values of harmony in family and society, conveying Chinese people's love for family and nation, and promoting the idea of building a community with a shared future for mankind (NICE and CEMOCF 2021). These themes and cultural connotations are linked to such concepts as "Harmonious World" and "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind", which, as explained in Chapters 1 and 3, are salient diplomatic slogans through which China attempts to foster its international image and increase discourse power. Furthermore, the implementation of China Intangible Cultural Heritage

Weeks was in line with the Central Committee of the CPC's emphasis on "the importance of carrying forward the essence of traditional Chinese culture" since the 18th National Congress of the CPC in 2012 (*Chinaculture.org* 2017b).

From the MCT's perspective, delivering cultural activities through such a working mode helps improve their influence by taking advantage of the global network of CCCs through an integrated approach (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2016a). The manifestation of such influence is typically linked to quantitative outcomes with little qualitative details, such as audience perceptions and media reviews/comments regarding these activities from host nations. This emphasis on the numerical measurements in relation to the perceived impact can be identified in a *China Culture Daily* article, which accoladed the achievements of 29 CCCs that delivered 160 events associated with the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Weeks in 2017, with a participation number of over 1.61 million people (Song 2019). In addition, as the article continued to exemplify, 86 events were hosted during the 2018 China Cultural and Creative Products Display Week, which were attended by nearly 580,000 people and covered by more than 200 Chinese and foreign media outlets (Song 2019). This way of gauging the success of Chinese cultural diplomacy events is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, while quantitative outcomes are indicative of the popularity of an event, they hardly reflect details concerning audience perceptions, which, as discussed in Chapter 2, are an important dimension to understand the impact of cultural diplomacy activities. Secondly, while numbers referred to in reports from Chinese state-affiliated media, like the *China Culture Daily*, are indeed impressive, they are difficult, if not impossible, to verify, especially given the lack of qualitative information, such as participants' comments and data sources, to validate such claims. This issue is subtly reflected in the contrast between Chinese state-affiliated and Australian English media's attention on the feature exhibition of the commemoration of Tang and Shakespeare, as can be seen later in this chapter.

The above-mentioned traits of the global coordination working mode—a top-down approach, prescribed themes, and quantitative emphasis—are also manifested in the commemorative event of the 400th anniversary of the passing of Tang Xianzu and William Shakespeare. This can be seen in the fact that, on the one hand, the proposition of this commemoration was intentionally made by Chinese President Xi Jinping in a diplomatic context. As stated by the MCT, the conception of this globally coordinated event followed Xi's suggestion to celebrate the two literary figures whilst on his state visit to the UK in 2015, aiming to expand the international influence of Chinese cultural figures and traditional culture and to promote cultural exchange between China and the world (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2016c). On the other hand, in a 2016 press conference held by the MCT, the commemoration of Tang and Shakespeare was listed as an example of an influential program organised through the global coordination working mode, as evidenced by claims that a total of 150

events were hosted by CCCs within three months, reaching over 50,000 visitors and being reported/reposted by overseas media 100,000 times (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2016a). While these numbers are incredible, they are hard to substantiate. Nonetheless, this demonstrates a perceived correlation between numerical measurements and impact. Taken together, the commemoration of Tang and Shakespeare is representative of the global coordination working mode, making it a suitable case for analysing this mechanism.

The following section examines the background, purpose, and delivery method of this commemorative event. These discussions are based on information and reports published by the Chinese government and media as well as the CCCS. The analysis also draws on debates regarding the cultural significance of Tang and Shakespeare, and the symbolic meaning of promoting Tang as a Chinese cultural figure in the contemporary world (in the eyes of Chinese scholars and politicians), shedding light on the underlying aim of this joint commemoration.

5.2 Commemorating Tang and Shakespeare: the background and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism's coordination

As mentioned earlier, the idea of jointly commemorating Tang and Shakespeare originated from Xi Jinping's state visit to the UK in October 2015. This was a time when China and the UK were embarking on the so-called "Golden Era" of their bilateral relations. In his speech at the City Hall in City of London, Xi noted,

> Tang Xianzu was a contemporary of Shakespeare, both of whom passed away in 1616. Next year marks the 400th anniversary of their passing. China and Britain could jointly commemorate these two literary masters to promote people-to-people exchanges and deepen mutual understanding between our two countries (Xi 2015b).

Xi's suggestion served as a strong political signal to celebrate the legacy of the two literary figures, and indeed had a significant impact on the number and scale of cultural events conducted under this theme. As reported by *China Daily*, a multitude of events were subsequently held to pay tribute to Tang and Shakespeare in the following years. For example, the Third China Fuzhou Tang Xianzu Art Festival, held in Tang's birthplace of Fuzhou in 2016, featured events such as the premiere of the musical *Tang Xianzu* performed by the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and the opening of the Tang Xianzu Memorial Museum (Chen 2017). This art festival also staged a production entitled *A Midsummer Night's Dreaming Under the Southern Bough* by the University of Leeds, combining Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Tang's *The Dream Under the Southern Bough* in the adaption (Chen 2017). Furthermore, approximately 20 performing arts troupes from China and the UK staged pieces adapted from Tang and Shakespeare's works at The Tang Xianzu International Theater Arts Exchange in Fuzhou in 2017 (Chen 2017). In addition, Fuzhou city even planned to build a "mini Stratford" by replicating features of Shakespeare's hometown, Stratford-

upon-Avon, such as his birthplace, family home, and the Holy Trinity Church where The Bard was buried (*Daily Mail* 2016).

Related to discussions in this chapter is the MCT's effort in pushing this commemorative event through the global network of CCCs in a coordinated approach. This global initiative to celebrate Tang and Shakespeare, as indicated by the MCT, followed Xi's call to commemorate the two contemporaries and echoed the arts and cultural events held between China and the UK, with the aim to further enrich the program content and increase the influence of the joint commemoration through CCCs as a major platform (Chen, L 2016). As a result, a series of activities were delivered in more than 20 countries from September to December 2016.

In the MCT's view, the coordination of the global commemoration of Tang and Shakespeare highlighted the scale and number of this event. As Liu Hongge, then Deputy Director of the NICE, stated, one of the characteristics of this event was its wide scale across the world and that it was delivered, for the first time, at all CCCs through a coordinated move (Chen, L 2016). Liu held that as the commemorative event was hosted continuously over the course of three months at 26 CCCs across five continents, this non-stop and concentrated schedule ensured the effectiveness of such an event (Chen, L 2016). Although Liu did not specify the kind of effectiveness he was referring to, it appeared that such perceived efficacy was connected with the wide presence and quantity of the cultural activity.

A main part of this commemorative event, as introduced in a MCT press conference by Zheng Hao, Deputy Director of the BIEC of the MCT,[56] was a feature exhibition, entitled *Dialogue Across Time and Space*, which was centred on the theme of Tang and Shakespeare (Chen, L 2016). The exhibition was designed by the Beijing Culture and Art Center (北京人文艺术中心 *beijing renwen yishu zhongxin*) as a commissioned project by the NICE, which was the organiser of this commemorative event and, as discussed in Chapter 4, is directly affiliated with the MCT. This exhibition was then planned to be distributed to and displayed at all CCCs as the main cultural program of the quatercentenary commemoration of Tang and Shakespeare's passing.

The *Dialogue Across Time and Space* exhibition consisted of three sections, namely, "Time and Legend", "Dream and Reality", and "I @ Tang Xianzu", with each segment having a distinct focus. According to Cui Qiao, Director of the Beijing Culture and Art Center and who was also in charge of producing this themed exhibition, the first part showcased Tang and Shakespeare's backgrounds, experiences, and literary achievements through pictures and historical records (Chen, L 2016). The second section presented Tang's representative works via video, image, multimedia, and virtual

[56] At the time of Zheng Hao's speech, he was Assistant to the Director of the BIEC.

reality technologies, with a particular emphasis on showcasing Tang's play *Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭 *mudan ting*) (Chen, L 2016). As Cui noted, the *Peony Pavilion* was a perfect representation of China's Kunqu Opera and this segment also exhibited costumes and props used in Kunqu Opera for showing the audience the charm of Chinese Kunqu culture (Lu 2016). The third part of the exhibition displayed derivative products of Tang Xianzu and Kunqu Opera, and allowed viewers to leave their feedback and comments on the event (Chen, L 2016).

Looking at the planning of this event, it can be said that this feature exhibition of the joint commemoration was curated in a prescribed way with a stronger focus on presenting Chinese cultural aspects including Tang Xianzu as well as Kunqu culture rather than Shakespeare and his work. It can also be discerned that there was an emphasis on the scale and number for gaining perceived influence of this commemorative event.

5.3 The purpose of the commemorative event

While Xi's suggestion to hold such a joint commemoration seemed to link to idealistic ideas, such as promoting cultural exchange and enhancing mutual understanding between peoples, as shown in his speech made in the UK, the global presentation and delivery of this event, however, had a strong strategic aim. Such a purpose can be seen from discussions and reports among Chinese scholars, media, and politicians.

As Xi promoted the idea of the commemorative event in 2015, he referred to Tang as being regarded as the "Shakespeare of the East" (Xi 2015b). While the parallels between these two historical figures might be drawn in the sense that they were contemporaries who both passed away in 1616 and that 2016 marked the quatercentenary of their death, there is no consensus regarding the appropriateness of this comparison. While some scholars point out that there are similarities between Tang and Shakespeare in terms of their common themes and shared values (Birch 1991; Fusini 2019), others hold that they do not have much in common (Joubin 2017; Zou 2018) and, in fact, even differ from each other in many aspects including background, purpose of writing, identity, target audience, and influence of their work (Zou 2018). The present study does not intend to examine the comparison between Tang and Shakespeare through a theatrical or dramatic lens as that is not the focus of this research. Nonetheless, it argues that it is important to look more closely at why such a connection was evoked in this commemoration. This analysis provides an angle to understand the purpose of this event from a Chinese point of view.

One difference, among others, that has been pointed out between Tang and Shakespeare is their global influence. As Ye Yang, Associate Professor in comparative literature from the University of California, Riverside, notes in an interview, Shakespeare's international status and influence

achieved in Europe cannot be matched by that of Tang (*The Paper* 2016). The global popularity of Shakespeare and his work, as pointed out by Liao and Liu (2016) in *Guangming Daily*, is largely driven by historical events including Renaissances and European imperialism, which have facilitated the spread of Shakespeare's literary work not only in Europe but also across other continents in the world. In this light, English drama has become a worldwide cultural phenomenon in the 20th century, of which Shakespeare has been made a benchmark (Liao & Liu 2016). The influence of Shakespeare can also be seen in China in the early 1900s, when his work was translated into Chinese by intellectuals, as part of their attempt to bring development to what they perceived as a backward Chinese society through Western ideals, such as democracy and science, instead of classical Chinese ideas. Despite being banned during the Cultural Revolution period, Shakespeare's work re-gained appeal in China since the late 1970s and is still very popular among Chinese people in the 21st century. As Professor Feng Wei, who teaches English and Shakespeare at Shandong University, notes, today everybody in China knows Shakespeare and educated people love to see Shakespeare's work on stage (Feng 2017). However, what is in contrast is the reputation of Tang Xianzu among Chinese people. As Professor Colin Mackerras (2010, p. 214), Australian sinologist specialised in Chinese theatre studies, observes, "[w]hereas Shakespeare is a household name virtually everywhere, even young Chinese intellectuals are not very familiar with Tang Xianzu, and many have not even heard of him".

To Sun Ping, member of the National Committee of the CPPCC and Chinese Peking Opera artist, this reputational disparity between Tang and Shakespeare is sad and embarrassing for China, which boasts its opera as well as long history and civilisation, as she notes in an interview with the *China Youth* (Xu 2016). She then calls to revitalise Chinese drama as an integral part of rejuvenating Chinese culture, and to promote Chinese drama and Tang Xianzu internationally to increase China's cultural soft power (Xu 2016). Sun's disappointment about the lack of understanding and recognition of Tang inside and outside China has similarly been expressed by others in China with a more nationalist sentiment. For example, an article published by *People's Daily* (2016) noted that the two literary masters were not commemorated together a century ago, and, instead, Shakespeare was regarded as a symbol of enlightenment and Western culture was prevalent during China's New Culture Movement (新文化运动 *xin wenhua yundong*).[57] This was a time, as the article continued, that led many Chinese to doubt and self-disparagement, wondering what tradition and China was about. The same article further pointed out that China, at that time, was voiceless, disappointing, and insignificant in the world. In other words, the unequal status of

[57] The New Culture Movement, also known as the May Fourth Movement, was a socio-political revolution driven by Chinese intellectuals between the 1910s and 1920s. This movement advocated the adoption of Western ideas, not least science and democracy, and the abandonment of traditional Confucian ideas, underpinned by hierarchy in relationships and obedience, in order to strengthen Chinese society and China's international position (Asia for Educators n.d.).

Tang and Shakespeare was seen as reflective of China's lack of cultural confidence in the early 1900s when the country was divided by foreign imperial powers and its economy, military, and technology fell behind the West.

However, in the eyes of the Chinese media and scholars, this imbalanced situation has changed as reflected in today's worldwide celebration of Tang and Shakespeare's quatercentenary of passing. For instance, the global commemoration of the two literary figures in 2016 was listed by Shanghai's *Wenhui Daily*, among other events, as showing how China's cultural soft power had shaped the world, heralding bright prospects for the development of Chinese traditional culture in the world (Li, Q 2016). Likewise, foreign students' studies and performances of Tang Xianzu's work were described by *Xinhuanet* as the increasing influence of China's soft power internationally (Yuan 2016). When talking about this joint commemoration, Zhou Yude, former President of the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts, held that such cultural exchange would have been unimaginable 100 years ago, but now China, as the second largest economy in the world, can have dialogues with Western countries on an equal footing (*Xinhua Daily Telegraph* 2016). In a similar vein, *People's Daily* (2016) noted that commemorating the two literary masters together showed the transformation from a sense of cultural inferiority to cultural confidence in China and represented the awakening of China's national cultural consciousness. However, it is important to point out that these events were intentionally driven by the Chinese government rather than occurring spontaneously abroad, therefore, to claim the global celebration of Tang as evidence of an increasing status of Chinese culture and soft power seems unfounded. Despite this flawed logic, these perspectives do show China's desire to assert and obtain cultural appeal and influence internationally through its cultural symbols, such as Tang Xianzu.

Driven by this sense of nationalist confidence, some have even gone further arguing that the celebration of Tang's literary status and achievement does not need to be linked to and gauged by Shakespeare's. For instance, Zou Zizhen (2016), Professor of Chinese from Minjiang University in Fujian, argues against the idea of naming Tang Xianzu as "Shakespeare of the East" and insists that Tang Xianzu's literary reputation and artistic achievements do not need to be demonstrated by being juxtaposed with Shakespeare. Fan Fangjun (2016), Professor of Chinese from Renmin University, is of the view that regarding Tang as the "Shakespeare of the East" is an attempt to showcase his historical status in drama in the East and even internationally by piggybacking on Shakespeare's prominent reputation in the history of drama. Nonetheless, as Fan (2016) further argues from the perspective of discourse power, such a connection reflects the assumption that Shakespeare is the only standard of evaluating theatre work in the world, and drama from the East can only be identified and recognised through that from the West, therefore being deprived of the right to express itself. He then calls to reflect on the 400th commemoration of Tang and

Shakespeare's passing and to acknowledge the gap between the East and the West in terms of global discourse power and cultural influence (Fan 2016). It is in this sense that Fan (2016) emphasises that improving China's cultural soft power and discourse power through cultural promotions and exchanges should be the aim of this quatercentenary commemoration.

While Zou and Fan's argument originate from China's academia, a similar perspective has also been expressed from China's top political circle. In an MCT-organised meeting concerning the celebration of Tang Xianzu's 400th anniversary of passing in 2016, Liu Qibao, member of the 18th Politburo of the CPC, former Secretary of the Secretariat of the CPC and head of the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the CPC, delivered a speech, entitled *Honouring Excellent Traditional Culture and Enhancing Chinese Cultural Confidence*. He stated that commemorating Tang Xianzu was important for improving national cultural confidence, facilitating the inheritance and development of Chinese culture, and promoting the exchange and mutual learning in culture between China and the world (Liu 2016). As he asserted,

> as a British cultural symbol, Shakespeare has become an important part of the UK's soft power…. Today, China is striding towards the centre of the world stage and the world is eager to understand China. We should seize this favourable opportunity to vigorously push Chinese culture abroad and to proactively facilitate cultural exchange and mutual learning between China and the world, promoting in the world the most representative Chinese cultural symbols such as Tang Xianzu; the most representative cultural carriers including Chinese opera, calligraphy, martial arts, medicine, and traditional festivals; the Hundred Schools of Thought and their wisdom,[58] aesthetic spirit of Chinese poems, and the artistic value of the Four Classic Novels,[59] fully showcasing the unique charm of Chinese culture and let the world know a cultural China, colourful China, and magnificent China (Liu 2016, p. 5).

It can be seen that the evocation of such a connection between Tang and Shakespeare in this global commemoration is of symbolic meaning, in which China has its own literary giant who is on par with, if not better than, one of the greatest masters in the same field. As the *Economist* (2016) bluntly pointed out, the use of Shakespeare in this commemorative event was an excuse and China's primary aim "was to use the English bard to promote one of their own: Tang Xianzu", showing that whatever the West can do, China can do at least the same. The symbolic meaning of this worldwide celebration is reflective of the view, especially manifested by Chinese media, scholars, and decisionmakers as discussed above, that Chinese culture has gained significant appeal and influence in the world as the country becomes stronger and richer than a century ago, thus allowing China to confidently conduct cultural exchange and cooperation with the West on an equal level. The ultimate purpose of China's commemoration of Tang and Shakespeare is,

[58] The Hundred Schools of Thought refers to philosophies and schools that flourished during the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period (770–221 BC) of ancient China, including those such as Confucianism, Legalism, Taoism, Mohism, etc.
[59] The Four Classic Novels include the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Water Margin*, *Journey to the West*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

therefore, closely linked to such attempts as increasing China's cultural confidence, enhancing its cultural soft power, and shaping a culturally prominent image of the country internationally through China's cultural figure. The essential goal of this global-scale event also broadly aligns with China's functional understanding of cultural diplomacy which, as discussed in Chapter 3, aims to increase China's global influence and to strengthen the country's discourse power through overseas cultural promotions, not least in recent years under Xi Jinping's leadership.

So far, this chapter has analysed the CCC project's global coordination working mode, and discussed the planning, programming, and purpose of an associated event. The following section will continue to examine this working mode and the commemoration of Tang and Shakespeare's passing by looking at how such an activity was presented at the CCCS.

5.4 Commemorating the 400th anniversary of Tang and Shakespeare's passing in Sydney

The feature exhibition of the quatercentenary of Tang and Shakespeare's death, *Dialogue Across Time and Space*, was delivered in the CCCS's exhibition hall from 9 to 30 September 2016. This time aligns with the MCT's plan, as noted in the *China Culture Daily*'s report, to host this commemorative event in a coordinated approach at CCCs in a concentrated period of time from September to December 2016 (Chen, L 2016). As the CCCS's event report wrote, this exhibition consisted of three parts: "Times and Legends", "Dream and Reality" and "I @Tang Xianzu", introducing the historical backgrounds in which Tang and Shakespeare lived respectively, as well as the life stories and representative works of the two literary contemporaries (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2016b). It also highlighted Tang's most known work *Peony Pavilion* and provided opportunities for participants to further experience the exhibition through virtual reality devices (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2016b). In this light, the presentation of this exhibition, including the content and emphasis, appeared to be consistent with the one distributed by the MCT.

This exhibition was officially opened on 8 September at the CCCS, which invited two guest speakers to the opening ceremony. One of them was Dr Zhao Xiaohuan, Associate Professor in Chinese Literary and Theatre Studies from the University of Sydney.[60] Zhao studied at Central China Normal University before he obtained his PhD in Classical Chinese Literature from the University of Edinburgh (Zhao n.d.). He taught in globally prominent universities, such as the University of Edinburgh and the University of Glasgow, and is currently the coordinator of Chinese studies for undergraduate students at the University of Sydney, teaching and researching a wide range of topics, including classical Chinese literature, philosophy, and religion (Zhao n.d.). Among Zhao's academic outputs, there is a research focus on Tang Xianzu's *Peony Pavilion*, which can be

[60] At the time of this event, Zhao was Senior Lecturer in Chinese literature from the University of Sydney.

seen in a series of scholarly work he has published on this topic.[61] It is also worth noting that Zhao's research focus on Tang's *Peony Pavilion* coincides with one of the highlighted elements in the *Dialogue Across Time and Space* exhibition for showcasing Tang's artistic achievements, as reflected in the design and presentation of this exhibition. Although Zhao's academic career has predominantly been based overseas, his scholarly capacity and contribution have not only been recognised internationally but are also highly valued in China. Zhao was selected into the Shanxi Hundred Talents Scheme (山西百人计划 *shanxi bairen jihua*) in 2015,[62] and subsequently appointed by Shanxi Provincial Government as Shanxi Hundred Talents Scheme Distinguished Professor at the Institute of Chinese Traditional Theatre and Theatrical Relics of Shanxi Normal University (Zhao n.d.).

In his speech at the opening ceremony, Zhao mainly shared his view with respect to the similarities and differences between Tang and Shakespeare's work (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2016b). Having such an academic background and experience in both China and overseas, Zhao provided a generally positive comment on this commemorative event, notably by emphasising its value in promoting intercultural communication (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2016b). Zhao's speech was echoed by Zhao Li, then Director of the CCCS, as she spoke about the meaning of this event to the present audience,

> [w]e are having this exhibition not only to observe the great contribution and legacies of the two masters, but also explore the cultural backgrounds, ways of life and philosophies of the 16th and 17th century in China and the UK; explore the similarities and differences between east and west (cited in China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2016b).

The other speaker present at the opening ceremony was Dr Bruce Crossman, Associate Professor in Music from the Western Sydney University. In addition to his academic profile, Crossman is also a composer and improviser. His music explores Asian–Pacific influences from countries, such as Japan, Korea, China, and the Philippines, and his aesthetics are influenced by ideas originated from Chinese aesthetics, Japanese aesthetics and architecture, Filipino–Australian poetry, and abstract

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[61] See below a list of Zhao's publications related to Tang Xianzu's *Peony Pavilion*:
Zhao, X 2011, "从神奇故事到传奇剧：明代梦幻/鬼魂剧《牡丹亭》的形态结构分析" [From mythology to melodrama: a morphological analysis of fantasy/ghost play—Peony Pavilion in the Ming Dynasty], in S Ye (eds), *结构主义神话学* [Structuralism in mythology], Shaanxi Normal University Press, Xi'an, pp. 305–21;
Zhao, X 2007, "Presentation and representation of time and space in Chinese traditional theatre: with special reference to the Peony Pavilion", *Double Dialogues*, no. 7 (Winter); Zhao, X 2006, "From story to script: towards a morphology of the Peony Pavilion—a dream/ghost drama from Ming China", *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia*, vol. 7, no. 1–2, pp. 189–208.

[62] The Shanxi Hundred Talents Scheme was initiated by the Shanxi Provincial Government in 2005, with the aim to recruit overseas talents for the development of the province due to a lack of specialists and experts in certain fields (*Shanxi Daily* 2010). According to *Shanxi Daily* (2010), the provincial government has allocated an annual budget of 50 million CNY (approximately 7 million USD) to fund this initiative. Specifically, people who are being recruited in the area of arts and culture, as stated by the Organisation Department of Shanxi Provincial Committee of the CPC (中共山西省委组织部 *zhonggong shanxi shengwei zuzhibu*) (2018), should have achieved internationally renowned awards and an international reputation, among other criteria.

and traditional East Asian visual arts (Crossman n.d.). Crossman's music has achieved an international profile, with his work featured in music events in Australia, China, South Korea, the Philippines, and the US. It is of particular relevance to note that Crossman's music-theatre work *Gentleness-Suddenness* was partially inspired by the Chinese Opera tradition of Kunqu, specifically the *Peony Pavilion* (Crossman 2011), which, again, was a highly promoted aspect of Tang Xianzu's literary achievement in this commemorative event. It is also worth mentioning that, in 2016, *Gentleness-Suddenness* was featured on *ABC Classic*, a classical music program of the Australian Broadcast Corporation (ABC) that brings high-level international performances and features stellar Australian artists, reflecting a high recognition for Crossman's artistic practice in Australia.[63]

"The sensual evocativeness of Tang Xianzu's poetry with its nature allusiveness to love and its spiritual dimensions I find deeply inspiring", as Crossman explained the creative process of his work *Gentleness-Suddenness* in his speech at the opening ceremony (cited in China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2016b). To Zhao Li, Crossman's creation of *Gentleness-Suddenness* was a relevant example to the commemorative event, as she stated in her speech that the work of Tang and Shakespeare, who were representative figures in Chinese and British literature between the 16th and 17th century, not only had a significant impact at their time but even influenced artistic creation today (Kuang 2016).

While the event, as indicated by Zhao Li, aimed to demonstrate the influence generated by both literary figures, what can also be observed here is that the emphasis appeared to have been placed more on the former as opposed to the latter. Such an imbalance can be identified in Zhao's speech, reported separately by China's state-owned *Xinhua News Agency* in Chinese, as she stressed that the purpose of holding this event was not only to honour their contributions in literature, but also to increase the international influence of Chinese cultural figures and traditional art and thus to promote the exchange and fusion between civilisations (Kuang 2016). This subtle emphasis on boosting the global impact of Chinese traditional cultural figures and culture through this exhibition echoes the underlying purpose of this commemoration, as analysed before, to promote Tang as a cultural symbol for increasing China's cultural attractiveness and influence in the world.

It needs to be acknowledged that it is hard to know, directly, how this commemorative event was received by the Australian audience. This is first because key participants involved in this event at the CCCS, who might have more insights on the reaction of local audiences, all declined the request for an in-depth semi-structured interview.[64] Secondly, there seems to be no mainstream Australian

[63] See: https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/new-waves/bruce-crossman-gentleness-suddenness/9692420.
[64] Two key participants in this event declined the request for an interview (in any form), with a third key participant declining an in-depth interview. The third candidate did provide some written response to part of the interview questions with very short answers, which were not quite suitable for analytical purposes. This interviewee also seemed reluctant to continue with any follow-up questions.

English media coverage of this commemoration held in Sydney. This, on the one hand, further hinders the understanding of how the Australian public perceives this activity. On the other hand, it suggests, indirectly, a limited impact of the commemorative event in local society.

The lack of Australian English media coverage is, however, in contrast with a wide promotion of this event by Chinese media outlets. An online search shows that the opening of this commemorative event at the CCCS was covered by three major Chinese state-owned media, namely, *Xinhua News Agency*, *People's Daily Online*, and *Chinanews*. Their media reports were also reposted by other Chinese media and government departments. For example, *Xinhua News Agency*'s coverage was republished by China's *Sohu* and *Sina*, *People's Daily Online*'s article was reposted by *Haiwainet*—the official overseas website of *People's Daily* (人民日报海外版官方网站 *renmin ribao haiwaiban guanfang wangzhan*), *Chinanews*' report was featured on the website of Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council and *Chinaqw.com*, which is affiliated with *Chinanews*.[65] The contrast between the number of Chinese state and Australian English media reports partly indicates that this MCT-led commemoration has a stronger focus on targeting the Chinese domestic audience rather than promoting it to and connecting with the Australian public.

A closer examination of these Chinese media reports shows that the content of such coverage is somewhat similar, primarily focusing on reporting the success of the feature exhibition in promoting Chinese culture and speeches from present speakers. For example, the media report from *Xinhua News Agency* wrote,

> the exhibition starts from *Dialogue Across Time and Space*, introducing Tang Xianzu and his work as well as Chinese culture through the dialogue between Tang and Shakespeare. The exhibition promotes Chinese aesthetics through a contemporary lens, combining Kunqu and space design, displaying exhibition content in Chinese traditional scrolls, using technology to allow the audience to travel through time and to have an immersive experience of the charm of Chinese culture (Kuang 2016).

This description of the exhibition was also reported, in an almost identical way, by *People's Daily Online* (Dong 2016) and *Chinanews* (Lai 2016), suggesting that it was taken wholesale from a Chinese media release. Likewise, similar speech quotes from the CCCS's Director, Zhao Li, and invited speakers, Dr Zhao Xiaohuan and Dr Bruce Crossman, were incorporated as a main part of these publications. While the exhibition and speeches were heavily covered, audience reception was largely absent in such Chinese media reports. This may be due to a lack of active

[65] See the below links for reposts of this event report:
Sohu: https://www.sohu.com/a/114055342_162522.
Sina: https://finance.sina.com.cn/roll/2016-09-09/doc-ifxvukuq4092172.shtml.
Haiwainet: http://world.haiwainet.cn/n/2016/0909/c232591-30307160.html.
Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council: http://www.gqb.gov.cn/news/2016/0909/40529.shtml.
Chinaqw.com: https://www.chinaqw.com/zhwh/2016/09-09/102708.shtml.

response/participation from local society to/in this event, as also partly reflected in the limited Australian English media coverage of the commemoration. This point concerning local audience's reaction to Chinese cultural diplomacy activities will be further elaborated in the following chapter.

Meanwhile, it may also suggest that there was less priority to connect with the general public in Australia through this event, and as a result, the activity did not reach a wider local audience. This speculation is reasonable, particularly given the symbolic meaning of this global event on a domestic front, as reflected in views from the Chinese government and scholars. This point is broadly connected with the internal dimension of building Chinese cultural soft power in relation to regime legitimacy, as discussed in Chapter 3. Yang Yifan further explains it from a public and cultural diplomacy perspective, arguing that Chinese media coverage of public and cultural diplomacy events abroad serves the purpose of enhancing the government's political legitimacy at home. By promoting to Chinese domestic audiences the "outputs", rather than the "outcomes", of China's overseas public and cultural diplomacy activities as evidence of the country's growing appeal and influence worldwide, such news coverage helps project "an image of a rising China under the leadership of the ruling party to the Chinese people" (Yang, Yifan 2020, pp. 382-3). In this light, it is justifiable to say that, motivated by domestic political objectives, Chinese state-affiliated media and, by extension the Chinese government, has a stronger internal than external focus in conducting and publicising such a state-driven commemoration.

This point is further supported when looking at how this event was promoted by the CCCS through its social media accounts and the reaction in Australia accordingly. Based on a search on the CCCS's YouTube channel,[66] there appears to be no promotional material posted in relation to this event, showing a lack of intention to publicise this event to the wider Australian public. Although the opening of the feature exhibition was promoted on the CCCS's Facebook page (under the name of "China Cultural Centre in Sydney") on 2 and 7 September 2016, it did not seem to reach a broader audience, as the former post received two likes and four shares, while the latter had three likes and two shares. Considering the above analysis, it can be presumed that the reaction regarding this event from Australian local society would have been minimal, given its limited engagement with and low exposure among the general public.

Taken together, the format and content of the feature exhibition were consistent with the one that had been commissioned by the NICE in China, demonstrating that this uniform exhibition was indeed distributed to overseas CCCs for display. Furthermore, invited speakers to the opening ceremony at the CCCS included internationally prominent scholars whose research work had been

[66] This YouTube channel was active from 2015 to 2017 and can be seen via: https://www.youtube.com/@chinaculturalcentreinsydne3428/featured. It was replaced by a separate account on the same social media platform in 2020.

associated with and influenced by Tang Xianzu. From the CCCS's perspective, their involvement helped promote Tang in the world and showcased the perceived global impact of this Chinese cultural figure, as manifested in the academic and artistic achievements of the speakers. Such an intention to increase the international influence of Tang and Chinese traditional culture was shown in CCCS's then Director Zhao Li's comments, as mentioned before. This goal was also in line with the ultimate aim of this globally coordinated commemoration—increasing China's cultural confidence, enhancing its cultural soft power, and shaping a culturally prominent image of the country, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Overall, the commemoration through the *Dialogue Across Time and Space* exhibition reflects a functional purpose with a top-down approach. What is also noticeable is an emphasis on the quantity in the planning and delivery of this activity in relation to its perceived impact. These characteristics are reflective of the traits in China's cultural diplomacy, as discussed in Chapter 3. Nonetheless, international scholars have reminded us that a functional and one-way approach risk the conduct of cultural diplomacy as it may hinder intercultural dialogue and meaningful engagement with the foreign audience, as explained in Chapter 2. This point is also echoed by one interviewee, who held that cultural activities with such characteristics were not necessarily effective in intercultural exchange in the sense that they "cannot facilitate a conversational mechanism" (Interviewee 2). Furthermore, as manifested in Chapter 3, researchers have questioned a quantity-based approach to undertaking cultural diplomacy, as it tends to overlook the localisation of cultural programs and interaction with the receiving audience, which is an important indicator of the impact of cultural diplomacy. These arguments are relevant to the feature exhibition of this commemorative event, which is practically a projection of a vetted cultural promotional program abroad, with little engagement and interaction with the foreign public. It is in this sense that the conduct of this activity deviates from cultural diplomacy, which, as analysed and defined in Chapter 2, is "the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding" (Cummings 2003, p. 1).

5.5 A somewhat flexible element in a prescribed event

Despite being a highly prescribed commemoration, there was some flexibility given to CCCs to host cultural activities along with the feature exhibition, albeit following the same theme of celebrating Tang and Shakespeare's passing, as requested by the MCT. Zheng Hao of the BIEC noted in the MCT's press conference that CCCs were encouraged to organise and host concurrent activities, such as performances, film screenings, talks and forums to supplement the feature exhibition, based on "the situation of the host country" (驻在国情况 *zhuzaiguo qingkuang*) (Chen, L 2016). This approach appeared to contrast with how the uniform exhibition of this global commemoration had been delivered—largely in a top-down and one-track style. The MCT's instruction subsequently led

to a series of collaborative activities carried out at different CCCs in conjunction with the main exhibition. Some of these accompanying events were held in association with Chinese collaborators, such as the Shanghai Kunju Opera Troupe, Suzhou Kunqu Opera Theatre, and Chinese scholars specialised in Tang Xianzu studies (Chen, L 2016), while others involved partners in the host country. For example, the CCC in Wellington partnered with Victoria University of Wellington's CI to present a staged play-reading, performed by Victoria University Theatre Programme students, of excerpts from New Zealand poet David Howard's libretto *The Mica Pavilion*,[67] which was influenced by Tang's *Peony Pavilion* (Confucius Institute at Victoria Univeristy of Wellington 2016; Xinhuanet 2016). In Singapore, parallel with the feature exhibition *Dialogue Across Time and Space*, the CCC collaborated with the Chinese Opera and Drama Society (Singapore) to co-host the 2nd Singapore International Chinese Opera Festival, in which Tang Xianzu's *Peony Pavilion* was presented as part of the program (Chen, L 2016). In the view of Liu Hongge, former Deputy Director of the NICE, in addition to contributing to the quantity of events, these cultural activities added to the variety of programs and helped accommodate a diverse group of participants including the mainstream and young audiences (Chen, L 2016). The next section will explore one such parallel event held at the CCCS. Compared with the implementation of the feature exhibition, it demonstrated a slightly different approach which included more collaborators in the host country and attempted to facilitate dialogues among local participants.

5.5.1 A concurrent panel discussion at the China Cultural Centre in Sydney

In Sydney, alongside the main exhibition dispatched from the MCT, a panel discussion was held at the CCCS. This event was delivered by the CCCS in collaboration with the China Studies Centre (CSC) of the University of Sydney, with support from the Institute for Australian and Chinese Arts and Culture (IAC) of the Western Sydney University.[68] Both organisations are well-known research institutes in Australia and were headed by distinguished scholars at the time of the event. The then Director of the IAC was Professor Jocelyn Chey, an eminent academic in Chinese studies and former Australian diplomat for more than 20 years. Chey's diplomatic career had a distinct focus on China, as can be seen from her diplomatic appointments as Cultural Counsellor in the Australian Embassy in Beijing from 1975 to 1978, Senior Trade Commissioner in the Australian Embassy in Beijing from 1985 to 1988, and Consul-General for Australia in Hong Kong from 1992 to 1995. In addition to her diplomatic career, Chey's other working experience, including her role as the key administrative officer in the Australia–China Council in 1979 and Director of the China Branch of the International Wool Secretariat from 1988 to 1992, was also closely related to China. It should be noted that the timing of Chey's diplomatic and professional positions roughly coincided with the first

[67] *The Mica Pavilion* is set in Tuapeka Country of New Zealand in 1874 and tells the story of a Chinese miner and Maori woman who fall in love with each other (Frame 2019).
[68] The Institute was previously known as Australia–China Institute for Arts and Culture.

two decades since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Australia in 1972. It is, in this sense, not an exaggeration to say that “she was instrumental in helping lay the foundations for trade and cultural relations between China and Australia” (Western Sydney University 2016). The interim Director of the CSC, was Professor Jeffrey Riegel who was specialised in Chinese ancient thought and philosophy, and previously held professorial positions in both the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Sydney. Both Chey and Riegel were present at this event, while Riegel was also invited by the CCCS as the moderator of the panel discussion.

According to the website of the CCCS, this panel discussion was “focused on retelling the life stories, social contexts, major works and thoughts of these two masters” and sought to “shed light on the distinctions and similarities between Western and Eastern cultures, philosophies and values of the 16th and 17th century” (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2016a). The panel discussion was designed by the CCCS in a way that guest speakers were first given the opportunity to share their understandings with respect to Tang and Shakespeare’s work through individual presentations. In addition, the CCCS organised a discussion among three panellists. This panel discussion, as the CCCS introduced, was moderated by the CSC’s Professor Riegel and facilitated dialogues among invited speakers on such topics as the “significance of Tang and Shakespeare to the world literature” and “similarities and distinctions between Chinese and Western aesthetics” (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2016a). Later in this event, the CCCS arranged a Q&A session which offered opportunities for the audience to further engage in questions. Some questions from the participants, as reported by the CCCS, included “how to interpret and appreciate Chinese aesthetics in drama” and “the aim and significance of translation between different languages and cultures”, which were responded to by the panellists from both theoretical and practical perspectives (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2016a).

The panel of this event included three scholars, who were invited by the CCCS from China and Australia and whose research focus and/or artistic practice were related to these two literary figures. One of the panellists was Dr Bruce Crossman, who, as mentioned earlier, also attended the opening ceremony of the *Dialogue Across Time and Space* exhibition as a guest speaker. As a scholar and arts practitioner, Crossman shared with the audience the artistic inspiration he gained through Tang Xianzu’s work. As he noted in his presentation,

> [t]he evocative dream-like state, referential of nature and allusive to spirit in Tang Xianzu’s poetic Peony Pavilion I find inspirational in creating sonic dreamscapes suggestive of spirit, allied to visual movement and resonant of place (cited in China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2016a).

A second panellist was Dr Wang Xiaoying, who was, among other titles, Executive Vice President of the National Theatre of China which is directly affiliated with the MCT, Vice President of the China Theatre Association (中国戏剧家协会 *zhongguo xijujia xiehui*) and member of the National Congress of the China Federation of the Literary and Art Circles (中国文学艺术界联合会 *zhongguo wenxue yishu jie lianhehui*) at the time of this event.[69] According to his profile on the website of the National Theatre of China, Wang holds a doctoral degree in directing and is a national first-level director. In addition, Wang has been selected as an arts professional in China's Four One Batch Talents Project ("四个一批"人才工程 *"sige yipi" rencai gongcheng*)[70] and is entitled to the special government allowance granted by the State Council for experts. He has also been awarded the MCT's Excellent Drama Artist (优秀话剧艺术工作者 *youxiu huaju yishu gongzuozhe*) and Outstanding Director of the New Century (新世纪杰出导演 *xinshiji jiechu daoyan*) which is selected and given by *Chinese Theatre*, a journal of the China Theatre Association.

As part of China's global commemoration of Tang and Shakespeare's quatercentenary, Wang's adaption of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, together with his other adapted work of *Romeo and Juliet*, performed in Kunqu Opera style, was presented at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, the world's largest arts festival, about a month before his participation in this panel discussion in Sydney. It is also worth noting that Wang's *Richard III*, adapted in Mandarin and a production of the National Theatre of China, was staged in Shakespeare's Globe,[71] as an important project featured in the China season of the 2015 China–UK Year of Cultural Exchange for showcasing Chinese culture and creativity.[72] As Liu Xiaoming, then Chinese Ambassador in the UK, stated at the reception of the premiere of *Richard III* in the UK,

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[69] The China Theatre Association is a member of the China Federation of the Literary and Art Circles (CFLAC). The CFLAC is a national association of Chinese artists led by the CPC and one of the founders of the CPPCC (cflac.org.cn n.d.). The current president of the CFLAC is Tie Ning, who is a novelist-turned politician and currently a member of the 20th Central Committee of the CPC.

[70] The Four One Batch Talents Project is initiated by the Organisation Department of the Central Committee of the CPC (中共中央组织部 *zhonggong zhongyang zuzhibu*) and the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the CPC (中共中央宣传部 *zhonggong Zhongyang xuanchuanbu*). According to their announcement that has been published on the Chinese website *souhu.com*, it aims to select a batch of theorists who comprehensively grasp Chinese ideological and political theories and concepts, are familiar with China and the West, and integrate theory with practice; a batch of famous journalists, editors, hosts who maintain the correct orientation, deeply reflect on life, and are loved by the masses; a batch of publishers who know well the principles and policies of the Party and the State, have a strong sense of social responsibility, and master professional knowledge; and a batch of writers and artists who keep up with the times, love the motherland and the people, and achieve high artistic levels (*Souhu* 2020).

[71] Shakespeare's Globe is a reconstruction of the Globe Theatre, for which William Shakespeare wrote his plays. It is now an internationally renowned arts venue and cultural attraction located on the bank of the River Thames in London.

[72] The 2015 China–UK Year of Cultural Exchange was underpinned by an agreement set in 2014 between the Chinese and British governments to showcase British culture in China and Chinese culture in the UK. It was formally announced by then Chinese Premier Li Keqiang during his visit to the UK in June 2014. The year-

> … the Chinese version of *Richard III* is not merely another translation of Shakespeare's writing. It is imbued with Chinese appreciation of the original work. The adaptation by director Wang Xiaoying of the National Theatre of China incorporates elements of traditional Chinese culture. The performance is in Chinese and intends to convey the Chinese understanding of Shakespeare and his play (Liu 2015).

In Wang's keynote speech prior to the panel discussion held at the CCCS in 2016, he also took the opportunity to introduce how he had created the Chinese version of *Richard III* through Tang Xianzu's theatrical approach. As he explained,

> this production was a rendition of Shakespeare's play through means of Chinese traditional culture and Chinese opera. It explored the style, appearance and artistic narratives in Chinese history through the aspects of stage design, costumes, makeup, masks, large and small props, music and sound, ultimately achieving a fusion between Shakespeare and Chinese drama (*Chinanews* 2016).

While it can be seen that Wang's professional work and his affiliation with the National Theatre of China are an integral part in presenting a culturally attractive China abroad through Chinese cultural diplomacy, it should be noted that his artistic practice has been heavily influenced by the West. As Wang recounted his three-month experience in West Berlin in 1988, he recalled that he had watched over 100 shows from local theatres and that "that period of time and European theatre had a deep influence on me and helped me find my direction in directing…" (cited in Catanzaro 2016). Wang has a strong interest in both Western and Chinese playwrights and regards people, such as William Shakespeare, Bertolt Brecht, and Tang Xianzu as his idols. As Wang said in an interview, "I looked up to them and saw them as gods" (cited in Catanzaro 2016). It is perhaps because of Wang's intercultural experience and perspective that his artistic practice, blending Eastern and Western theatrical elements and narratives, have received international acclaim. For instance, Wang's production of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, featuring dramatics and techniques originating from acrobatics, Kungfu, and Peking Opera, received four out of five stars from the *Guardian* (Dickson 2012). To Wang, the purpose of performing Shakespeare's work through the Chinese Kunqu style on the 400th anniversary of Tang and Shakespeare's passing, as he told *Xinhua News*, was to pay our tribute to Tang and Shakespeare on the one hand, and to show the beauty of combining dramatic works from the East and West on the other (Wu, C 2016). Such an aim seems to be more artistically motivated and driven by the exchange and learning between different cultures, contrasting with a functional view of cultural diplomacy with strong political and strategic underpinnings.

The third panellist in this panel discussion was Emeritus Professor Colin Mackerras, who is a sinologist from Griffith University and specialist in Chinese history, musical theatre and ethnic

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round cultural exchange consisted of two parts, with the first half being the UK season in China and the second half being the China season in the UK.

minorities, as well as Australia–China relations and Western images of China (Griffith University n.d.). Professor Mackerras is a prolific academic who has written/edited over 40 books and authored nearly 200 scholarly papers about China (Griffith University n.d.), including studies on Tang Xianzu and his work *Peony Pavilion* (Mackerras 2010, 2014). After graduating from the University of Cambridge, he went to teach in Beijing Foreign Studies University from 1964 to 1966,[73] before he obtained his doctoral degree in Chinese opera from the Australian National University in 1970 (Griffith University n.d.).[74] During his presentation at the event, Mackerras shared his interpretation of the characteristics of Tang's life and literary work, such as "[p]rogressive in thinking" and the emphasis on "emotion as opposed to reason" (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2016a). Furthermore, he also provided a comparative perspective in understanding Eastern and Western ideas originating from the 16th–17th centuries, explaining historical events such as "Protestant Reformation", "Enlightenment", and the Chinese ancient philosophy of "Confucianism" (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2016a).

From a scholarly perspective, Mackerras' immersion in Chinese society advanced his ability to understand Chinese art and culture based on first-hand experience and opened doors to later engagement with China in his career. Mackerras' intercultural experience is, to some extent, comparable to Wang Xiaoying's short exchange to West Berlin, in so far as the influence of such experiences on their respective professions are concerned. And it is the interest and passion towards China, enhanced in this early-life experience, that has driven Mackerras to return to China numerous times for teaching and researching purposes since his departure in 1966, and to travel extensively in different areas in China since the 1970s.[75] It can be said that Professor Mackerras' field trips to China, particularly in the early days when access to information about China was limited, has brought invaluable and timely reports of Chinese arts scenes to the outside world. As Liu (2011) argues, Mackerras' early contact with China has made him one of the major scholars documenting the changes that took place in Chinese theatre practice, therefore laying a foundation for current studies on Chinese performance.

It is also noticeable that, as a long-time observer of Australia–China relations and China's international images among Western countries, Professor Mackerras holds a generally sympathetic

[73] The Beijing Foreign Studies University was then known as the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute.
[74] It is worth mentioning that China and Australia had not yet established diplomatic relations during the period when Professor Mackerras was teaching in Beijing. As Veronica Mackerras (2015), daughter of Professor Mackerras, recounted, Australia refused to recognise China due to its White Australia policy and fear of communism at that time, hence an Australian passport had to be specially validated for travels to Mainland China. It is in this sense that she held that her parents "went on an incredibly brave journey to China in the 1960s and became the first Australians to form a life long friendship during a time when their country and family said 'no'" (Mackerras 2015). This brief experience in teaching and living in China was "completely transformative" in his life, as noted by Professor Mackerras in an interview (cited in Bai 2021).
[75] It has been reported that Professor Mackerras has visited all Chinese provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions in China over the past decades (Yang 2019).

view about China's economic growth and social improvement in the past decades and does not perceive its development as a threat to the world.[76] As reported in a *China Daily* article, Mackerras has opposed the idea that China's rise is of potential danger to the international community and regarded such perception as originating from misunderstanding and bias (Yang 2019). This argument is very similar to how the Chinese government responds to international concerns about China's ascendency in the 21st century, as mentioned in Chapter 3. As the same chapter has explained, it is precisely such uneasiness, particularly from Western countries, that drives China's cultural diplomacy to dismiss what the Chinese government sees as misconceptions of and prejudice against China, present a 'real' China to the world, and establish a favourable international image of the country. While this study is not intended to embark on a debate about the rights and wrongs of these views, what is relevant here is how the Chinese government sees such favourable perceptions of China held by people like Professor Mackerras in relation to the role of the CCC project. In Xi Jinping's address to the Australian Parliament in 2014, he noted Professor Mackerras' presence as an invited guest and spoke highly of his contribution in terms of explaining China to the world and fostering mutual understanding between the Chinese and Australian peoples. As Xi stated,

> I am delighted to see that Emeritus Professor Colin Mackerras, of Griffith University, is with us today. In 1964, Professor Mackerras went to China for the first time. Over the past five decades he has visited China over 60 times and has made tireless efforts to present a real China to Australia and the world based on his personal experience of China's development and progress. It is worth mentioning that his son Stephen was the first Australian national born in China since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. With his unremitting efforts and devotion, Professor Mackerras has built a bridge of mutual understanding and amity between our people. Last September, he was conferred the Friendship Award by the Chinese government. Professor Mackerras, I wish to express deep appreciation to both you and many other Australians for what you have done to enhance the friendship between our two countries (Xi 2014a).

Indeed, Professor Mackerras' academic work and intercultural experience in relation to China has undoubtedly contributed to mutual understanding and friendship between China and Australia on a people-to-people level. Meanwhile, it can also be seen that, on the part of the Chinese government, such positive perceptions of China held by renowned international scholars, such as Professor Mackerras, are highly valued and promoted in the context of explaining China and shaping its positive image in the world. These intentions of the Chinese government are integral to the purposes of China's cultural diplomacy and reflected in the CCC project's strategic aims, as noted in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively. They also appear to have played a role, at least partly, in guiding the

[76] Professor Mackerras' views about China's development domestically and internationally appear to contrast with how Australian mainstream media oftentimes perceives China in a more critical way. For example, see Mackerras' recent analyses posted on *Pearl and Irritations*, critiquing Australian and Western media's views on China in terms of its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and Hong Kong from an international perspective (Mackerras 2020), and regarding the implementation of the "Common Prosperity" (共同富裕 *gongtong fuyu*) policy on a domestic front (Mackerras 2021).

CCCS's engagement with panellists in this activity, notably reflected in the CCCS's inclusion of Professor Mackerras as a speaker in the panel discussion following Xi's remarks cited above.

5.5.2 Reflection on the panel discussion

Despite a uniform and highly prescribed commemoration through the feature exhibition, the MCT also allowed some flexibility in delivering supplementary activities at CCCs. In practical terms, the CCCS arranged a panel discussion in partnership with reputable research institutes and scholars whose research on Tang and Shakespeare are well-recognised internationally. In doing so, the CCCS tapped into the expertise and influence of local collaborators in hosting this cultural activity. Looking through the lens of cultural diplomacy, the way in which this panel discussion was conducted reflects the recognition of the role of non-governmental actors, including academics from the host country, in undertaking cultural diplomacy, a point echoing discussions concerning the value of non-state practitioners in Chapter 2. It also connects with some Chinese scholars' view that favours engagement with local partners in China's conduct of cultural diplomacy abroad. This mechanism differs from the global coordination approach adopted in the planning of the feature exhibition of the commemoration. A similar approach can also be seen in other events held by the CCCS, as will be shown in cases analysed in the following chapters.

Furthermore, the format of such a panel discussion enabled a more balanced conversation situated in an intercultural setting, in which both Chinese and Australian participants were invited to share insights on Tang and Shakespeare as well as Chinese and Western cultures in a broader sense. This kind of engagement between peers from both countries facilitated dialogues driven by knowledge and personal experience of the invited speakers. Such an interactive activity could lead to meaningful outcomes. For example, to Dr Bruce Crossman, one of the panellists, the panel discussion was an opportunity for the exchange of thoughts with other scholars in this field and had a positive influence on his artistic creation. As he reflected on the impact of this experience on producing his music piece *Shy Like Blushing Flowers*,

> [i]nspired by the meeting of minds at the China Cultural Centre in Sydney, where theatre director Wang Xiaoying (Vice President of the National Theatre Company of China) and scholar Professor Colin Mackerras (Emeritus Professor, Griffith University) espoused the ideas of cultural blending and ancient riches of Tang Xianzu and William Shakespeare, I embarked on my own blending (Crossman 2017).

A supplementary event like this is perhaps less impressive in a numerical sense, however, the impact of such an activity on participants, such as Dr Crossman, is more demonstrable compared with the perceived influence associated with the scale and quantity of the feature exhibition launched worldwide by the MCT.

Moreover, the communication between the panellists and local participants, facilitated by the Q&A session of the panel discussion, was also conducive to engagement with the local audience. As one Australian curator commented broadly on the effect of face-to-face conversations and exchanges between arts practitioners and audiences in exhibitions, such an opportunity "has a big impact on people rather than [them] just going to see the artwork on the wall" (Interviewee 10). While there is no direct evidence showing the impact of this activity on a wider audience, this kind of interaction, as the same respondent argued, helped people with "expanding their understanding" of the cultural program (Interviewee 10).

Indeed, the involvement of well-known scholars and arts practitioners in the panel discussion may help show the lasting impact of Tang Xianzu and his literary work in today's academic and artistic fields, particularly through their acclaimed research and artistic practice centred on and influenced by Tang. This idea of targeting influential cultural figures in cultural diplomacy initiatives has, in fact, been noted by Dr Chen Xiao (2016), researcher at the MCT's BIEC, who suggests that CCCs should prioritise engagement with "renowned people and sinologists", among others including "politicians and high-rank officials" and "mainstream media workers" in the host country, as they have the most influence in spreading and shaping ideas and values in the contemporary world. However, the creation of these panellists' work, which could contribute to the international awareness and appeal of Tang as a Chinese cultural figure (a goal that the Chinese government attempts to achieve through the commemorative event), has primarily been driven by personal interest, passion, and long-term intercultural practice in a more organic manner, as manifested in life stories of those invited panellists. This way to approach cultural exchange and understanding somewhat resembles the method adopted in organising the CCCS's panel discussion, where an interactive dialogue took place for sharing personal perspectives and facilitating mutual understanding and learning through such a process. It is in this sense that the intention of this panel discussion was slightly different from a largely functional aim reflected in the prescribed campaign through a uniform exhibition initiated globally by the Chinese government.

Nonetheless, while some flexibility was given to CCCs to host concurrent activities, such programming freedom was limited due to the MCT's strict timeframe and prescribed theme. This limitation can also be discerned in the CCCS's panel discussion, in which the selection of speakers, including Dr Wang Xiaoying, who holds administrative positions in the MCT-affiliated organisations that are integral to China's cultural diplomacy, and Professor Colin Mackerras, whose generally sympathetic and favourable views towards China are highly valued by the Chinese government and state media, appeared to align with China's broad goal of shaping a preferred international image through cultural promotions overseas. This alignment between the CCCS's programming and the

Chinese government's policies was also identified in one Australian academic's assessment of the CCCS's overall programming. As the respondent noted,

> I think that there can be no doubt that an organisation like that is, all of their cultural programming is obviously very carefully vetted and very carefully examined, and is very much in line with current Chinese government policy, and that includes policy in relation to cultural diplomacy (Interviewee 12).

Following this, it is reasonable to further question to what extent could there be critical views/comments allowed at this event, and, in a broader sense, at the CCCS's other cultural activities. The answer to this inquiry, in the opinion of a former Australian cultural diplomat, was self-evident,

> there are certain things you would not expect to find at the Chinese Cultural Centre…. It's a fact that people will not go to an event at the Chinese Cultural Centre and expect it to be anti-China in any way. I think that's obvious (Interviewee 9).

However, such aspects in the planning and delivery of this panel discussion are not surprising, given, as analysed in Chapter 4, the strategic aim of enhancing China's cultural appeal, image, and influence embedded in the CCC project as part of China's cultural diplomacy initiative. As one Chinese–Australian artist pointed out, as China's state-run cultural organisation in Australia, it was "inevitable" that some of the CCCS's cultural events, including exhibitions, carried "motivations" and "themes" that were associated with the government's intentions (Interviewee 2). The same interviewee was, nonetheless, not in favour of such characteristics and, as a professional artist, expected higher standards of professionalism and quality in such cultural programs (Interviewee 2). Despite all this, what should still be emphasised is the opportunity that this panel discussion created for dialogues and interaction between Chinese and Australian scholars in particular, within the MCT's global coordination working mode, which is typically undertaken in a rigid and one-way style.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the CCC project's global coordination working mode, which primarily adopts a top-down approach to programming and is driven by a quantity-based mindset for gaining perceived influence of cultural events. The present chapter has examined this working mode through the global commemoration of the 400th anniversary of Tang and Shakespeare's passing, analysing its background, programming, purpose, and delivery based on the MCT's coordination and the case of the CCCS.

The commemoration through the feature exhibition, *Dialogue Across Time and Space*, reflected a strong functional purpose with a top-down approach. It also demonstrated a marked emphasis on the number and scale of the event and their perceived correlation with impact. These characteristics

are reflective of what has been discussed in Chapter 3 as traits in Chinese cultural diplomacy. They are, as mentioned in the same chapter, also factors identified by both international and Chinese scholars as hindering intercultural engagement in cultural diplomacy.

Implemented as a projection of a highly vetted cultural promotional program with little engagement with the foreign audience, the feature exhibition of this commemoration deviated from what cultural diplomacy represents—"the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding", as defined by Cummings (2003, p. 1).

Despite this, the MCT allowed some degree of flexibility for CCCs to organise supplementary activities alongside the feature exhibition. As can be seen in Sydney, a panel discussion was undertaken by the CCCS in partnership with reputable research institutes and scholars, whose research on Tang and Shakespeare were well-recognised internationally. In organising such an activity, the CCCS tapped into the expertise and influence of local collaborators. This approach showed recognition of the role of actors other than the government in conducting cultural diplomacy, echoing the emphasis on the value of non-state and local practitioners in cultural diplomacy, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

The format of the panel discussion facilitated a more balanced conversation in an intercultural setting, in which both Chinese and Australian participants had the opportunity to share insights and learn from each other in a dialogic fashion. This interaction enabled dialogues and the exchange of thoughts driven by knowledge and personal experience of the invited speakers. Compared with the feature exhibition launched worldwide by the MCT, this cultural activity, though less impressive in its number and scale, led to meaningful outcomes, as shown in Dr Bruce Crossman's artistic creation, which was inspired by the experience of this intercultural conversation.

The flexibility to deliver concurrent activities at CCCs was, however, limited, as can be seen in the MCT's prescribed timeframe and theme. This limitation could also be discerned in the CCCS's selection of certain panellists, indicative of the Chinese government's influence and preferences. However, the value of this panel discussion should still be highlighted in terms of creating the opportunity for dialogues between Chinese and Australian scholars in particular, within the MCT's global coordination working mode, which is typically implemented in a rigid and one-way style. This activity between the CCCS and local collaborators reflected, in part, what cultural diplomacy is about. This approach contrasts with the global coordination approach and can also be seen in other events held by the CCCS, as will be shown in cases analysed in the following chapters.

Following the global coordination approach, the next chapter will shift the focus to a second working mode of the CCC project by looking at its partnership with Chinese provincial-level governments.

CHAPTER 6 THE CHINA CULTURAL CENTRE PROJECT'S WORKING MODE 2: PARTNERSHIP WITH CHINESE PROVINCIAL-LEVEL GOVERNMENTS

While the previous chapter has addressed the China Cultural Centre project's global coordination working mode, this chapter will focus on its partnership with Chinese provincial-level governments. It starts by providing an overview of this working mode and its associated events. Informed by analysis of reports and information published by the Chinese government and media, this chapter further discusses perceived values and benefits of this working mode from the perspectives of Chinese actors (including central and local governments as well as CCCs). To understand the impact of cultural programs delivered through this working mode, the present chapter examines perceptions and delivery methods of such activities in Australia. This part of the analysis primarily draws on data collected from the website and social media accounts (WeChat, Facebook, and Twitter/X) of the China Cultural Centre in Sydney, and interviews with Australian participants who have been involved in the CCCS's cultural programs.

The implementation of this working mode and associated events reflects China's functional understanding of cultural diplomacy and a top-down approach in practice. While this working mode may contribute to more regular and sustainable annual programming, it shows a lack of engagement with the general public in local society, as manifested in how such cultural programs are perceived by local participants. In terms of the delivery method, two approaches can be identified in this working mode—presenting cultural events through the CCCS and co-hosting events with Australian partners. The former method appears to be less effective in gaining local exposure and reaching the general public in Australia, showing a limited impact generated through cultural programs under this working mode in local society. Despite this, the CCCS's work with the Adelaide Festival Centre (AFC), an Australian collaborator, helps boost a wider awareness of its cultural activities among the Australian public.

6.1 An overview of the partnership with Chinese provincial-level governments

The MCT has implemented the working mode between CCCs and Chinese provincial-level governments since 2011. In this mode, each CCC receives and presents cultural programs dispatched from its partner (Chinese province, municipal city, or autonomous region) on a yearly basis. Generally speaking, cultural activities undertaken through this working mode constitute a sizable portion of the CCCs' annual programming. For example, according to Chen Lu of the *China Culture Daily*, there were more than 200 cultural events delivered under the partnership between Chinese provincial-level governments and 20 CCCs in 2014, accounting for approximately 1/5 of the

total activities conducted by all CCCs in the same year (Chen 2015). This point was echoed by a Chinese-Australian artist, who had collaborated with the CCCS on multiple occasions. As this interviewee noted,

> so far, the majority of the CCCS's programs are from [Chinese provinces and cities]. As I understand, the centre's task is to receive and present different cultural groups, projects, and programs sent from various Chinese provinces and cities [to the Australian audience] (Interviewee 4).

These activities are typically held at CCCs at two particular times—the beginning and the second half of the partnership year. The following section will provide background to programs delivered in these two periods of time.

6.1.1 Cultural programs presented during the Chinese Spring Festival

The annual collaboration between a CCC and its provincial partner usually commences at the beginning of the year, coinciding with the Chinese Spring Festival. Programs presented around this time are specifically associated with the MCT's Happy Chinese New Year event. This event was established in 2010 and has gradually incorporated all the MCT's overseas Chinese New Year activities under this brand since then. These cultural events include a variety of programs, such as concerts, exhibitions, cultural workshops, talks, temple fairs, parades, etc. It was reported that more than 1,500 activities had been held in 396 cities among 133 countries and regions in the world in 2019 through the MCT's Happy Chinese New Year event, which, according to *People's Daily Online* (2019), was China's major cultural celebration overseas with the broadest reach, most participants, and highest influence.

The scale and number of the MCT's Happy Chinese New Year event in the world are indeed impressive, and to achieve such a large-scale promotion worldwide requires resources and coordination from various levels. According to Li Jiangang, Deputy Director of the BIEC, there are five dimensions that contribute to the programming and delivery of the Happy Chinese New Year event globally. They are collaborations between the MCT and 1) ministerial-level departments such as Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Overseas Chinese Affairs Office; 2) provincial-level governments particularly concerned with their departments or bureaus of culture and tourism;[77] 3) MCT-affiliated organisations, theatres and troupes, and companies; 4) cultural enterprises; and 5) Chinese embassies and consulates, as well as government bodies, companies, and cultural organisations in host countries (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2016a). The working mode between CCCs and

[77] Each Chinese provincial-level government has a department or bureau that executes work related to culture and tourism affairs. In a Chinese province, such a department is typically called "[province name] Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism". In the case of a municipal city, it is usually named as "[municipal city name] Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism". Similar agencies in China's autonomous regions are normally titled "Department of Culture and Tourism of [autonomous region name] Autonomous Region".

Chinese provincial-level governments falls into the second category as a way of supporting the delivery of the Happy Chinese New Year event worldwide.

When talking about the coordination of resources for this MCT-led global celebration, Li asserted that the BIEC, which, as mentioned in Chapter 4, is part of the MCT, ensured that the content and form of programs included in the Happy Chinese New Year event framework were representative and inclusive (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2016a). As he further explained, the programming should not only incorporate highbrow works but also cultural programs liked by Chinese ordinary people from the grassroots society (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2016a). While this seems to be a vague description, it shows that, on the one hand, the BIEC of the MCT has control over what will be presented abroad as part of the Happy Chinese New Year event. This can be seen in the MCT's approval of Jiangsu Province's cultural programs, including the 3D Acrobatic Show: Golden Cudgel, Charms of Chinese Music concert, and Kunqu Opera *Peony Pavilion*, as part of the 2021 Happy Chinese New Year programming (*Xinhua Daily* 2021). On the other hand, Li's remarks also indicate that the curation of these cultural events has somewhat less focus on the reception of overseas viewers than preferences of domestic audiences, albeit these activities are implemented abroad and target the foreign public. This point broadly connects with the internal dimension of Chinese cultural soft power and cultural diplomacy, as discussed in Chapter 5, which will be further explored later in this chapter.

The BIEC's role in deciding cultural programs in the Happy Chinese New Year event is, perhaps, not surprising, given that to the Chinese government, the global celebration of the Chinese Spring Festival is not just about sharing the festivity around the world but also a way of promoting what the government perceives as Chinese traditional values embedded in the festival, and thereby increasing the attractiveness and influence of Chinese culture in the world. As Li points out,

> the Spring Festival has a history of more than 4,000 years and represents cultural ideas such as "unity of Heaven and man",[78] "family reunion", "auspiciousness and wellbeing", which are not only a vivid embodiment of the genes of Chinese traditional culture, but also of universal meaning…. Holding "Happy Chinese New Year" in the world at such a time of Chinese cultural significance, the event should do even better in telling the Chinese story, explaining the Chinese characteristics, and showcasing the Chinese spirit (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2016a).

In a similar vein, former Chinese Minister for Culture and Tourism, Luo Shugang, says,

> we will continue to tell the Chinese story well through the "Happy Chinese New Year" event, further enhancing the foreign public's understanding and identification of Chinese culture, providing more opportunities for the public abroad to experience and share excellent Chinese

[78] The term "unity of Heaven and man" (天人合一 *tianren heyi*) is also known as "Heaven and man are united as one", which, originated from Chinese traditional philosophy, denotes a world outlook that believes Heaven and man are interconnected, highlighting the integration and relationship among Heaven, earth, and man (Key Concepts in Chinese Thought and Culture n.d.-b).

> traditional culture represented by the culture of the Spring Festival, and to understand and accept the values and ideas, such as "unity of Heaven and man", "do away with the old and set up the new"[79], and "reunion and sharing", reflected in the culture of the Spring Festival *(People's Daily Online* 2019).

It is in this light that cultural programs presented as part of the Happy Chinese New Year event, including those undertaken through the annual partnership between CCCs and Chinese provincial-level governments, ultimately possess a strategic orientation linked to increasing China's cultural influence in the world. This kind of purpose resembles what has been discussed in Chapter 2 as the functional understanding of cultural diplomacy, which, as mentioned in Chapter 3, prevails in the Chinese government and among Chinese scholars. As these cultural programs are vetted by the BIEC, and by extension controlled by the Chinese government, it further reflects a top-down approach in China's cultural diplomacy, a point that has also been noted in Chapter 3.

6.1.2 Cultural programs presented through the remainder of the partnership year

In addition to programs associated with the Happy Chinese New Year event, there are other cultural activities delivered at CCCs through the yearly partnership with Chinese local governments. Such cultural programs are usually across the second half of the collaboration year and constitute a larger portion of the annual programming under this working mode. These events are typically curated by municipal bureaus for culture, radio, and news publication, cultural bodies directly affiliated with the provincial government, and non-governmental cultural institutions. They commonly go through the selection process implemented by the Chinese provincial departments of culture and tourism to be vetted and included into each province's "program database for external cultural exchange". According to a document published by Shandong Provincial Department of Culture, programs incorporated in this database will be arranged as priorities for participating in important international cultural initiatives, including the MCT's Happy Chinese New Year event and the annual collaboration with CCCs (*China Economic Net* 2018). While each province may have specific guidelines for selecting programs, a similar process seems to apply. For example, this can be seen in the announcement made by Nantong Municipal Bureau for Culture, Radio, Television and Tourism (2021), noting programs that were approved and included in Jiangsu Province's "selected program database for external exchange". Another example is reflected in a *Zhejiang News* article, which reported the launch of the application process of the province's "resource database for external cultural exchange", which gathered selected cultural programs from various cities and regions in Zhejiang (Hu, H 2018).

[79] The term "do away with the old and set up the new" (革故鼎新 *gegu dingxin*), originated from *The Book of Changes*, represents the change of the old and creation of the new (Key Concepts in Chinese Thought and Culture n.d.-a).

Similar to the MCT's Happy Chinese New Year event, the curation and selection of cultural programs from a provincial-level government shows a strong strategic and even political overtone. For example, as the guideline from Shandong Provincial Department of Culture stated, the establishment of the provincial "program database for external cultural exchange" was a practice of the "spirit of 19th National Congress of the CPC", which urged to "develop the construction of international communication capacity, tell China's story well, showcase a real, three-dimensional, and comprehensive China, and improve national cultural soft power" (*China Economic Net* 2018). Therefore, as the same document outlined, programs included in this database should serve China's "overall diplomacy" and "the needs of external cultural work" with the aim, among others, to "present a positive image of the culture of Shandong" and to "better showcase Chinese spirit, values, and strength" (*China Economic Net* 2018).

Taken together, cultural activities selected and dispatched from Chinese provincial-level governments through the remainder of the partnership year have similarly shown a functional purpose and top-down approach in China's cultural diplomacy, as have those delivered through the MCT's Happy Chinese New Year event.

6.2 Chinese perceptions of this working mode: perceived values and benefits

Delivering cultural programs through the partnership between CCCs and Chinese provincial-level governments is seen as useful and beneficial by different Chinese actors. First, in the eyes of the Chinese government, mobilising cultural resources from Chinese local governments through national directive and presenting cultural programs at 45 CCCs on a global scale serve well the strategic aim of showing the perceived global appeal of Chinese culture and impact of Chinese cultural values. This is manifested in that, for example, the worldwide promotion of the Chinese New Year and associated cultural values has oftentimes been reported in China, from the Chinese government's perspective, as "Spring Festival fever", which reflects China's rising international status and the increasing global influence of Chinese culture (Chen 2012). This sentiment can be further identified in a *Guangming Daily* article by Han Yeting, who linked the global delivery of the Happy Chinese New Year event to the increase of Chinese cultural soft power. Han quoted the Russian state-controlled news television network, Russia Today (RT), in his article to make this point,

> as reported in Russia Today's "Spring Festival Becomes Chinese 'Soft Power' Brand", "the wide celebration of the Chinese Lunar New Year in the world fully shows the international popularity of Chinese cultural traditions, and also manifests the enhancement of China's 'soft power'. As the world's fastest growing economy, China's development in economy and military strength has drawn more attention from the world, and its soft power has also been perceived as an inseparable part of China's influence. The Spring Festival has already become the brand of Chinese cultural soft power" (Han 2015).

The working mode between the Chinese provincial-level governments and CCCs, as part of the overall delivery mechanism of the Happy Chinese New Year event, aligns with and serves China's strategic purpose, in the sense that the former provides ongoing cultural resources to support the running of this event internationally, and the latter functions as China's overseas platform to project these cultural programs worldwide and thus contributes to the number and scope of the global celebration. Such practice in promoting Chinese culture abroad reflects the traits of Chinese cultural diplomacy—the emphasis on quantity and scale, and their perceived link to the increase of cultural appeal and impact in the world, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Next to the central government's viewpoint, Chinese local governments may also see this working mode as a valuable channel to show their accomplishment in contributing to China's national cultural endeavours abroad. As discussed before, the worldwide delivery of cultural events is typically regarded by the Chinese government as integral to enhance Chinese culture's global appeal and influence. This connection between China's international cultural promotion and national directives (such as the "going out" policy in the cultural realm, as explained in Chapter 3) makes collaboration with CCCs through this working mode a useful way in which local governments could gain political credit. This rationale was shown in the 2014 national meeting of cultural departments and bureaus on external cultural work, where a number of Chinese local governments, as reported in a *China Culture Daily* article, highlighted their partnership with corresponding CCCs as an achievement in cooperating with the MCT and supporting the state's diplomatic work. For example, Zhejiang emphasised its annual partnership with the CCC in Berlin, where eight art troupes were dispatched from the province in 2013 to present a series of cultural activities; Guangdong underlined nine cultural exchanges (with a total of 184 people involved) conducted through its yearly collaboration with the CCC in Moscow; similarly, Jiangxi and Beijing boasted their work with CCCs in Cairo and Seoul respectively, while Hunan vowed to "carefully implement" the collaborative program with the CCC in Benin so as to "proactively cooperate" with the MCT's work plan in the coming year (Chen 2014). To Chinese provincial governments, this political value of collaborating with CCCs is further reflected in their reports, which oftentimes promote the successful delivery of cultural activities at CCCs through this working mode, particular in the Chinese domestic discourse. For instance, Hunan Provincial Department of Culture declared cultural activities held at the CCCS as a successful way of showcasing the unique cultural charm of Hunan and promoting the province's achievement in cultural development (People's Government of Hunan 2015). Likewise, in Zhejiang Provincial Department of Culture's annual report, the delivery of the Beautiful Zhejiang Cultural Festival at the CCCS was badged as a fulfilment of "important external cultural activities of the provincial party committee and provincial government" (Zhejiang Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism 2017). Taken together, to Chinese local governments, this working partnership with CCCs is a helpful channel to demonstrate their performance in implementing China's national

policy of promoting Chinese culture overseas. This is also why, in a broader sense, CCCs are regarded by the Chinese government as a "coordinated and shared platform" for provincial-level governments to practise the "going out" policy (Ye 2016). These above views concerning the central and local governments' perceived values and benefits in relation to this working mode also partly explain a heavy promotion of such cultural events to a domestic audience, motivated by varied political considerations. This is a point that has also been discussed in Chapter 5 when analysing the contrast in coverage between Chinese state-owned news outlets and Australian local English media.

In addition to the above perspectives, the working mode is further recognised for its practical benefits. This point is reflected in the aforementioned *Outline of the Cultural Reform and Development Plan During the National 12th Five Year Plan Period*, noting that such a working mechanism is to "provide a long-term and stable platform" for Chinese local governments to conduct external cultural work and to "facilitate exchanges between Chinese local governments and foreign countries in culture, tourism, as well as economy and trade" (Ye 2015). In particular, the CCCs' function as an ongoing window to present cultural programs from partner provinces is manifested in that, based on an online search performed by the researcher in September 2022, 31 Chinese provincial-level governments have been involved in annual collaboration with at least one CCC abroad since the initiation of this working mode. This means that all Chinese provincial-level administrative areas from Mainland China have had the opportunity to promote their culture through CCCs abroad. Li Hui, then Director of Hunan Provincial Department of Culture, regarded Hunan's partnership with the CCCS in 2015 as an opportunity for the province to introduce its culture to overseas audiences (People's Government of Hunan 2015). This annual collaboration was also perceived as a channel to promote the provincial culture and facilitate cultural groups and organisations to be involved in the "going out" practice through China's national-level platform, as noted by Wang Zhijie of the External Cultural Exchange Centre of the Hunan Provincial Department of Culture (People's Government of Hunan 2015). It was also reported that Guizhou Province, through its partnership with the CCC in Madrid in 2014, delivered 11 projects related to cultural exchange, tourism promotion, and business cooperation (*Guizhou Daily* 2017). According to *Guizhou Daily*, the province saw this partnership as beneficial in terms of promoting Guizhou and increasing its influence internationally, generating a positive impact on the economic and social development of the province (*Guizhou Daily* 2017). From the standpoint of the collaborating province, the potential to create business opportunities through international cultural engagement was further reflected in Hunan's partnership with the CCCS, which organised a meeting to connect representatives from Hunan animation companies with their counterparts in Sydney. As the Hunan provincial government reported, this meeting resulted in an intent on cooperation between the two sides, with an estimated investment of over 300 million CNY (approximately 42 million USD)

(People's Government of Hunan 2015), although there is no further evidence showing qualitative outcomes of this undertaking.

A further benefit of this working mode is that this year-round partnership supports annual programming of the CCC project. This can be surmised from media reports and interviews with those involved with CCCs. As reported in the *China Culture Daily*, cultural programs dispatched from Chinese local governments had enriched the CCCs' programming and introduced to overseas audiences different cultures from various regions in China, given that over 200 cultural events were sent out from 18 Chinese provincial-level governments and presented at CCCs through this working mode in 2014 (Chen 2015). Related to this point is that cultural programs delivered through such a partnership also contribute to the continuity of activities at CCCs, which, as former Chinese Vice Minister for Culture, Ding Wei, said in an interview, aimed to deliver cultural programs in host nations on a regular basis (Wang, J 2014). The expectation of ongoing programming at CCCs is also alluded to in an interview featuring the inaugural Director of the CCCS, Zhao Li, who proudly claimed that the CCCS had "presented cultural programs every day, hosted cultural events every week, had cultural highlights every month" (cited in China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2016c). Given that, as mentioned earlier, cultural programs dispatched from Chinese provincial governments account for a considerable part of the CCC project's annual event schedule, this working mode helps build up the regularity and sustainability of CCCs' yearly programming. In the case of the CCCS, past partnerships with Hunan (2015), Zhejiang (2016), Sichuan (2017), Henan (2018), Guizhou (2019), Shaanxi (2020), and Jiangsu (2021) yielded a series of activities including exhibitions, concerts, dance performances, talks, and cultural workshops. These cultural programs, as will be discussed later, added to events conducted at the CCCS during the Chinese Spring Festival and the rest of the partnership year on a continued basis.

6.3 Summary

So far, this chapter has presented an introduction to events delivered through the working mode between CCCs and Chinese provincial-level governments. A range of cultural activities are undertaken through this working mode at different times of the partnership year. Despite the number and scale of such events, the curation and selection of programs are primarily controlled by the MCT and Chinese provincial governments, showing a top-down approach in Chinese cultural diplomacy. The implementation of this working mode and associated programs shows an emphasis on enhancing Chinese cultural appeal and influence abroad for strategic and political objectives, with perceived values and benefits linked to such functional purposes from Chinese perspectives. These traits are consistent with characteristics of China's practice of cultural diplomacy, as analysed in Chapter 3.

It should be noted that the working mode between CCCs and Chinese provincial-level governments may help improve the regularity and sustainability of the CCC project's annual programming, which are important aspects in conducting cultural diplomacy, given its emphasis on a long-term interchange among nations, as noted in Chapter 2. However, whether a continued presentation of cultural programs can be successful through the lens of cultural diplomacy is also contingent on other factors, such as whether or not such events can engage with local audiences, as also suggested in Chapter 2. As further shown in Chapter 3, some Chinese scholars hold that a functional perception of cultural diplomacy, coupled with a top-down approach in practice, would risk the actual impact of China's cultural efforts abroad. They have, instead, called for the understanding of the target audience for better engagement and collaboration with local partners for effective outreach. In this light, to further examine this working mode in the context of cultural diplomacy, it is important to know how these activities are perceived and their actual influence in the host country. To understand this, the following section will turn to discussions about cultural events carried out through this working mode and their delivery methods based on the case of the CCCS. This section particularly draws on data collected from interviews with Australian participants and the CCCS's website as well as social media accounts (including WeChat, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter/X), and information published by the Chinese government and media.

6.4 Cultural programs delivered through partnerships with Chinese provinces in Australia

Based on a systematic search on the CCCS's official English website and through its Chinese WeChat account in October 2022, the researcher compiled the Table 6.1 (see below) which presents a summary of cultural programs delivered at the CCCS in collaboration with its partner provinces from 2015 to 2021.[80] The use of both the CCCS's website and WeChat account is, first, to ensure thoroughness, as there are occasions where past events were only published on one source instead of the other. A second reason is to improve the accuracy of event times, names, and organisations involved, as information reported from one source can be cross-checked against the other. The chosen time period covered seven full partnership years. Although the CCCS started to deliver cultural activities in May 2014 as it began its trial operation, events hosted in the first six months were small in number and did not make up a full partnership year with a Chinese provincial-

[80] Information (in English) about the CCCS's past events was collected under the "Events" section on its website, which can be accessed via the following link: https://cccsydney.org/. Post-event articles are usually published via the CCCS's WeChat account (in Chinese), which is under the name of "悉尼中国文化中心" (China Cultural Centre in Sydney) and Weixin ID "cccsydney". The researcher went through all event posts within the above-mentioned timeframe. The present research, however, could not incorporate data from the 2022 partnership year as it would not have fitted into the data collection and analysis schedule.

level government, hence are not included here. The most recent events reflected in this table were as of the end of 2021.

Table 6.1 Programs delivered by the China Cultural Centre in Sydney through partnerships with Chinese provinces (2015–2021)

Event title	Time	Performer	Type	Main content
Hunan Province (2015)				
Chinese New Year Concert (Happy Chinese New Year event)	February	Hunan Orchestra of Chinese Music	Concert	Folk music
Traditional Chinese Music Parade (Happy Chinese New Year event)	February	Hunan Orchestra of Chinese Music	Performance	Folk music
Fantastic Hunan Animation Exhibition	September–October	Hunan animation and game companies	Exhibition	Animation products
Amazing Hunan Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition	October–November	Hunan intangible cultural heritage inheritors	Exhibition	Folk art and craft
Intangible Cultural Heritage Workshops	October	Hunan intangible cultural heritage inheritors	Workshop	Palm leaf weaving, Miao painting, paper cutting, embroidery
Zhejiang Province (2016)				
Traditional Chinese Chamber Music (Happy Chinese New Year event)	February	Zhejiang Folk Music Orchestra	Concert	Folk music
Chinese Garden Chamber Music (Happy Chinese New Year event)	February	Zhejiang Folk Music Orchestra	Concert	Folk music

Chinese New Year Concert (Happy Chinese New Year event)	January	Butterfly Ladies Band	Concert	Folk music
Integration & Redesign	July–August	Zhejiang designers	Exhibition	Design work inspired by Chinese traditional philosophy
Cultural Landscape of the World Heritage West Lake & Chinese Aesthetics	July	Director of Cultural Relics Preservation & Archaeology Department of the Bureau of Cultural Relics of Zhejiang Province	Talk	Introduction to West Lake, Chinese philosophy and aesthetics on the relationship between human beings and nature
Chinese Cultural Workshops	June	Instructors from Zhejiang Province	Workshop	Dim sum making, silk tie dyeing
Life in Motion	October	Dance troupe of Zhejiang Song & Dance Theatre	Dance	Contemporary dance
Cultural Breeze—Exhibition on Kites and Fans	October–November	Zhejiang intangible cultural heritage inheritors	Exhibition	Folk art and craft
Kite Making and Fan Painting Workshops	October	Zhejiang intangible cultural heritage inheritors	Workshop	Traditional fan painting and kite making
Tradition Meets Trend	November	Zhejiang Fashion company, Chinese and Australian models	Fashion show	Chinese silk garments and apparel
West Lake Longjing Tea and Chinese Humanism	December	Deputy Director of Zhejiang Provincial Cultural Centre	Talk	History and influence of tea and tea culture in China

Sichuan Province (2017)				
Chinese Garden Chamber Music (Happy Chinese New Year event)	February	Beauty & Melody Orchestra of Sichuan	Concert	Folk music
Sichuan Cultural Performance and Workshop	February	Sichuan artists and instructors	Performance and workshop	Puppetry and face changing, lantern making, dough modelling, sugar painting, New Year picture making
Sichuan Contemporary Animation and Comic Show	June–July	Representatives from Sichuan animation and comics industry	Exhibition	Selected manga and animation work
Shifting Permanence	September–October	Artists from Sichuan	Exhibition	Contemporary art including performance, installation, photography, video
Creative Island: Sichuan Visual and Creative Art	September	N/A	Exhibition	Contemporary visual and creative art
We	September	Sichuan Contemporary Dance Company and Tianfu Music Rap Group	Dance	Contemporary dance and rap performance
Ancient Shu Civilisation	September	President of Sichuan Provincial Institute of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage	Talk	Introduction to the history of Shu Kingdom

Intangible Cultural Performances	October	Sichuan intangible cultural heritage inheritors	Performance	Acrobatics, puppetry, folk dance, face changing
Henan Province (2018)				
Chinese New Year Celebration Performance (Happy Chinese New Year event)	February	Henan Song & Dance Group and Shaolin Monastery	Performance	Traditional music, folk dance, martial art
Henan Excellent Folk Custom Photography Exhibition	July	N/A	Exhibition	Photographs from Henan photographer
Chinese Garden Chamber Music	September	Henan Folk Music Group	Concert	Folk music
Taichi Training Course	November	Instructors from Henan	Class	Taichi introduction and practice
Intangible Cultural Heritage Workshops	November	Henan intangible cultural heritage inheritors	Workshop	New Year picture making, sancai painting, stone carving, dough modelling, scent bag making
Guizhou Province (2019)				
Chinese New Year Celebration Performances (Happy Chinese New Year event)	February	Guizhou Song & Dance Theatre	Performance	Acrobatics, folk song and dance
Colourful Culture Charming Guizhou	June	Guizhou intangible cultural heritage inheritors	Exhibition	Pictures of Guizhou national attractions, folk costumes and cultural items including batik,

				silk textiles, silverware, wax painting
Intangible Cultural Heritage Workshops	June	Guizhou intangible cultural heritage inheritors	Workshop	Batik, embroidery
Chinese Chamber Music	September	Guizhou Traditional Orchestra	Concert	Folk music
Charming Orient—Festivals in the Mountain	November	Painters from Guizhou	Exhibition	Chinese paintings reflecting traditional festivals of Guizhou ethnic minorities
Shaanxi Province (2020)				
Variety Show of Shaanxi (Happy Chinese New Year event)	January	Shaanxi Song & Dance Troupe, Shaanxi Acrobatics Troupe, Shaanxi Wushu & Sports Centre	Performance	Traditional song and dance, folk music, acrobatics, martial art
Qin—The Past and Present of Terracotta Warriors	June	N/A	Exhibition (online)	History of Terracotta Warriors, tourism resources of Shaanxi
Ancient Workmanship: Exhibition of Utensils in the Han & Tang Dynasty	September–November	N/A	Exhibition	Replicated costumes and appliances including dresses and ceramics
Shaanxi Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition	November–December	N/A	Exhibition	Qin Opera, folk song, puppetry, clay sculpture, embroidery, New Year picture

Jiangsu Province (2021)				
Jiangsu Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition (Happy Chinese New Year event)	January–February	N/A	Exhibition	New Year picture, brocade, embroidery, paper cutting, dyeing, opera facial makeup
Suzhou Chinese Orchestra Online Concert	March	Suzhou Chinese Orchestra	Concert (online)	Folk music
Jiangsu Traditional Performing Art Show	May	Suzhou Kunqu Opera Theatre, Yangzhou Puppet Research Institute, Jiangsu Acrobatic Troupe, Jiangsu Drama School	Performance (online)	Kunqu Opera, puppetry, acrobatics, folk dance
Taste Life: Exhibition of Artists' Works and Cultural Creative Products from Jiangsu Art Museum	October–December	N/A	Exhibition	Chinese painting, calligraphy, oil painting, printmaking, cultural creative products
Closing Ceremony of 2021 Australia Jiangsu Culture and Tourism Year & China–Australia New Year Concert	December	Suzhou Chinese Orchestra	Concert (online)	Folk music

In terms of the content, this table has shown both activities conducted under the MCT's Happy Chinese New Year event and those presented through the remainder of the partnership year. As can be seen, programs conducted during the Chinese New Year time included concerts, cultural performances, workshops, and exhibitions. Concerts delivered in association with the Happy Chinese New Year event primarily featured music groups from corresponding provinces, such as the Hunan Orchestra of Chinese Music, folk music groups from Zhejiang, and Beauty & Melody

Orchestra of Sichuan. As to cultural performances, Henan, Guizhou, and Shaanxi provinces dispatched similar shows presenting Chinese traditional music, folk dance, and martial arts from 2018 to 2020. In addition to these commonly held concerts and performances, other cultural activities, such as art and craft workshops from Sichuan and intangible cultural heritage exhibitions from Shaanxi and Jiangsu, highlighted Chinese folk art in respective programs.

Apart from events held at the beginning of the year, more activities were conducted later in the year, spanning across a longer time compared with programs delivered during the Chinese New Year period, as shown in the same table. However, the majority of such cultural activities were not particularly different from those undertaken earlier in the partnership year. For example, cultural workshops and exhibitions presenting Chinese folk art and craft (from Hunan, Zhejiang, Henan, Guizhou provinces), Chinese traditional music concerts (from Henan, Guizhou, Jiangsu), traditional performing art including folk dance, acrobatics, and puppetry (from Sichuan and Jiangsu) remain ongoing and main themes that appeared over the past years. Despite this, it should be noted that there were some contemporary elements that can be identified in such provinces as Zhejiang and Sichuan. Nonetheless, this type of activity is rare and not consistent through the CCCS's collaboration with its provincial partners.

6.5 Reaction to cultural programs delivered through partnerships with Chinese provinces in Australia

It is noticeable that these events are primarily oriented towards projecting the culture of a collaborating province to the overseas audience, even though the practice of cultural diplomacy, as discussed and defined in Chapter 2, is not about advancing one-track promotion. Such an approach is in line with the primary intentions of this working mode, such as utilising CCCs to boost international appeal and influence of Chinese culture and increasing the international profile of Chinese provinces, as analysed earlier in this chapter.

While these cultural programs may indeed reflect what the Chinese central and local governments consider as suitable and representative, given the MCT and Chinese provincial governments' role in the curatorial and selection process, they are perceived with contrasting views from Australian interviewees.

6.5.1 A one-way projection of culture

When talking about the CCCS's cultural events under the partnership with Chinese provincial-level governments, a few interviewees regarded the programming style as a one-way projection, noting that the way such programs had been planned lacked consideration of how well they might be

received by the Australian public. As one Chinese-Australian artist held, these programs seemed to adopt a “one-way” style and

> generally speaking, they follow the approach of indoctrination—bringing cultural and performing groups as well as exhibitions straight from China to the Australian audience. I am not sure whether or not the target audience in Australia can accept or to what extent they can accept these programs. I am also not sure to what degree the Australian audience cares about them (Interviewee 4).

This respondent’s point was supported by an Australia academic, who was of the opinion that

> sometimes they seem to me to be a bit bland, there is a program and each region of China has to have a piece of the action, and whatever it gets sent and they have to run it whether anyone thinks it works or not, and nobody knows, right? It’s not a putdown, but it doesn’t seem to me as though they do much in the way of research into what Australians would like to see (Interviewee 5).

Another interviewee echoed this view by sharing the experience of working with the CCCS on a collaborative project, in which the CCCS provided the program content that was designed and dispatched from China. This interviewee noted that

> from my point of view, it always felt like, here’s what we’ve got, this is what we can give you, and that was it, and I don’t know if then behind that is a lot more thinking and programming decisions (Interviewee 10).

This one-track approach to projecting Chinese culture abroad further links to other interviewees’ perception regarding a perceived lack of engagement of the CCCS’s programming with the wider Australian audience. The following sections will be centred on discussions in this regard.

6.5.2 A predominant focus on traditional cultural programs

Looking closely at cultural programs delivered at the CCCS through this working mode, despite different origins and art groups, the overall programming showed a strong and consistent emphasis on presenting Chinese traditional art and culture through similar forms, such as music, dance, exhibition, and cultural workshops. This was demonstrated in the Happy Chinese New Year programs, which oftentimes included Chinese traditional music, folk dance, acrobatics, and martial arts. It can also be seen in intangible cultural heritage exhibitions from Hunan, Shaanxi, and Jiangsu, featuring folk art and craft including paper cutting, embroidery, puppetry, and New Year painting; photographic exhibitions of folk customs from Henan; visual art exhibitions showcasing traditional festivals in Guizhou; as well as exhibitions of Terra Cotta Warriors and Han and Tang cultures from Shaanxi. In addition, cultural workshops from Hunan, Zhejiang, Sichuan, and Henan, as well as talks given by researchers from Zhejiang and Sichuan were all centred on similar aspects of Chinese traditional culture from respective provinces.

This trend became even more salient from 2018 to 2021, during which, as reflected in Table 6.1, almost all cultural programs delivered through this working mode had a primary focus on the traditional side of Chinese art and culture. As one interviewee recently observed, the CCCS was "very much focusing on exhibitions of folk culture or traditional craft practices or digital exhibitions that have come from Mainland museums of historical artefacts" (Interviewee 12). This emphasis confirms what has been discussed in Chapter 3 as a characteristic of China's cultural diplomacy, in which Chinese traditional culture is considered by the Chinese government as a key source for gaining attraction and soft power in the world. While agreeing that Chinese traditional cultural programs have a certain audience in Australia, some interviewees are of a different view concerning the extent to which such activities connect with the broader Australian public. For example, a former Australian cultural diplomat to China pointed out that

> traditional arts and customs, folk art, paper cuts, all of these things which are enjoyed by many members of the Chinese community or children in particular and people learning Chinese. But the connection with the wider Australian community is not really there, it's for a particular group of people. I'm not saying only people who have Chinese background, but people who are very interested in China as well (Interviewee 9).

This respondent's viewpoint was supported by an Australian scholar of Chinese visual art. This interviewee took exhibitions of traditional culture of Chinese guqin or teapot as an example and suggested its limited effect in bringing in "a broader audience other than people who are already quite knowledgeable about Chinese traditional culture because they're Chinese" (Interviewee 12).[81] The same participant further argued that

> promoting traditional Chinese culture, traditional folk arts, and that's all great and it's really interesting, and I'm sure it brings in a very small audience who are already particularly interested [in China], but it doesn't do that kind of broad outreach [in Australia] (Interviewee 12).

Given the strong focus on presenting Chinese traditional culture in CCCS's cultural events, this interviewee held that, generally speaking, the CCCS's programming was "narrow-casting", as

> they're reaching people like me who are already working in the field, who've been to China many times, who have a demonstrated ongoing interest in Chinese language, Chinese culture, Chinese history. But, beyond, and that's quite a small group of people, really, in Australia, and I think that there's an opportunity to reach people more broadly (Interviewee 12).

Such response suggests that while Chinese traditional art and culture do have an audience in Australia, this is a rather narrow group of people who are either of Chinese cultural heritage or already have prior knowledge of/interest in China and Chinese culture in general. In other words, the existing programming of the CCCS is perceived as having limited effect in connecting with a

[81] Guqin (古琴) is a seven-stringed musical instrument and has been played in China since ancient times.

wider and more diverse public in the host country. As another former Australian cultural diplomat to China shared, “I don’t think that the Centre is reaching as wide or as many different audiences as they could … but they could reach a much wider audience with different programs” (Interviewee 7).

The problem of audience engagement is not exclusive to the CCCS, but also reflected in other CCCs in the world. In 2016, a *Guangming Daily* report noted two challenges, among others, for the development of the CCC project based on field research on CCCs in Belgium, Spain, and Egypt. According to the findings of this report, one of the issues was related to the program content, which was primarily centred on introducing Chinese traditional culture and lacked a sense of modernity, future-orientation, and depth of thought (Shi & Yuan 2016). Related to this issue, another challenge was the difficulty in reaching the mainstream audience of local society, who appeared to be less attracted to the existing cultural activities at CCCs (Shi & Yuan 2016).

This limited engagement with the foreign public is, however, in contrast with what the Chinese government expects CCCs to achieve—connecting with the wider public in host nations. As former Chinese Vice Minister for Culture, Ding Wei, said in an interview, CCCs’ activities were to focus on the mainstream society while reaching people from all walks of life in host countries (Wang, J 2014). In addition, there also appears to be a particular emphasis for CCCs to engage with local audiences who are not of a Chinese cultural heritage. For example, the *Guangming Daily* report regarded CCCs’ predominant engagement with overseas Chinese as one of its limitations that needed to be addressed. More evidently, as reported by *Chinanews*, Zhao Li, inaugural Director of the CCCS, asserted that, “the China Cultural Centre ought to be established as a platform for the foreign public, showcasing Chinese culture to the foreign public and facilitating their understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture” (cited in Tao 2017). In this light, the CCCS’s heavy focus on Chinese traditional culture in its programming under this working mode seems counterproductive to the goal of reaching a broader audience in the host nation.

6.5.3 A small portion of contemporary art programs

Despite a primary focus on Chinese traditional art and culture, it is discernible that some programs presented through this working mode have shown a certain degree of contemporary elements. They were manifested in programs including animation exhibitions from Hunan and Sichuan, contemporary dance from Zhejiang and Sichuan, and contemporary art from Sichuan, as presented in Table 6.1. This type of program was not commonly featured at the CCCS through this working mode, with only seven programs delivered from 2015 to 2021 and the majority of them coming from Zhejiang and Sichuan, which are Chinese provinces with a vibrant scene in contemporary art. Although these cultural events had only been delivered through the CCCS’s early partnerships with Chinese provinces and seldom seen in recent years, this type of contemporary program was

perceived, particularly by those who had worked with the CCCS and long observed its programming over the past years, as a useful means to engage with a wider Australian audience.

For example, talking broadly about the Australian public's preferences in arts and cultural programs, one former Australian cultural diplomat held that a wider Australian audience, "which is interested in Australian culture, Australian culture interacting with other cultures, including Asia, including Chinese, is really more interested in contemporary practice" (Interviewee 9). Likewise, a senior cultural leader of a major arts centre in Australia pointed out that "there was a lot of interest and still is in this country" in "contemporary creative work from China" (Interviewee 3). An Australian scholar of Chinese visual art echoed this by noting that Asian contemporary art exhibitions, especially those from China, have brought in big audiences in Australian galleries (Interviewee 12). Based on previous experience working at the White Rabbit Gallery, a Chinese contemporary art gallery in Sydney, the same respondent further highlighted the appeal of Chinese contemporary art among a diverse audience in Australia, noting that

> contemporary art is a really great way to engage people with China. I think White Rabbit does it really successfully, it brings in a really diverse audience of Chinese and Chinese–Australian and Australian audiences of pretty much all demographics and all age groups, and creates conversations about China (Interviewee 12).

One factor related to the appeal of Chinese contemporary artwork, according to an Australian curator, was that it offered different understandings of Chinese art and culture and helped break down stereotypes (Interviewee 10). A pertinent example is a past visual art program, entitled *Shifting Permanence*, which was delivered by the CCCS under its annual partnership with Sichuan Province in 2017. The exhibition featured a selection of artwork from Chengdu Blue Roof Museum, reflecting Chinese contemporary artists' thoughts concerning implications of China's fast urbanisation through performance art, installation, photography, and video art. From a curatorial perspective, the same respondent held that these contemporary artists and their work presented a different aspect of Chinese art and culture rather than "a lot of Australians would just think of, much more traditional like ink paintings or something like that when they think of Chinese art" (Interviewee 10).

A further aspect related to the attractiveness of Chinese contemporary artwork is that it provides insights into contemporary Chinese society through creative practice by artists, who, as perceived by a former Australian cultural diplomat, are

> very attuned more than the average person in the street to changes in our general way of living and future trends, and they are looking for a way to respond creatively to those changes, and to express them in their work. So, they are always looking for something new, while their ideas are formed by their culture and their training and their past environment, their own personal histories (Interviewee 7).

Following this, an Australian curator considered contemporary art produced by Chinese artists as an opportunity to learn what was happening in China today, noting that

> looking at artists now and what they're doing … rather than sending a very famous, well-known traditional painter that the Chinese government might feel is what they want to show and portray, I think it's much more interesting … just people that are doing interesting things and what's going on now. And I think also then it's like you're getting artists who are addressing issues that are important to them and what's going on now (Interviewee 10).

This view is manifested in the aforementioned *Shifting Permanence* exhibition. As the curator of this exhibition, Ding Fenqi, explained, ideas were expressed in exhibited works produced by Chinese contemporary artists, including

> the faster pace of change, differentiation of village and town landscape, different experiences between normality and abnormality, physical freedom and discipline of the social system, as well as the cynicism and seriousness of the attitudes towards these phenomena (cited in *The Adelaide Review* 2017).

These emotions and concerns of Chinese artists resonated with a broader audience in relation to global topics, such as environmental issues. As Ding said, "[t]hese concerns are, to some extent, a reflection of human shared experiences. I believe that such an exhibition is quite easy to understand with universal values" (cited in *The Adelaide Review* 2017).

This perceived wider resonance created through contemporary work like ones featured in the *Shifting Permanence* exhibition was echoed by a senior arts leader in Australia, who recognised such connections between Chinese contemporary art and Australian audiences more generally. As this interviewee elaborated,

> I think, from the contemporary point of view, particularly where we had artists who were reacting to contemporary issues in China, some case I seem to recall, artists responding to environmental concerns, I think what it does is, it connects people, and people here can respect and appreciate the creative work, but then they also, if they're given the opportunity with background and tour work, interpretive, then what it says is this was put together by a human being, albeit 7,000 miles away, or whatever it is, but who is wrestling with similar concerns but in a very different situation, but similar concerns, human concerns that we all have. And so, it shares a kind of common human bond, and a lot of people said that to me, it opened up all sorts of different insights. I think a lot of people, particularly with the contemporary work, just had no idea that modern artists in China are working in this way and that they are making comments on all sorts of issues, often through the work, but that are issues which do have resonance with Australia and Australian conditions and, or just from a common humanity point of view. So, I think a lot of those exhibitions actually touched people here (Interviewee 3).

Next to the appeal of Chinese contemporary art and culture is the opportunity, seen by interviewees, to connect with the Australian public through the CCCS's programming. As one Australian scholar of Chinese visual art pointed out, this would be "an opportunity for the China Cultural Centre to capitalise on that interest" to engage with a wider audience in Australia (Interviewee 12).

Nonetheless, it can be seen from recent programming under the partnership between the CCCS and Chinese provinces that there have been limited cultural activities with a contemporary focus. It is in this sense that an Australian curator even lamented this missed opportunity for the CCCS to potentially reach more general viewers in Australia. As this interviewee reflected on the *Shifting Permanence* exhibition, which also toured in Adelaide, "I don't know if they realised how cool the exhibition was, and I think if we'd gone more down that path, I'd say there's more of an audience for that in Adelaide" (Interviewee 10).

6.6 Reflection on programs delivered through partnerships with Chinese provinces

The above discussions have shown how Australian interviewees view the CCCS's cultural programs undertaken in collaboration with Chinese provinces. In particular, participants held that programming under this working mode tended to follow a one-way approach, with less consideration on its appeal to Australian audiences. This broad perception further connects to a perceived lack of engagement with the general public in Australia. More specifically, it was pointed out by interviewees that the CCCS's predominantly traditional-culture programming was limited in its capacity to reach a broader Australian audience. Meanwhile, some interviewees, not least those specialised in the arts and culture, suggested a more general and wider interest from the Australian public in Chinese contemporary art and cultural practice, which was not commonly featured in the CCCS's programming through this working mode. These perceptions from local participants further led to reflection on this working mode and its associated programming.

6.6.1 A top-down approach to programming

It is important to note that while Chinese contemporary art and cultural programs are likely to engage with a broader audience in Australia, this may be just one of many areas in which Australian audiences would potentially be interested. For example, one Australian academic also mentioned other areas of interest among the Australian public, such as "contemporary Chinese innovation in technology design" and "contemporary Chinese architecture" (Interviewee 5). Therefore, it is not the researcher's intention to suggest that replacing the CCCS's existing program with a series of Chinese contemporary art exhibitions would automatically resolve the engagement issue once and for all. Nor does the present study consider that as an appropriate approach as it would oversimplify the complexity and diversity of varied groups of the target audience.

However, what can be learnt here is that there is a gap between what the CCCS can offer through relatively homogenous programming under this working mode and an awareness of what a wider group of Australian audiences might prefer to see. To engage with the general public in the host country, it is essential to first understand and acknowledge the receiving audience's preferences,

which could be diverse and different from what the sender considers as representative and attractive. To further facilitate the engagement with foreign audiences, a more locally oriented approach is required when curating such cultural programs, instead of applying a top-down method, which, as noted by a former Australian cultural diplomat, tends to only "reflect the preferences or the policies of the senior people in charge", who are "not necessarily in touch with the audience that they're trying to reach" (Interviewee 7). Echoing this point, one Australian scholar of Chinese visual art stressed the importance of a bottom-up approach by focusing on the connection with local community while undertaking cultural diplomacy, arguing that such an approach contrasted with what had been adopted by the CCCS in that

> it's not a directive that the China Cultural Centre is to reflect, Chinese intangible cultural heritage, for example, but that it's something that engages people at a local level. So, I think if the China Cultural Centre were a bit more plugged in to Sydney's particular local communities, and I don't think they are, then that might be the opportunity (Interviewee 12).

The researcher agrees with this interviewee in the sense that cultural programs delivered at the CCCS in partnership with Chinese provinces face the challenge of connecting with a broader and diverse Australian public. However, this study also argues that this is not just a problem of the CCCS as it does not have much control and flexibility in curating and selecting programs in such a working mode. Instead, the programming decision is made by the MCT and Chinese provinces, which do not directly interact with the overseas public and tend to approve these cultural activities in line with domestic guidelines. As one Australian academic similarly pointed out, "there are specific strategies that tie in with what's happening in China or what the Chinese government wants to do. So, I don't think the Chinese Cultural Centre has very much autonomy in that regard" (Interviewee 5). As the same interviewee further noted, "what they do, what they get is what the Chinese government networks and then ministries are prepared to pay for, send out" (Interviewee 5). It is precisely this kind of top-down approach in conducting cultural diplomacy that risks cultural programs being less responsive to the local audience's interests and preferences, hence engendering a potential lack of engagement with the general public in the host country.

6.6.2 Contextualisation of existing programs

As the CCCS's programming flexibility is, to a large extent, restricted by this working mode, its capacity to respond to the appeal of local audiences is subsequently constrained. This can be seen in its continued presentation of traditional cultural programs from partner provinces, which, as suggested by interviewees before, have a limited capacity in reaching a wider audience in Australia. Nonetheless, despite this perceived ineffectiveness, such a limitation is perhaps not entirely due to the promotion of Chinese traditional art and culture itself. It is also partly concerned with whether or not a more localised approach can be adopted to cultivating the interest and understanding of such programs, so as to engage with a broader audience. As one Interviewee pointed out,

> I think that there would be [an] interest from Australian audiences more broadly in aspects of traditional Chinese culture, but I think it has to be marketed and deliberately targeted towards that broader audience, and I think that that's not happening [at the CCCS] (Interviewee 12).

In this respondent's view, the Chinese government and local authorities did well in promoting its traditional art and culture to domestic audiences. But this kind of promotional content and approach would need to be re-strategised for engaging with the foreign public. As this interviewee continued to argue,

> I think that their promotion of intangible cultural heritage and sites, including in places like Jing Dezhen, for example, they're fantastic, but they're mostly directed towards local tourism within China, and so, the materials that are produced are not, perhaps, very accessible to audiences who don't already have a knowledge of Chinese history. So, I think that it would be a really great opportunity to reach Australian audiences and to provide an education as well as an entertaining and an interesting introduction to Chinese history and culture. But I think, perhaps, they haven't quite hit the mark (Interviewee 12).

The localisation of cultural programs was mentioned by another interviewee, who emphasised the importance of providing contextual information to facilitate the engagement with local audiences. Based on previous experience working with the CCCS on collaborative exhibitions, this interviewee recalled that one of the issues in such visual art programs was that the "introductory texts and labels and everything were always very factual. It was like this is what it is, whereas I think usually our way of doing exhibitions is to give a background on the artist and the artwork" (Interviewee 10). As this respondent further explained,

> I don't know if this is a cultural difference or a different understanding. Other exhibitions we tend to, or the programming that we do, it's a lot more personal, like the stories behind the art, or there's a lot more about the artist themselves. And, again, I don't know if that's just a cultural difference of maybe Chinese artists are much more private, whereas Australian artists will just be like, "Blah blah blah, here's me and here's my work", and often it might be very personal and they don't have a problem telling people that as well. So, I think introductory texts and labels were always the main thing (Interviewee 10).

The response from this interviewee has shown, on the one hand, certain information, such as the artistic background and creative process, is expected from a curatorial point of view in an Australian context. On the other hand, it has indicated that such expected components are oftentimes overlooked in the CCCS's cultural programs. This type of information is important in an intercultural setting where cultural diplomacy is being conducted, as cultural programs from a foreign country may not be easily understood and appreciated by the local public (Interviewee 10). As one Australian senior arts leader said, it was of importance to put such cultural work in context, so that "ordinary Australians who didn't know that much about China could understand what was the background to these works" and to allow people "to have a way in" (Interviewee 3).

As cultural programs delivered under the partnership between the CCCS and Chinese provinces are typically curated in China by departments or organisations that oftentimes do not possess first-hand

experience in interacting with local audiences in the host country, and are then dispatched to the CCCS for presentation in Australia, the lack of customised information in such programs can be identified. This could hinder the engagement with the general public, especially in those programs focused on Chinese traditional art and culture. When browsing the CCCS's website, it can be seen that the introduction of programs, such as the *Ancient Workmanship—Exhibition of Utensils in the Han and Tang Dynasty*" from Shaanxi Province in 2020 and the *Jiangsu Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition* in 2021, are rather descriptive and provide little explanation with respect to the historical and social context of exhibited items, creative process of such work, and the relevance of the program to viewers abroad. Similar issues are also shown in other traditional performances delivered at the CCCS through this working mode, including the Jiangsu Performing Arts Show in 2021. Presented on the CCCS's website, this performance featured programs such as the Chinese Kunqu Opera *Peony Pavilion* and the Yangzhou rod puppet show Love Without End, which reflected the story of the *Butterfly Lovers*. The stories behind these performances all have particular historical and social meanings at different times of Chinese history and the understanding of such cultural backgrounds would be, at least helpful if not critical, in appreciating these cultural programs. Nonetheless, the introduction of these performances simply praised the beauty and fineness of the program, instead of offering more contextual information from a Chinese historical and literary perspective to facilitate the audience's understanding of and connection with these Chinese traditional performances. For instance, the Chinese Kunqu Opera *Peony Pavilion* program was introduced on the CCCS's website as

> [o]riginated from Kunshan in Suzhou city, Kunqu Opera is one of the oldest dramas in China with a long history of over 600 years and is reputed as the ancestor of Chinese dramas. For its elegant lines from the classic poems and graceful singing, Kunqu Opera is regarded as an orchid in the garden of Chinese traditional culture and art. Also, this great cultural art is listed as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2001 (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2021).

Similarly, the text describing the Yangzhou rod puppet show Love Without End provided little detail about the performance and seemed somewhat irrelevant to the program. As it read,

> Yangzhou, whose rod puppet is as famous as the marionette of Quanzhou and the puppet of Zhangzhou, is known as Hometown of Puppets. As a national intangible cultural heritage, Yangzhou Rod Puppet has a long history and enjoys a high reputation all over the world (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2021).

What appeared more disconnected in these programs was that the Kunqu performance and Yangzhou rod puppet show were performed in company with traditional Chinese opera singing, with no translated subtitles embedded in these videos. Given that the traditional Chinese opera singing could be difficult to appreciate even among Chinese natives, it is likely that to most of the Australian

public who does not understand or speak Chinese, such performances would be incomprehensible and less attractive.

6.7 The delivery of cultural programs from Chinese provinces

While the above sections have discussed the working mode between the CCCS and its provincial partners from a programming perspective, the following part will focus on how these programs have been delivered in Australia. So far, the CCCS has primarily presented such cultural activities either through itself or in collaboration with Australian local partners, and they appear to generate different impact in terms of gaining local exposure and reaching the Australian public.

6.7.1 Presenting programs through the China Cultural Centre in Sydney: examples and challenges

In the annual collaboration between the CCCS and Chinese provinces, some programs have been delivered by the former at its own venue or through its website. For example, based on information published by the CCCS and Chinese media reports online, 13 out of 15 exhibitions listed in Table 6.1 were presented this way between 2015 and 2021. A further search shows that all four talks given by researchers from corresponding provinces from 2015 to 2017 as well as recent online programs, including Jiangsu Traditional Performing Art Show and Suzhou Chinese Orchestra Concert in 2021, adopted a similar delivery method. As the main platform to promote the partner province's culture to the Australian audience, the CCCS is also responsible for publicising these programs to local society. So far, it has done so through social media channels, such as YouTube, Twitter/X, and Facebook, which primarily target Australian audiences who do not read and speak Chinese. For example, events including the *2020 Shaanxi Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition* and *2021 Jiangsu Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition* were promoted through YouTube videos *Exhibition Promotion Video* and *Jiangsu Intangible Cultural Heritage* respectively.[82] In addition, programs such as the Jiangsu Traditional Performing Art Show, were promoted on Twitter/X (under the name of "CCCsyd") with a tweet/post that read

> #LivePerformance has always been a vital part of Chinese culture. #Chineseoperas, #puppetplays, #shadowplays, #acrobatics and #folkmusic are among the hallmarks of China Performing Arts.

Promoting and hosting these cultural events solely through the CCCS essentially reflects a strong role taken by the Chinese government in implementing cultural diplomacy, given that such activities are primarily operated by a Chinese state-run cultural organisation abroad in a relatively isolated fashion. This, as mentioned in Chapter 3, represents one of the characteristics in Chinese cultural

[82] See these promotional videos via https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vx8qJG3Twrs and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qK4UENS078U respectively.

diplomacy. However, the challenge of such a delivery approach is that it appears to create a limited impact in terms of gaining local exposure and reaching the general public in Australia. Looking at promotional videos of cultural programs conducted in partnership with Chinese provinces on the CCCS's social media platforms, such as YouTube, which only has a total of 431 subscribers at the time of writing, they tend to attract a small number of views.[83] For example, the promotional video of the *2020 Shaanxi Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition* was viewed 71 times, while the promotional video of the *2021 Jiangsu Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition* had 111 views. Furthermore, other programs that had been promoted via the CCCS's YouTube channel, including Jiangsu Acrobatic Troup's performance, *Qin—The Past and Present of Terracotta Warriors* exhibition from Shaanxi, and *Taste Life: Exhibition of Artists' Works and Cultural Creative Products from Jiangsu Art Museum*, also received low view numbers of 82, 11, 115 respectively. Similarly, cultural activities promoted on the CCCS's Twitter/X account also demonstrated a lack of exposure, as reflected in a generally low view rate (less than 100 times) of its posts. By way of comparison, at the time of writing, the British Council has 122,000 subscribers to its YouTube channel (under the name of "British Council") with a large proportion of promotional videos receiving nearly/over 1,000 views. In terms of its Twitter/X account (under the name of "British Council"), it is not uncommon that an individual tweet/post by the British Council has been seen more than 1,000 or even thousands of times.

The limited influence of the CCCS among the Australian public can also be seen in low subscription numbers to its Facebook page, which, at the time of writing, has 1,255 followers. This number, in comparative terms, is much lower than those of similar foreign cultural institutes in Australia, such as the Alliance Française Sydney, British Council Australia, Instituto Cervantes in Sydney, Japan Foundation Sydney, and Korean Cultural Centre Australia, as shown in Table 6.2. It may be argued that this disparity is partly due to the fact that the CCCS's Facebook page was created later than those of other listed foreign cultural institutes. Nonetheless, looking at the average annual growth of followers, it shows that the CCCS's popularity and influence have developed at a far slower pace over the years than its competitors in Australia.

[83] This YouTube channel was opened in 2020 and can be seen via: https://www.youtube.com/@ChinaCulturalCentreinSydney. This account, as explained in Chapter 5, replaced the CCCS's old YouTube account which was active from 2015 to 2017.

Table 6.2 Comparisons between the China Cultural Centre in Sydney's Facebook subscription number and those of other similar foreign cultural institutes in Australia [84]

Organisation	Page created	Subscribers	Annual growth on average
China Cultural Centre in Sydney	28 May 2014	1,255	157
Alliance Française Sydney	18 September 2009	13,146	1,011
British Council Australia	11 April 2011	8,200	745
Instituto Cervantes in Sydney	25 April 2010	7,425	619
Japan Foundation Sydney	20 April 2011	13,286	1,208
Korean Cultural Centre Australia	11 March 2011	12,470	1,134

Linking with this, in some interviewees' recollections, there was a low attendance of cultural events held at the CCCS. As one respondent said, the CCCS was "usually quite empty, with less viewers" to cultural programs presented in the venue (Interviewee 4). In a broader sense, other interviewees similarly shared the impression of low attendances in CCCS's other events, including exhibitions and film screenings, attributing to the cause of this issue to ineffective publicity and marketing in Australia (Interviewee 7; Interviewee 12).

This lack of exposure of the CCCS's programs is further reflected in little to no coverage of these activities by the Australian media, contrasting with the number of reports produced by the Chinese media on the domestic front, as indicated earlier in this chapter and analysed in Chapter 5. This point is supported by some interviewees, who also recalled low local publicity of the CCCS's events in Australia (Interviewee 7; Interviewee 9). While this may be, as noted by one interviewee, due to a general lack of interest from the Australian media in covering Chinese arts and cultural programs (Interviewee 6), the researcher would also argue that this is partly related to the visibility of the CCCS in local society, as further demonstrated in Australian participants' views.

According to some interviewees, the CCCS is not widely known in Australia. One former Australian cultural diplomat noted that "I have mentioned the Centre to some people that I would have thought would know about it, and they're actually quite surprised to find out that it exists" (Interviewee 7). This point was supported by a Chinese–Australian artist, who pointed out that "I don't think the majority of the Australians are aware of the existence of such an organisation in Sydney's CBD" (Interviewee 4). It is in this sense that the same respondent argued that the CCCS's influence in Australia was very "limited" (Interviewee 4). An Australian academic agreed that the CCCS had a very low profile in Australia and held that

[84] Data presented in this table was collected in September 2022.

> I honestly don't think people would really know it's there…. I think if you weren't on the mailing list, you would have no idea what was on there, and I think if you went out and did a vox pop in the streets of Sydney and asked people if they knew that such an organisation existed, they would have no idea (Interviewee 12).

Taken together, it can be said that the use of the CCCS as an isolated platform to promote cultural programs in Australia appears to have shown limited potential in increasing local exposure and reaching the public, partly due to its low visibility and promotional capacity. The limitation of such a delivery method has also been acknowledged, though perhaps indirectly, by the Chinese government, as it encourages all CCCs to collaborate with local partners in host nations to present cultural activities. For example, when commenting on CCCs' working modes, Zheng Hao, Deputy Director of the BIEC, has emphasised the benefits of working in partnership with local collaborators, which can help broaden overseas markets, facilitate effective cooperation, enhance exchanges between personnel, and increase the influence of cultural communications (Song 2019). This approach, as he further notes, can "yield twice the result with half the effort" (事半功倍 *shiban gongbei*) as it multiplies the influence of CCCs' work through partnerships with governments, media, arts and cultural organisations, educational institutes, and festivals in the host country (Song 2019). In a similar vein, Li Jiangang has argued that to increase the influence of Chinese cultural activities, such as the MCT's Happy Chinese New Year event, in the host country, it is important to involve local partners as they are more aware of the local environment and receiving audiences' cultural preferences and habits (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2016a). Li has further stressed the importance to adopt a localised approach to promoting Chinese cultural programs abroad and to integrate such activities in local platforms such as festival events for reaching the wider public (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2016a).

In practical terms, this can be seen in that, while the CCCS functions as the main platform to promote and deliver programs in this working mode, it also seeks collaboration with local partners in Australia to co-host cultural events. The following section will provide an example and discuss how such a delivery method differs from the aforementioned one in terms of increasing the exposure and outreach of cultural activities in Australia.

6.7.2 Presenting programs through the local partnership: examples and benefits

Apart from hosting cultural activities dispatched from Chinese provinces in an isolated way, the CCCS also attempts to present these programs in association with Australian partners. One such local collaborator, as listed on the CCCS's website, is the Adelaide Festival Centre (AFC), which was established in June 1973 as Australia's first multi-purpose arts centre based in South Australia.

Since 2006, the AFC has been a strong advocate for Asia–Australia cultural engagement. The AFC's interest in championing exchanges between Australia and Asia is manifested in its annually

held OzAsia Festival (inaugurated in 2007), which is Australia's leading contemporary arts festival engaging with Asia through theatre, dance, music, visual arts, literature, food, and cultural programs from across Asia. In particular, the AFC has hosted a series of cultural events with a focus on showcasing Chinese art and culture. For example, the 2014 OzAsia Festival focused on Shandong Province (South Australia's sister state), featuring 140 artists from the region and presenting programs, such as acrobatic performances, photographic exhibitions, contemporary music, and films. The AFC has also initiated the Chinese New Year celebration program since 2016, and held the inaugural Australia–China Cultural Dialogue, which gathered key arts administrators from China and Australia as well as officials from the former Australian Department of Communications and the Arts and former Chinese Ministry of Culture in 2016. It further delivered the Australia–China Arts and Cultural Symposium, where it launched the *Australia–China Arts and Cultural Exchange Report* in 2019. Apart from these programs, the AFC has also developed a series of strategic partnerships with Chinese arts and cultural organisations, such as the National Centre for the Performing Arts, Hong Kong Arts Festival, and China National Children's Theatre. From the AFC's perspective, while the support from the then state and federal governments was one factor in building such cultural engagement, a further reason for pursuing this cultural relationship with China was explained by a senior leader of the organisation, who noted that

> I think this centre has, at least for the last 15, 16 years, been interested in Asian engagement, and interested in supporting a successful multicultural community by recognising Asia in Australia with the significant role and presence of a number of Asian communities over generations within Australia. And the Chinese community is seminal to that, and … something like 1.2 million people in this country claim some degree of Chinese heritage. And so, that is quite significant, and I think anyone who, or any organisation that is seriously taking a look at engagement with Asia on a cultural basis, then a recognition, an understanding of Chinese culture in both its traditional and contemporary forms in all sorts of genres, whether it be visual arts or dance or film or whatever it is, that is absolutely a very important ingredient in engaging with East Asian cultures generally, and also in recognising a very significant part of the community at home. So, there were these drivers which came out of our wish to be a centre which recognised and encourages multicultural participation (Interviewee 3).

The AFC's recognition of the importance of cultural engagement with Asia, particularly China, is further shown in its partnership with the CCCS. In 2016, witnessed by then Premier of South Australia Jay Weatherill and Consul-General of China in Adelaide Rao Weihui, the AFC signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the CCCS, establishing a collaborative partnership under which the CCCS supported Chinese visual arts exhibitions and facilitated the presentation of Chinese performing arts at the AFC around the Chinese New Year time. The establishment of this relationship was reported by the Chinese government and state-owned media, such as *Chinanews* and *CCTV*, but also national and state-level media from Australia, including ABC News (Fedorowytsch 2016), *Limelight* (Bartle 2016), *Arts Hub* (2016), *Broadway World Adelaide* (Peterson 2016), and *The Lead* (2016). The Australian media reports were generally positive as they had

primarily focused on the opportunity to bring in more Chinese art and cultural work and strengthening cultural ties between Adelaide and China.

It is in this context that two programs under the annual partnership between the CCCS and corresponding Chinese provinces were presented at the AFC, namely, the 2017 Chinese New Year Concert, performed by the Butterfly Ladies Band from Zhejiang, and *Shifting Permanence*, which, as discussed earlier, was a contemporary art exhibition from Sichuan.

From a curatorial perspective, the AFC's impetus to take these programs was first and foremost due to its programming needs. As one interviewee from the AFC talked about the collaboration with the CCCS on the Chinese New Year concert, which, as mentioned before, is a component in the AFC's annual programming,

> we were looking at music work which would be complementary to [the AFC's] Chinese New Year celebrations…. I think [the concert] provides a window for non-Chinese folk to get a sense of some of the basic elements of Chinese culture in that context. So, I think, clearly from a curatorial point of view our people were thinking how a contribution in that regard would contribute to those celebrations (Interviewee 3).

As one of the programs under the year-round partnership between the CCCS and Zhejiang Province in 2016, the Butterfly Ladies Band concert is a Chinese traditional music performance by a 15-piece all-female ensemble. The music group is part of the Zhejiang Traditional Music Orchestra, which is under the Zhejiang Song & Dance Theatre. According to an introduction to the band on the CCCS's website, the Butterfly Ladies Band's performance exhibits a unique and original style from southern China and represents Zhejiang province's local music (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2017).

One participant, who was managing this collaborative project at the AFC, recalled that this performance was based on an "existing repertoire" of the Butterfly Ladies Band, meaning that the AFC was not involved in designing the program (Interviewee 8). The collaboration between the AFC and the CCCS, as this interviewee shared, was arranged in a way that

> all of those touring expenses, the travel, the accommodation, the ground transport, the wage, the per diems were all covered by the China Cultural Centre and, I guess, the government in the region that they came from. And what we managed is the venue costs, the marketing, the publicity and the production (Interviewee 8).

This kind of arrangement appeared to be very appealing to an Australian local collaborator like the AFC, not least in terms of the financial feasibility to present such programs. As the same interviewee noted, the purpose of conducting this type of program, for the AFC's part, was community-oriented and related to the AFC's commitment to promoting multicultural participation. It was "to ensure primarily that Festival Centre is doing its job at representing on-stage or reflecting

on-stage, the people that [are] from all walks of life, like general public" (Interviewee 8). Therefore, as part of the "year-round public purpose programming" of the AFC, the presentation of this performance was not necessarily commercial-based, but aimed to remove "the pressure of any commercial gain" while "working with a budgeted deficit" (Interviewee 8). It is precisely because of this that the collaborative arrangement offered by the CCCS, mostly covering the expenses for carrying out this event, was beneficial to the AFC and also a key element in facilitating this collaboration, as noted by this interviewee that "it's cost prohibitive for us to afford to bring out a big troupe" (Interviewee 8). As the same respondent continued to explain the benefit of this arrangement to the AFC,

> for me it was pure advantage, because any time you, as a presenter, can have another presenting partner to share the risk with, you're already miles ahead. But the fact is it was even more beneficial to us because it's very rare that, as a presenter, you can have an international touring company of really high quality delivered to your door and to your venue without any investment in flights, accommodation, ground transport, freight, per diems, visas, not only is it so much money, but it's also a lot of work and time. So, I only saw it as a benefit, and it was like that from the get-go and right to the very end (Interviewee 8).

Similar arrangements can also be seen in the collaboration between the two organisations on the Sichuan contemporary art exhibition *Shifting Permanence*. This program was delivered as part of the AFC's 2017 OzAsia Festival, which typically has a strong focus on presenting contemporary work from Asia. As one interviewee from the AFC noted, the Chinese contemporary visual art exhibition was in line with what OzAsia was about and "completely what that festival was looking for" (Interviewee 3). As another involved respondent recalled, the CCCS contributed half of the cost for delivering this exhibition in Adelaide, covering AV equipment (for video works), which was "quite a high expense", as well as the freight costs which, according to this interviewee, the AFC's exhibition department would not have been able to afford with the allocated budget (Interviewee 10).

While the AFC's programming and financial needs were accommodated by the CCCS on both occasions, the CCCS and its Chinese provincial partners also benefitted from such collaborations, not only in terms of venue and production supports but also the exposure and recognition of these cultural programs in local society. These benefits can be seen from a few aspects. First, this kind of collaboration helped find a way for the program to reach a wider public by tapping into the audience base of the local partner. This was manifested in the Sichuan contemporary art exhibition that was presented at the AFC as a free event in the OzAsia Festival, which, on average, attracts up to 200,000 people each year (OzAsia Festival n.d.). What this means is that people who came to various activities of the festival would have the opportunity to view this exhibition, and therefore, as argued by one interviewee from the AFC, it was "open to exposure with a very wide range of audience" (Interviewee 3). Another respondent, who was involved in the delivery of this event, recalled a high number of viewers to this exhibition, noting that audiences came to OzAsia Festival

to “see a show in the Dunstan Playhouse or Space [Theatre] and then they’d see the exhibition as well” (Interviewee 10).[85]

A second benefit to the CCCS and its partner Chinese provinces was that their cultural programs had gained more promotions through the local collaborator’s marketing resources, which, in one respondent’s view, helped reach the local audience (Interviewee 8). As this respondent reflected on the marketing campaign of the Butterfly Ladies Band performance, the AFC had promoted this event by targeting several audience groups, including the OzAsia database, music fans, business community, and government officials (Interviewee 8). In the case of the Sichuan contemporary art exhibition, a similar marketing strategy was implemented. As another interviewee noted, this program had been promoted through Electronic Direct Mail (EDM) to the AFC’s subscribers, social media posts, and the OzAsia database (Interviewee 10).[86]

Next to the promotional support from the local partner, a third benefit can be seen from local publicity. As these cultural activities were held at the AFC as part of its annual programming, they were pitched to national and local media in Australia through the AFC’s publicity team. In most cases, as one interviewee shared, such publicity efforts would include inviting Australian arts and cultural critics to attend and review these cultural events (Interviewee 8). Coverage of these programs from the Australian media was generally positive, with one reviewer even giving 5/5 stars to the Butterfly Ladies Band concert (Canavan-Tonkin 2017). Primarily focusing on introducing the programs, these reports provided artists the opportunity to explain to the audience their background as well as the creative processes, which, as mentioned before, are important to facilitate a connection with local viewers. For example, *Glam Adelaide’s* report on Butterfly Ladies Band offered an opportunity to the Deputy Head of the ensemble, Song Shanhu, to introduce the concept and musicians of the group (Hassan 2017). In coverage by *Scenestr* (2017), Song was also interviewed to discuss her understanding of music, background of the performance, and explain Chinese traditional music instruments used in the concert to Western audiences who were not familiar with them. In terms of the Sichuan contemporary art exhibition, one report provided a detailed introduction to the stories of participating artists and the context in which creative works had been produced (Reid 2017). *The Adelaide Review* (2017) also covered this visual art program by conducting an interview with the Chinese curator, Ding Fenqi, from the Blue Roof Museum. Ding talked about his interpretation of the value behind this exhibition and took the opportunity to promote Chinese emerging contemporary artists, particularly those born in the 1980s.

[85] Dunstan Playhouse and Space Theatre are two main venues of the AFC.
[86] According to numbers shown on the AFC’s social media accounts, at the time of writing, it has 48,000 followers on Facebook and over 2,600 subscribers on YouTube. It also has 7,671 followers on its Twitter/X account, which the AFC has stopped using since July 2023.

6.7.3 Reflection on delivery methods

Through the above examination of the CCCS's delivery methods, it can be seen that presenting activities solely through the CCCS has less potential in gaining local exposure and reaching the general public in Australia. This is partly due to the CCCS's low profile and limited promotional capacity in local society. Such limitations may hinder the conduct of cultural diplomacy, especially given that the local public is the target audience of such diplomatic endeavours.

In contrast, by tapping into local collaborators' expertise and resources, collaboration with local partners, such as the AFC, has helped achieve a wider awareness of the CCCS's cultural programs among the local public. This collaborative approach has placed more emphasis on the value of partners from local civil society in conducting cultural diplomacy, a point that broadly aligns with the recognition of the role of non-state actors in contemporary cultural diplomacy, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. It is in this sense that the CCCS's collaboration with the AFC was a good attempt in improving the impact of its cultural events in Australia.

However, it should be noted that this level of collaboration with an Australian arts and cultural organisation like the AFC is not commonly seen in the CCCS's delivery of cultural events through this working mode. On the one hand, as shown from examples above, this may be because such collaboration is hinged on the local organisation's interest in engaging with China, its programming needs and schedule, or whether there is sufficient budgetary support. On the other hand, what seems more important to such engagement is the CCCS's identification and acknowledgment of the local partner's needs and preferences, whether it be program-centred or financial. Reflecting on the AFC's interaction with the CCCS over the past years, one AFC interviewee recalled a particular CCCS director whose enthusiasm for cultural engagement and an understanding of the Australian milieu and tastes "made it an interesting collaborative approach" (Interviewee 3). This point was supported by another AFC interviewee, who held that the CCCS, under the leadership of that same director, "wanted to nurture that relationship" with the AFC (Interviewee 8). This interviewee further elaborated on the CCCS's understanding and facilitation of the local partner's needs and preferences at the time of collaboration, noting that

> importantly, in our experience with the China Cultural Centre … they clearly had an understanding of what our aims are and what we're like at the Festival Centre, so they could then suggest from a curatorial perspective which company could, would come over to perform (Interviewee 8).

Recalling the relationship between the two organisations and the collaborative project of the Butterfly Ladies Band concert, this interviewee was of the opinion that without "that history, relationship, and trust" and "an understanding of each other's needs as organisations", "I don't know that I or anyone else would've known to secure the Butterfly Ladies Band" program (Interviewee 8).

Nonetheless, such enthusiasm to connect with and understand local society from the CCCS is not consistent. As a senior leader of the AFC noted, the collaborative process was less effective when there was a lack of willingness from the CCCS to connect with and understand the needs and interests of the local collaborator, and more specifically, when "either the director was not so interested in really supporting and growing that network or had a particular view about what they wanted to present, and that was fairly narrow" (Interviewee 3). The impact of this inconsistency on initiating and maintaining an effective partnership with local partners perhaps can be partly seen in that the five-year Memorandum of Understanding, which was signed between the CCCS and AFC in 2016 and eventuated five collaborative cultural programs, was not renewed when it reached its expiration in 2021.[87]

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on another working mode of the CCC project by looking at its annual partnership with Chinese provincial-level governments. It has discussed the purpose of this partnership, associated programs, and perceived values and benefits from perspectives of Chinese actors (central and local governments as well as CCCs). To understand the impact of cultural programs delivered through this working mode, this chapter has further examined local perceptions and delivery methods of these programs based on the case in Australia.

As shown in this chapter, a range of cultural activities have been undertaken through this working mode at different times of the partnership year. Despite the number and scale, it can be seen that the curation and selection of these cultural programs are primarily controlled by the MCT and Chinese provincial governments, showing a centralised approach in China's conduct of cultural diplomacy. The implementation of this working mode and associated programs shows an emphasis on enhancing Chinese cultural appeal and influence abroad for strategic and political objectives, with perceived values and benefits linked to such purposes from the standpoints of the central and local governments in China as well as CCCs. These characteristics confirm China's functional understanding of cultural diplomacy and a top-down approach in practice, as discussed in Chapter 3.

[87] There might have been other elements that contributed to the discontinuation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the AFC and CCCS, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and, as mentioned in Chapter 4, geopolitical/diplomatic factors between Australia and China at the time. Nonetheless, these were not noted by a senior member of the AFC management team in the interview, indicating that these, perhaps, were not main reasons for the discontinued agreement between the two organisations. In fact, the AFC worked on signing a cultural collaboration agreement with the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing and officially joined its BFPA in 2020. This was a time when both the pandemic and geopolitical/diplomatic factors were present, hence suggesting that the AFC's engagement with China was not significantly impeded by such aspects.

While this working mode may contribute to more regular and sustainable annual programming, it presents two main problems through the lens of cultural diplomacy, namely, a lack of engagement with the general public and a limited impact generated by these activities in local society. These issues are manifested in how such cultural programs are perceived by local participants and delivered in the host country.

In particular, from a programming perspective, Australian participants hold that programming under this working mode tends to follow a one-way approach, with less consideration on the reception of Australian audiences. More specifically, it has been highlighted by interviewees that the CCCS's predominantly traditional-culture programming is less effective in reaching a broader Australian audience. Meanwhile, there appears to exist a more general and wider interest from the Australian public in Chinese contemporary art and cultural practice, which is not commonly presented in the CCCS's programming through this working mode. These local perceptions have further indicated a gap between what the CCCS can offer through relatively homogenous programming in this working mode and an awareness of what a wider group of Australian audience would prefer to see.

It should be noted that this programming issue is not solely a problem of the CCCS itself, as the CCCS's programming flexibility is, to a large extent, restricted by this working mode and its capacity to respond to the interests of a diverse local audience is subsequently constrained. Instead, a deeper cause to this problem is related to China's top-down approach to conducting cultural diplomacy, as shown in the BIEC and Chinese provincial governments' role in curating and selecting cultural activities to be featured in CCCs' year-round programming. This approach has resulted in a primarily one-way projection of cultural programs from China to viewers abroad and is less responsive to the local audience's preferences, hence leading to a potential lack of engagement with the foreign public. In addition, this limitation is further compounded by the absence of a localised strategy to cultivate the interest and understanding of such programs, not least ones centred on aspects of Chinese traditional art and culture in an intercultural setting.

In terms of the delivery method, two approaches can be identified in this working mode—presenting cultural programs through the CCCS and co-hosting events with Australian partners. As shown in the analysis, promoting and delivering cultural activities through the CCCS in an isolated fashion has less potential in gaining local exposure and reaching the general public in Australia. This is partly due to the CCCS's low profile and limited promotional capacity in local society. Such a limitation hinders the practice of cultural diplomacy, which targets the foreign public. In contrast, by tapping into local partner's resources, CCCS's collaboration with the AFC has helped increase the likelihood of creating a wider awareness of its cultural programs among the Australian public.

These two delivery methods echo debates about the actor of cultural diplomacy, as manifested in Chapters 2 and 3. While presenting cultural programs through China's state-run cultural organisation abroad ultimately reflects the leading role of the Chinese government in cultural diplomacy, collaborating with partners from local civil society acknowledges the multiplicity of actors and their values in today's diplomatic practice. This collaborative approach reflects, as shown in Chapter 2, the prevalent understanding regarding the actor of contemporary cultural diplomacy, and resonates with the call, among some Chinese scholars, for working with local partners to improve cultural diplomacy outreach.

Despite advantages seen from collaboration with local partners, such as the AFC, this level of collaboration with an Australian arts and cultural organisation remains rare in the CCCS's delivery of cultural programs through this working mode. This may be due to different factors, including the local organisation's interest in engaging with China, its programming needs and schedule, or budgetary constraints. However, what is also a critical factor in achieving and maintaining such collaborative relationships is a consistent commitment to connecting with the public in local society, including local partners, and the understanding of their needs and preferences, as can be seen in the case of the CCCS.

While the CCCS does not have much control in the curation and selection of cultural programs within such a working mode, there are cases in which it has conducted events with a certain degree of independence. On such occasions, the CCCS not only seeks to deliver cultural activities in collaboration with local partners in Australia, but also demonstrates more curatorial flexibility and freedom. It is in this sense that such programs warrant further examination. Therefore, Chapters 7 and 8 will focus on two relevant cultural events, namely, the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* and *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* exhibitions, in the context of the CCC project's working mode of collaboration with local partners, as they highlight the above programming characteristics.

CHAPTER 7 THE CHINA CULTURAL CENTRE PROJECT'S WORKING MODE 3: COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL PARTNERS—THE EXHIBITION OF *JEWISH REFUGEES AND SHANGHAI*

Following the previous two chapters, Chapters 7 and 8 continue to examine the China Cultural Centre project's working modes and programming. In particular, they will further delve into its collaboration with local partners through cultural activities delivered at the China Cultural Centre in Sydney. While this approach and some of its related programs have been discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, cases presented in this and the following chapters show distinct traits, as they are more flexible, locally driven, and connected with the target audience. Such a programming approach not only involves actors from local society, but also demonstrates considerations of audience reception and attempts to facilitate dialogue and mutual understanding. These characteristics reflect an idealistic understanding of cultural diplomacy, as discussed in Chapter 2. Therefore, cultural programs like these warrant further attention and analysis.

Specifically, this chapter will focus on the case of the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition, which was presented at the CCCS from 21 April to 20 May 2015. It begins by briefly discussing the CCC project's collaboration with local partners as a working mode. This discussion builds on and extends what has been mentioned in Chapters 5 and 6 by further pointing out programming characteristics associated with this working mode. It then provides a historical background of the exhibition, followed by a review of the planning and delivery of this event in Australia. Based on the analysis, this chapter reflects on the organisation of the exhibition in the context of cultural diplomacy. Discussions in this chapter are mainly based on information published by the Chinese government, CCCS, Chinese and Australian media, memoirs of Jewish refugees in Shanghai, as well as data collected through interviews in Australia.

The *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition showed the CCCS's active attempt in engaging with an Australian audience for improving the impact of cultural diplomacy. The CCCS worked with a range of collaborators in China and, particularly, in Australia. These partners helped enhance the authenticity and richness of this exhibition on the one hand, and increased the reach and influence of this event in Australia on the other. The CCCS's intentional choice of such an exhibition theme resonated well with local society, manifested not only in ready cooperation from local partners but also a positive response from participants and media in Australia. This achievement was first based on the recognition of diverse actors and their roles in contemporary cultural diplomacy. Secondly, it was also a result of an understanding of and a willingness to connect with the local audience, ultimately underpinned by a dialogic approach to fostering mutual understanding.

7.1 An overview of the collaboration with partners in host countries

In addition to conducting cultural activities through a global coordination approach and partnership with Chinese provincial-level governments, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, CCCs also carry out events by collaborating with local partners in host countries. For example, the CCC in Paris partnered with Pathé, a major film production and distribution company, to host the annual Chinese Film Festival in France. The CCC in Malta co-organised the yearly Children's Arts Exhibition with the Maltese Ministry for Education. The CCC in Berlin worked with the Berlin Go Association to deliver the annually held China Cup, an international go tournament associated with the European Go Grand Slam Tournament.[88] Similarly, the CCCS also engaged with local partners, including the AFC and Australian scholars, to deliver its activities in Australia, as mentioned in the previous two chapters.

From the Chinese government's perspective, this working mode contributes to the effectiveness and influence of CCCs' activities abroad. As already noted in Chapter 6, the perceived value of collaborating with partners in host nations has been highlighted by Chinese officials from the MCT.[89] Their views are further echoed by researchers, such as Zhang and Guo (2017), who hold that CCCs' collaboration with organisations from civil society provides opportunities for them to understand the local market and gain access to local resources. From a practical point of view, as shown in Chapters 5 and 6, the CCCS's work with local collaborators in Australia has indeed helped it acquire expertise and resources needed to conduct and promote cultural diplomacy programs, especially compared with other working modes, namely, the global coordination and partnership with Chinese provincial-level governments.

Seen through the lens of cultural diplomacy, collaborating with partners in host countries reflects the recognition of the value of non-state actors, such as civil organisations and individuals, in improving the impact of cultural diplomacy. This emphasis is broadly in line with contemporary discussions about cultural diplomacy and connects with the view held by some Chinese scholars, as noted in Chapters 2 and 3.

However, it is important to point out that the realisation of such collaboration between CCCs and local partners is not only hinged on the former's initiative, but also the latter's willingness to cooperate. While supportive of this working mode, Zhao Li, inaugural Director of the CCCS, has said that in order to have good partners in the host country, one has to have good programs to offer (*People's Daily Online* 2017). Broadly speaking, as Zhao further notes, what is considered as a

[88] Go, known in Chinese as "围棋" (*weiqi*), is an abstract strategy board game, in which the two players aim to surround more territory than each other.
[89] See discussions in section 6.7.1 Presenting programs through the China Cultural Centre in Sydney: examples and challenges.

good program cannot be unilaterally understood from a Chinese perspective, as what Chinese people regard as a fine project is not necessarily liked by overseas audiences due to different cultural backgrounds and habits (*People's Daily Online* 2017). Therefore, she argues that a key element for achieving recognition and enhancing cultural understanding in local society is the consideration of the foreign public's reception, understanding, and preferences when curating cultural programs (*People's Daily Online* 2017).

In a similar vein, an Australian musician, who, as a local collaborator of the CCCS, argued from a receiving audience's standpoint that

> a successful Chinese cultural program should include all possible facets and themes that, not only China possesses, are accessible and have reason to expose, but subjects and ingredients which the Australian public could enjoy and be interested in (Interviewee 6).

This interviewee further exemplified and compared possible preferences of Australian audiences,

> some cultural themes are more acceptable and enjoyable than others as I mentioned before. For example, to the western ear, Cantonese opera is obviously not one of the most entertaining forms of Chinese culture but Suzhou opera (ping tan) seems much more appealing. Revolutionary poetry readings from the 1950s in China may not be as fascinating or beautiful as Shanghai cigarette poster girls of the 1930s (Interviewee 6).

Despite the fact that this perception only represents a single view of the interviewee, it, nonetheless, highlights the importance of finding the connection with the receiving audience for conducting cultural diplomacy effectively. This point connects back to Zhao's argument about seeking collaboration with local partners, which constitute the public in the host country, through locally appealing and appreciated cultural programs.

In the context of cultural diplomacy, effectively engaging with local collaborators and, in a broader sense, with the general public in the host nation, would subsequently require an approach that is somewhat driven by mutuality and openness to foster understanding. From a theoretical point of view, this kind of cultural practice is, as discussed in Chapter 2, concerned with an idealistic view of cultural diplomacy, contrasting with a functional mentality which typically renders cultural diplomacy a one-way projection.

The Chinese government is aware of, at least in theory, the need for CCCs to engage with local partners and audiences in programming terms. This is manifested in that the MCT not only encourages CCCs to seek local collaboration, but also calls them to curate cultural programs based on the "national conditions" (国情 *guoqing*) of host countries and on the interests of the local pubic, with the aim for CCCs and their cultural activities to integrate into the cultural life of local society (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2016a).

Nonetheless, critical questions remain. For instance, what are the general public's interests and preferences in host nations where CCCs are based? How to incorporate them and connect with the local audience through cultural events? To be sure, there are no easy answers to such questions, as one Australian academic admitted, "to find a hook for that engagement is much more difficult" (Interviewee 5). The *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition, however, serves as an appropriate case, which showed how the CCCS built up such engagement through a historical narrative that connected with the Jewish communities in Australia. The following section will analyse this cultural event in detail. But before that, historical background of this exhibition will first be provided for the purpose of facilitating further discussions.

7.2 A review of the historical context: Jewish refugees and the city of Shanghai

7.2.1 Jewish communities in Shanghai

The Jewish community has existed in Shanghai since the 19th century. One of the early Jewish communities was formed by Baghdadi (or Iraqi) Jews, who had arrived in the Chinese port primarily from India as merchants following the First Opium War (1839–1842) and established lucrative trading businesses (Eber 2018). Later on, a much larger Jewish community in Shanghai was constituted by Russian Jews who fled the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 (Griffiths 2013).[90] Many of these Russian Jews also became affluent merchants, though their wealth was not comparable to that of the Baghdadis (Eber 2018).

The Baghdadi and Russian Jews were fairly well-off, in contrast with Jews who escaped from central Europe to Shanghai in the wake of Nazi persecution from 1938 to 1941, leaving behind their assets and possessions. Specifically, these refugees were German and Austrian Jews, many of whom landed in Shanghai by ship in 1939, as well as Polish Jews, who were sent from Japan to Shanghai in 1941 (Eber 2018). They came to Shanghai as a last resort and the vast majority did not intend to settle permanently (Gao 2013).

7.2.2 Shanghai: a refuge for European Jews during the Holocaust

Historically speaking, two main factors made Shanghai a city where European Jews fled during the Holocaust. First, as anti-Semitism reached its peak in Germany and Austria following the Kristallnacht in November 1938,[91] Jews in these two countries soon realised that they could no

[90] Among these Russian Jews, some had arrived as early as the Russian–Japanese War (1904–1905), as a result of being unwillingly drafted into the Russian army (Eber 2018).
[91] Kristallnacht, oftentimes referred to as "The Night of Broken Glass", was a series of anti-Jewish pogroms launched by the Nazi leaders on 9 and 10 November 1938 in Germany and other German occupied areas, such as the annexed Austria. The Kristallnacht owed its name to the shattered glass that lined the streets after the vandalism and destruction of Jewish-owned businesses, synagogues, and homes (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum 2019).

longer stay in their hometown and that escaping from Europe immediately was their only chance for survival. Nonetheless, obtaining visas to other countries was extremely difficult. A large number of refugees attempted to flee to the US but had to face a long waiting time due to the country's immigration quota. Countries elsewhere were also unwilling to admit more Jewish refugees and, instead, enforced strict immigration policies (Deeks 2007). In July 1938, delegates from 32 countries (including the US, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand) met in Evian, France to discuss the Jewish refugees crisis. While most of the countries expressed sympathy for Jews who were seeking to escape from Nazi persecution, nearly all of them refused to accept more Jewish refugees, fearing this would cause extra economic hardship domestically (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum n.d.).[92]

Related to this international background was Shanghai's unique situation, making it one of the few destinations to which European Jewish refugees could flee. Following the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in July 1937, the Japanese defeated the Nationalist army and drove the Nationalist Government out of the city by November of the same year.[93] As the Nationalist Government's officials and military forces retreated from Shanghai, passport control was ceased at the port of entry (Eber 2018). This had subsequently led Shanghai to become a viable option for the European Jews' hasty emigration, as it required neither an entry visa nor a financial guarantee to enter between 1937 and 1939 (Deeks 2007).[94] While there are no conclusive numbers, it is commonly estimated that 18,000 to 20,000 Jewish refugees escaped from Nazi-occupied Europe to Shanghai from the late 1930s to early 1940s. In sum, the unwillingness of other countries to take in more refugees and the distinct circumstance of Shanghai made the Chinese city an option for many European Jews' escape, albeit, as suggested in Gao Bei's research, Shanghai was not an ideal choice of these Jews who largely desired other European countries or the US as their destinations (Gao 2013).

7.2.3 Fleeing to Shanghai

Despite Shanghai's open access, it was by no means easy for European Jews to get there. This was not only because, from an emotional perspective, Jewish refugees had to rush out from places where they and their family had lived for generations and head for an unknown city halfway around the world, but also because of logistical and technical reasons for such emigration. For example,

[92] The only country that agreed to receive more Jewish refugees in the conference was the Dominican Republic.
[93] At the time, Japanese occupation in Shanghai did not include the International Settlement and the French Concession, which were controlled by foreign powers and exempt from Chinese laws or influence.
[94] It should be noted that Japan did not tighten immigration to sectors of Shanghai they controlled immediately after their occupation of the city and allowed relatively free entry to Shanghai until August 1939 (Hochstadt 2019; Paldiel 2007). Meanwhile, no other foreign powers present in Shanghai claimed authority to take charge of passport control (Gao 2013). These factors were also important as to why Shanghai remained an open port to Jewish refugees at the time.

one difficulty for Jewish emigrants was restrictions on transferring valuables and funds abroad and exit taxes imposed by Nazi Germany on those who were seeking to flee (Eber 2018). As Deeks (2007) notes, Jewish refugees were only allowed to leave Germany with 10 German Marks (4 USD) in cash and, consequently, many of them had little financial resources and were impoverished upon their arrival in Shanghai.

In Austria, which was annexed by Nazi Germany in March 1938, Jews could only escape from the country provided they had an entry visa from a foreign nation (Meacham 2017). Similarly, for Austrian Jews who had been arrested and sent to concentration camps, their release was dependent on their families showing proof of emigration (Eber 2018). Getting such paperwork was challenging, if not impossible, due to refusal from other countries to accept more Jewish immigrants. While Shanghai remained open to Jewish refugees, the situation in Austria meant that to escape from the country, getting a valid visa to the Chinese city was a prerequisite, although such documentation was not required for entering Shanghai at the time (Tenembaum n.d.).

To facilitate Austrian Jews' escape, He Fengshan, Consul-General of the Republic of China in Vienna (1938–1940), issued large numbers of exit visas for Jewish emigrants who were scrambling to leave the country, despite the fact that this was against the order of his superior, Chen Jie, then Ambassador of the Republic of China to Berlin.[95] According to Tenembaum (n.d.), He issued 1,200 visas during the first three months as consul-general in 1938. It was also reported that He had approved thousands of entrance visas to Shanghai by 1940 when he was ordered to return to his home country (Meacham 2017), though there is no direct evidence concerning the exact number of visas he granted to Jews fleeing Austria. When speaking of his intent, He explained in his oral memoir that

> the visas were to Shanghai "in name" only. In reality, they were a means to help Jews to leave Austria and eventually find a way to the US, Britain or other preferred destinations (cited in Ho 2019, p. 122).

As a result, while some of these Shanghai visa recipients ended up in Shanghai, a large proportion of them used these visas to escape to the Philippines, Cuba, Palestine, England, and the US, as recounted by Manli Ho (2019), daughter of He Fengshan.

[95] At the time, Chen Jie was worried that supporting the Jews would jeopardise diplomatic relations with Germany (Paldiel 2007). Because of He's behaviour, he was later reprimanded and received in his personal file a demerit, which was presumably linked to his disobedience to his immediate superior, Chen Jie, regarding the granting of visas to Austrian Jews (Paldiel 2007). He's assistance in Austrian Jews' flee from the country eventually led to his removal from the post as the Consul-General in Vienna in May 1940 (Paldiel 2007).

7.2.4 Life of Jewish refugees in Shanghai

Upon their arrival, while financial support was offered locally by the well-to-do Baghdadi and Russian Jews, and internationally by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, such assistance was insufficient to shelter and feed large numbers of penniless Jewish refugees pouring into Shanghai. Nonetheless, some Jews managed to set up their own businesses in trying circumstances to make a living, and even established a cultural scene, including performing and visual arts activities, for generating a small income on the one hand and helping their spiritual survival in this painful period on the other (Eber 2018).

Whilst in Shanghai, Jewish refugees largely settled in Hongkou district, which had been severely damaged in the battles between China and Japan in Shanghai in 1937 and, consequently, offered relatively affordable prices for housing (Deeks 2007). Hongkou began to see more Jewish refugees in February 1943, when all stateless Jews (predominately from Germany and Austria) were forced into the district, which was established by the Japanese as a Designated Area and became an overcrowded ghetto (Eber 2018).

Despite a deteriorating situation, Jewish refugees lived in peace with Chinese inhabitants in the Hongkou area. In fact, Jews were accepted with friendliness by their Chinese neighbours, whose country was undergoing a full-scale war against Japan's invasion and who themselves were enduring Japanese oppression (Xu 2019). As Evelyn Pike Rubin (2019, p. 142), a German Jew who fled with her family to Shanghai in 1939, recalled, "[t]he Chinese population was most welcoming and very neighborly. They helped us whenever possible". Following accounts like this, Professor Pan Guang of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences argues that European Jewish refugees and local Chinese in Shanghai forged a very close relationship during World War II, representative of "an unforgettable chapter in the history of the Sino–Jewish relationship" (Pan 2019, p. 68). In contrast, other scholars suggest that the relationship between these two groups was limited in its scope and depth. For example, Marcia Ristaino (2003, p. 282) argues that contact between Jewish refugees and Chinese inhabitants was limited and primarily based on encounters on the street, as hired help, or in the marketplace, whereas social, educational, and cultural lives of the two groups were "very much apart". Gao (2013) holds that while some refugees developed close relationships with their hosts in situations where they were tenants, business partners, or co-workers to the Chinese, neither did most European Jews build a deep relationship with Chinese inhabitants nor integrate into local society. As Charles Klotzer, a former Jewish refugee in Shanghai, said,

> while we were surrounded by Chinese and interacted with them on a daily basis, I developed no close relationships with any Chinese. Their lives were much more circumscribed than that of the refugees (cited in Gao 2013, p. 132).

These different views regarding the scope and degree of interaction between Jewish refugees and local Chinese may all have their evidence, and the contrasting arguments are perhaps due to various experiences and situations of European Jews in Shanghai. It is precisely because of this that while agreeing that there was by and large a peaceful and friendly coexistence between the two communities and a lack of anti-Semitism among Chinese people, as will be discussed later in this section, the researcher does not intend to generalise the extent and depth of relationships between the two groups, so as to avoid what historian Steve Hochstadt (2019, p. 156) cautions "an exaggeration of the closeness of Jewish refugees and Chinese natives in Shanghai".

Overall, as Deeks (2007) points out, the Chinese perceived the Jews in a positive light and did not express anti-Semitism, which prevailed and led to anti-Jewish violence in Europe at the time. One of the reasons that contributed to this somewhat peaceful and amiable coexistence was related to the Chinese people's identification with Jews' suffering and insecurity caused by Nazi persecution, as the former, too, were under tremendous attack by the Japanese (Deeks 2007). In particular, Chinese residents' empathy towards the persecuted Jews was evoked following the Nanjing Massacre,[96] which, as Meyer (2005) suggests, prompted Chinese people's association between the brutality they suffered from the Japanese and the atrocities committed by the Nazis to European Jews. Taken together, although life was difficult in Shanghai at times, Jewish refugees were largely free from the kind of discrimination and abuse they would commonly experience in Europe, and managed to survive and live their lives side by side with the local Chinese during wartime.

7.2.5 Jewish refugees' departure from Shanghai

The suffering and hardship of Jewish refugees in the densely populated Hongkou district was finally over after World War II ended in China, marked by Japan's surrender on 14 August 1945. Soon after that, the Designated Area was opened on 23 August and its inhabitants regained freedom of movement. European Jewish refugees, who took temporary refuge in Shanghai from the Holocaust, began to leave for their preferred destinations, seeking to reunite with family members and start a new life. Their departure was perhaps also precipitated by external factors, such as the Nationalist Government's intention to repatriate German and Austrian refugees and the impending conflict between the Communist and Nationalist armies in Shanghai during the Chinese Civil War (Eber 2018).[97] Some of these European Jews, estimated to be around 2,500, relocated to Australia (Gao 2013; Rutland 1987), which, according to the World Jewish Congress (2017), admitted tens of thousands of Holocaust survivors after World War II and had the highest percentage of Holocaust

[96] After occupying Nanjing, the capital city of the Republic of China, the Japanese committed mass murder of Chinese civilians from December 1937 to January 1938. According to a document published by the UNESCO, at least 300,000 Chinese were killed (see: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/china_nanjing_en.pdf).
[97] The Chinese Civil War started in 1927 between the Chinese Communist and Nationalist forces and was resumed following the end of Sino–Japanese War in 1945. It concluded in 1949 when the Chinese Communist army took control of Mainland China.

survivors of any diasporic Jewish community in the world. Mainly settled in Sydney and Melbourne,[98] these Jewish immigrants from Shanghai, often referred to as "Shanghailanders", form part of a wider Jewish community in Australia, together with their families and descendants.

To recapitulate, the historical context of Jewish refugees in Shanghai has been discussed in some detail in this section. By reviewing this part of history, it has particularly explained why Shanghai became a refuge for European Jews during the Holocaust, the life of Jewish refugees in Shanghai, and their departure following World War II. This background is important and helpful to the examination of the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition.

7.3 The aim and broader context of the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition

From 21 April to 20 May 2015, the CCCS presented an exhibition entitled *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai*, which showed the history of European Jews who escaped from the Holocaust to Shanghai between the 1930s and 1940s. The exhibition featured stories of 22 former "Shanghailanders" with around 200 photos, and displayed replicas of paperwork and artefacts previously owned by Jewish refugees in Shanghai. The opening ceremony of this exhibition, held on 20 April 2015 at the CCCS, was attended by around 100 people, including Li Huaxin, then Consul-General of China in Sydney, Yan Jianping, Director of Hongkou District People's Congress, Norman Seligman, then CEO of the Sydney Jewish Museum (SJM), Chen Jian, Director of the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum (SJRM), and former Shanghai Jewish refugees with their families.[99] The opening event also included a ceremony in which Martine Brieger, descendant of Shanghai Jewish refugees, donated 19 pieces of historical material including postcards and paintings from her grandfather to the SJRM.[100] The aim of this event, as the CCCS described, was to promote "love and understanding", provide "an insight into a little-known corner of history", and serve as "a stark warning against the twin dangers of extremism and intolerance" that were present during World War II (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2015c).

Looking at the broader context, the timing of this exhibition coincided with the 70th anniversary of what the Chinese government calls the victory of World Anti-Fascist War and China's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, both of which witnessed atrocities committed by the

[98] The majority of Australian Jewry is located in Sydney and Melbourne, where about 85 per cent of Australian Jews live (World Jewish Congress 2017).
[99] The opening ceremony was well-attended, as shown in photos taken at the event. See pictures posted by the CCCS via https://cccsydney.org/2015/04/23/jewish-refugees-and-shanghai-australia-tour-kicked-off-at-china-cultural-centre-in-sydney/, and by the SJRM via: http://www.shhkjrm.com/node2/n4/n5/n12/u1ai250.html.
[100] The donation ceremony was photographed by the SJRM and can be seen via the following link: http://www.shhkjrm.com/node2/n4/n5/n12/u1ai250.html.

Nazis and Imperial Japan. It is in this sense that Zhao Li, then Director of the CCCS, explained in an interview that the purpose of the exhibition was also "to remind people to remember the history and to treasure the peace we possess today".[101] She went further noting in another interview that "we want to tell this story widely through this event and let more local audiences know of this part of history. We also want to show the kindness of Chinese people as a nation".[102]

Zhao's emphasis on "peace" and "kindness" in such a context aligns with the Chinese government's propagation of China as a contributor to the anti-Fascist war, a peaceful nation, and a defender of world peace. As Chinese President Xi Jinping addressed, in the same year of the exhibition, at the Commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of the Victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War,

> during the war, with huge national sacrifice, the Chinese people held ground in the main theater in the East of the World Anti-Fascist War, thus making major contribution to its victory….
>
> War is like a mirror. Looking at it helps us better appreciate the value of peace. Today, peace and development have become the prevailing trend, but the world is far from tranquil. War is the sword of Damocles that still hangs over mankind. We must learn the lessons of history and dedicate ourselves to peace….
>
> In the interest of peace, China will remain committed to peaceful development. We Chinese love peace. No matter how much stronger it may become, China will never seek hegemony or expansion. It will never inflict its past suffering on any other nation. The Chinese people are resolved to pursue friendly relations with all other countries, uphold the outcomes of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War, and make greater contribution to mankind (Xi 2015a).

One Australian academic, who attended the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition at the CCCS, drew a connection between the exhibition and the narrative of China's celebration of the anti-Fascist war, arguing that the story behind the exhibition "fitted into that narrative", which showed "the role that China played in defeating fascism at that time" (Interviewee 5). The same respondent further pointed out the perceived interrelated messages promoted in this exhibition, noting that

> China was an ally, had been part of the struggle, had lost many people in the fight against fascism, and should be considered by the Jewish community, which was almost completely destroyed by fascism during the second world war, as a major friend (Interviewee 5).

In this light, this interviewee held that the exhibition was associated with China's soft power strategy, though he was not in favour of characterising the event as "political" (Interviewee 5). This point is echoed by Schultz (2022, p. 176), who has also linked the promotion of the history of Jewish

[101] This interview can be accessed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNzdzklVI-M.
[102] This interview can be accessed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhmDqhzggZQ.

refugees in China to the party-state's missive of "telling China's story well", increasing China's soft power, and strengthening China's international discourse power, thereby assuaging the perceived "China threat" narrative as the country becomes more powerful in the world.

Despite the broader context of this exhibition having a clear strategic bearing, this event was, nonetheless, seen by the aforementioned interviewee as "quite unique" due to its engagement with an Australian audience through a particular life experience of and links to China, both of which were not commonly identified in Australia (Interviewee 5). Following this respondent, the researcher argues that while the hosting of this event was connected with China's intent to enhance its cultural soft power by shaping a benign and positive international image,[103] the planning and delivery of the exhibition was not simply a one-way projection but showed the CCCS's initiative to engage with local audiences in Australia, not least local Jewish communities. This is both manifested in the CCCS's inclusion of multiple collaborators in Australia and its conscious choice of the exhibition theme. To further explain this, the following section analyses the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition through the lens of its partners and local reaction to such an event, based on memoirs of former Shanghai Jewish refugees, interviews, and media reports in Australia.

7.4 Collaborators involved in the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition

As the organiser of the event, the CCCS formed a multi-dimensional collaboration in delivering the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition. Collaborators involved in this event included both Chinese and Australian institutions as well as individuals in Australia.

7.4.1 Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum

One collaborator was the SJRM, which supplied the exhibition and all associated exhibits. Established in 2007, the SJRM presents the history of European Jews who sought refuge in Shanghai between the 1930s and 1940s and is located in Hongkou District, where Jewish refugees lived during their exile in Shanghai (Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum n.d.). It sits on the original site of the Ohel Moshe Synagogue, where Jewish emigrants gathered for social activities during their refuge (Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum n.d.), including teaching and religious practices (People's Government of Shanghai Hongkou District 2007). The precinct of the SJRM, as the museum states on its website, is "the only existing historical site in China that reflects the life of Jewish refugees in China during World War II" (Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum n.d.).

[103] There are certain aspects of the exhibition content that reflect China's attempt to establish a favourable narrative and perception of the country. They will be pointed out and examined later in this chapter.

Today, the SJRM is not only a tourist attraction for Chinese domestic audiences, but also a host for foreign diplomats' visits, academic exchange, networking events between Chinese and Jewish people who reside in Shanghai, as reflected in its past activities. In addition, as Chen Jian, Director of SJRM introduces, "the museum attracts tens of thousands of global visitors and 'root seekers' every year" (Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum 2019).[104] It can be said that, as a collaborator of the CCCS's *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition, the SJRM is of both historical and contemporary importance due to its nature and location which connect to a special part of living experience shared among Jewish refugees and their families, as well as its ongoing relationships and interactions with Jewish communities worldwide, including those in Australia.

7.4.2 Sydney Jewish Museum

A second partner involved in this exhibition was the SJM, which was founded in 1992 by Holocaust survivors who settled in Sydney after the war (Sydney Jewish Museum n.d.). The SJM has a specific focus on preserving the history of Jewish people who suffered from the Holocaust by "shar[ing] their memories, commemorat[ing] the six million Jewish people who were murdered" in Nazi persecutions (Sydney Jewish Museum n.d.). It also promotes this part of history to future generations through the voice of Holocaust survivors, who come to the museum to share their stories with both people from Jewish communities and the wider public, thereby facilitating conversations and inspiring changes in modern Australian society (Sydney Jewish Museum n.d.). According to Norman Seligman, former CEO of the SJM, the museum had around 60,000 visitors in 2019, half of whom were students who primarily came from a non-Jewish background. As Seligman further noted, the SJM also had 40 Holocaust survivors, who volunteered at the museum and shared their testimonies with visitors.[105]

The SJM, although not involved in the curation of the program content, promoted the exhibition through a dedicated page on their website.[106] Considering its active engagement with Holocaust survivors and the general public in Sydney, it is reasonable to assume that such publicity would at least increase the awareness of this exhibition among local Jewish communities and those who were interested in knowing more about this historical event.

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[104] "Root seekers", known in Chinese as "寻根者" (*xungen zhe*), means the person who attempts to trace his/her cultural and ethnic origins. Here, it refers to Jewish refugees who return to Shanghai after their post-war departure to re-visit previous living sites and/or to find neighbours they used to know. In this context, "root seekers" can also refer to descendants of European Jews who once took refuge in Shanghai.
[105] Seligman's comments were made in an interview, which can be viewed via the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcU-104lujo.
[106] Event page: https://sydneyjewishmuseum.com.au/shop/events/jewish-refugees-and-shanghai/.

7.4.3 Confucius Institute at the University of Sydney

This event was also supported by the CI at the University of Sydney. Although it is unclear what specific role the CI played in this collaboration, it appeared that it had, similar to the SJM, contributed to the promotion of this event to its clientele in Sydney. This was manifested in its Facebook posts, which, in addition to introducing the exhibition, specifically tagged 19 students of the University of Sydney who visited the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum on a study tour organised by this CI in the previous year. One of these students, whose great-grandfather was a former "Shanghailander" and business owner in Shanghai, attended the opening of *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* at the CCCS with his father.[107] Apart from this, the CI also promoted this event through a webpage created by the University of Sydney.[108] The involvement of the CI at least helped promote this exhibition to students connected with the institute through its social media platform. It might also increase the awareness of this exhibition among a wider group of people at the University of Sydney through the event webpage, albeit there is a lack of direct evidence to show the outcome.

7.4.4 Six "Shanghailanders"

As part of the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition, six "Shanghailanders", identified and invited by the CCCS, were present at the opening ceremony of this event. These individuals, as mentioned earlier, were European Jews who took refuge in Shanghai and later relocated to Australia. One such guest was Ron Klinger, who fled from Vienna to Shanghai in 1938 with his family and later settled in Sydney. Klinger returned to Shanghai in 1987 to visit Hongkou district where he grew up and in 2007 to visit the old site of The White Horse Inn, a Viennese-style café established by his grandparents in the Chinese city. The original café, demolished in 2009, was re-built as an extended part of the SJRM in 2015 when Klinger was invited to its re-opening in Shanghai with his family members from Australia and the US.

Another similar figure present was Fred Antman, who escaped with his family from Berlin to Shanghai and settled in Melbourne after the war. Antman re-visited Shanghai with his wife Eva in 2011 and presented his memoir to the SJRM, where an adapted musical production based on Antman's stories was premiered in 2012 (Zhang, K 2012). It is worth noting that Antman's experience as a Jewish refugee in Shanghai was featured on a display board titled "Happiness in Hard Times" as part of the exhibition held at the CCCS, describing Antman's family stories and encounter with Eva, who also fled from Berlin to Shanghai during the Holocaust. The presence of

[107] These posts were published by the account "The University of Sydney Confucius Institute (悉尼大学孔子学院)" on Facebook on 20 and 23 April 2015.
[108] The original link to the webpage is as follows: https://www.sydney.edu.au/confucius-institute/news-and-events.html?newsstoryid=14776. This webpage is currently unavailable, possibly removed as the event was held over eight years ago at the time of writing.

these “Shanghailanders” made the exhibition more authentic and powerful as they recounted this particular history by sharing their personal recollections. Furthermore, the identification and inclusion of such Australian “Shanghailanders” also helped enhance the connection of this event with an Australian audience.

7.4.5 Local academic

Alongside the exhibition, the CCCS worked with Professor Andrew Jakubowicz of the UTS to deliver a talk entitled *The Menorah of Fang Bang Lu*, which explained the historical background, fleeing experiences, and survival of Jewish refugees in Shanghai based on family stories of seven “Shanghailanders”.[109] Professor Jakubowicz’s research involves Jewish refugees in Shanghai during World War II and he served as historical advisor for exhibitions about Jewish communities in Shanghai, previously held at the SJM and the National Maritime Museum between 2001 and 2002. His expertise and personal experience were largely pertinent to the topic of the CCCS’s exhibition. His talk, which lasted 90 minutes, enriched the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition and created more opportunities for the CCCS to reach and interact with local audiences. According to the CCCS’s media report, this talk attracted around 100 participants, mainly former “Shanghailanders” as well as family members and descendants of Shanghai Jewish refugees (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2015f). The high turnout of this talk can also be seen from a photo taken during this activity.[110] While at the CCCS for an accompanying talk, these attendees were also exposed to the main exhibition. This outcome demonstrated a success for the CCCS to reach more audiences by tapping into the knowledge and influence of a local partner.

It is, however, interesting to note that the initiation of this collaboration did not start from the CCCS. As one interviewee, who was involved in the curation and delivery of this talk, recalled, the CCCS was first approached, through the SJM, by Professor Jakubowicz, who expressed his interest to conduct the lecture on a voluntary basis (Interviewee 5). Despite this, the same respondent perceived that the CCCS’s willingness to take this offer reflected its intention “to present itself more widely than it might otherwise have done” (Interviewee 5). This perception is broadly consistent with the CCCS’s active engagement with other local partners to enhance the reach and influence of this exhibition in Australia, as discussed so far in this section. To further extend this point, the researcher argues that Professor Jakubowicz’s initiative showed that the CCCS’s selection of such an exhibition theme resonated well with its audience in Australia, many of whom were eagerly

[109] Professor Andrew Jakubowicz is a Polish Jew. Judging from an image posted on top of the CCCS’s webpage of his talk, it is likely that he has family members who took refuge in Shanghai in the 1940s. This image can be seen via the following link: https://cccsydney.org/2015/04/28/talk-the-menorah-of-fang-bang-lu-refugee-jewish-families-in-shanghai-by-prof-andrew-jakubowicz/.
[110] See event photo in the middle of the webpage via the following link: https://cccsydney.org/2015/04/29/talk-the-menorah-of-fang-bang-lu-held-in-china-cultural-centre-in-sydney/.

present at and even involved in this event. This argument will be elaborated with more analysis in a later section, which will focus on local reaction to the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition.

7.4.6 Interstate presence

In addition to holding this event in Sydney, the exhibition was also jointly presented by the Australia–China Friendship Society (ACT Branch) at the Canberra Multicultural Centre and hosted at the Jewish Holocaust Centre (JHC) in Melbourne respectively in the same year.[111] According to a report from *Chinanews*, the CCCS, together with the SJRM, planned the tour of the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition in Australia (Tao 2017). There is not much detail as to how such interstate collaboration was initiated and the degree to which the CCCS was involved in delivering this event in Canberra and Melbourne. Nonetheless, it is safe to say that the CCCS supported and facilitated the exhibition to be shown at multiple locations in Australia. This gave the exhibition a national profile, further increasing its exposure and influence among Australian audiences. For example, in Canberra, this exhibition reached Peter Witting, who was 87 years old and the only Jewish survivor from Shanghai in Canberra at the time of event. It was also reported that the launch of the exhibition at the JHC was attended by more than 250 people onsite, including viewers not only from local Jewish and Chinese communities but also the wider public (Zylberszpic 2016).

The network of CCCS's local collaborators helped increase this event's awareness and reach among Australian audiences, as shown in a high turnout of the exhibition and its concurrent activities. It should, however, be noted that the number of attendees is not sufficient to demonstrate this event's success, which requires further qualitative evidence showing the reception of local audiences. Therefore, this chapter will discuss perceptions from participants and media response regarding this event in later sections.

7.5 The content of the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition

The "Jewish Refugees and Shanghai" exhibition consisted of six parts, namely, "Fleeing to Shanghai", "Refugee Life in Shanghai", "Hongkew Ghetto",[112] "Affectionate Neighborhood", "Leaving Shanghai", and "Unforgettable History". Featuring stories of Jewish refugees in Shanghai and historical documents and artefacts, the exhibition presented the history of Jewish diaspora in the Chinese city during World War II, showing their escape to, exile life in, and post-war departure from Shanghai. Several stories of former Australian "Shanghailanders", including Fred Antman and Ron Klinger, were also promoted in this event, adding more relevance to an Australian context.

[111] The JHC is now known as Melbourne Holocaust Museum, which is Australia's largest institution solely dedicated to Holocaust education, research, and remembrance (Melbourne Holocaust Museum n.d.).
[112] "Hongkew" is a formerly-used romanisation of "Hongkou".

The exhibition generally followed the historical background of the experience of Shanghai Jewish refugees during the Holocaust, as reviewed earlier in this chapter. Despite this, it, nonetheless, emphasised a somewhat overrated role played by Shanghai and Chinese residents in saving European Jews. This was first manifested in the portrayal of Shanghai, as the introduction to the exhibition said,

> [i]n the 1930s and the 1940s, Jews in Europe were suffering from the persecution of the Nazis. While many countries virtually closed their doors to them, the Chinese city of Shanghai sheltered them…. Between 1933 and 1941 it is estimated that at least 18,000 Jews came to Shanghai. To some extent, "Shanghai" became synonymous with "Rescue" and "Haven" in the history of Holocaust.[113]

The use of words such as "Rescue" and "Haven" are emotive and powerful, positioning Shanghai as an active protector to Jews who were persecuted by the Nazis. The exhibition went on introducing how Jewish refugees adapted their life, established businesses, created publications, and organised arts and cultural activities in Shanghai. This further indicated that as a result of Shanghai's protection, Jewish refugees flourished in the city.

However, such a protective role was to some degree embellished. As discussed before, although Shanghai became a place where European Jews escaped from the Holocaust, the city was largely occupied by Japan at the time and did not consciously provide such shelter. Furthermore, the reason why Shanghai remained an open port to Jewish refugees was also heavily dependent on the fact that no foreign powers in Shanghai, including Japan, implemented passport control. Hochstadt (2019) acknowledges the role Japan played in protecting Jewish refugees, despite the country being allied with Nazi Germany. Such a narrative was not and, perhaps, could not be incorporated in this exhibition as it would clash with stories related to the invasion and atrocities committed by the Japanese in China, especially in the eyes of the Chinese government. However, the promotion of Shanghai as a proactive protector to Jews certainly fitted into the broader context of this exhibition, as explained earlier.

The exhibition also highlighted the relationship between Jewish refugees and native Chinese, particularly in the section "Affectionate Neighborhood". As it described,

> After Japanese authorities created the Ghetto in Hongkou and ordered all refugees to move there, local Chinese and Jewish refugees became even more emotionally and culturally connected. In less than one square mile, the Ghetto was home to some ten thousand Chinese residents living side by side with thousands of Jewish refugees. It is admirable that the original Chinese community was able to absorb smoothly the arrival of so many Jews forced to relocate in this tiny area.

[113] The digital version of this exhibition can be seen via the following link: https://indd.adobe.com/view/87e85143-5fdf-40bf-9597-55cd60d4ee14.

The text continued,

> When Jews were first forced into the Ghetto, local people hosted them. Before the establishment of a Jewish refugee hospital, Chinese hospitals accepted many refugees and saved their lives. In the Ghetto, Jewish refugees learned how to cook meals with a coal stove and how to bring hot water from a boiler. They fell in love with Chinese opera and Chinese food and learned Tai Chi, a Chinese martial art. Although local Chinese suffered in the Ghetto themselves, some invited Jewish refugees to celebrate the Chinese New Year together, extending their family gathering. In spite of the language barrier, local Chinese tried to help Jews, in any way possible. When Jewish children needed to get to school, it was not uncommon for Chinese neighbors to call them a rickshaw. And, after school, neighbors often invited refugee children to pastries at their home.

These descriptions not only portrayed a peaceful co-existence but also a close engagement between Jews and local Chinese from social and cultural perspectives. It is in this sense that the exhibition suggested that besides Jewish refugees' mutual help and great support from Jews around the world, "[t]he tolerance and help from the Chinese people also played an important role" in their survival in Shanghai during the Holocaust. However, as discussed in previous sections, the scope and depth of interactions between these two groups is, at least, debatable. Nonetheless, the indication of such an intimate relationship is reflective of Chinese official discussions of the history and experience of Jews in China. As Hochstadt (2019) points out, they are primarily focused on spreading messages about the country's lack of anti-Semitism and Chinese people's welcoming and friendly co-existence with Jews. While these ideas do not violate the historical record, the degree of the relationship between Jewish refugees and local Chinese, as Hochstadt (2019, p. 156) further argues, can be exaggerated and stretched to the conclusion that "[w]e saved the Jews", which lacks historical support.

These above-mentioned aspects have subtly demonstrated the alignment between the SJRM's exhibition and an international image preferred by the Chinese government, whose sanctioned narratives have a noticeable influence on the museum from a curatorial point of view. Broadly speaking, this point is reflective of a limited role of Chinese non-state actors in cultural diplomacy, as mentioned in Chapters 3 and 4. While claiming to be non-governmental, such actors are not completely independent and oftentimes influenced by the government under the Chinese political system. Despite this, the exhibition received a positive reaction from local society, as will be shown in the following discussion. This favourable reception further demonstrates the CCCS's understanding of a target audience in Australia and its active attempts to connect with the local audience.

7.6 Local reaction to the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition

7.6.1 Perceptions from former "Shanghailanders"

The decision to host the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition in Australia was made with consideration of the local audience's reception. When explaining the reasons for organising this event, Zhao Li said that it was partly driven by the fact that "a large number of Jewish refugees in Shanghai had relocated to Australia" after World War II.[114] The connection between this exhibition and its audience in Australia, especially in Sydney, was further revealed by Zhao in another interview, where she noted "part of the Jewish refugees, after 1947 or 1946, they moved to Australia and settled down here [in Sydney]".[115] This motivation behind the planning of the event showed an understanding of the history of a group of Australian audience and its connections with China. The use of such a historical connection in conducting cultural diplomacy, as manifested in the selection of this exhibition, also demonstrated the CCCS's efforts to resonate with local viewers, attempting to create a positive engagement. Such an attempt appeared to be effective as evidenced by local reaction to this exhibition.

To be sure, the Shanghai exile was no doubt filled with pain and fear for Jewish refugees. Nonetheless, most of them, as Ross (1994, p. ix) points out, "recall their Shanghai days with a sense of wonder" and perceive the sojourn as a "defining experience of their lives, a time when they learned to see themselves as survivors instead of victims". Despite, as noted earlier, that Shanghai might not have been the first choice for European Jews fleeing from Nazi persecution, many Jewish survivors in Shanghai remain grateful to the city that provided them refuge and hold a positive view towards local Chinese who lived side by side through a difficult time, while their families and friends suffered and died during the Holocaust in Europe. For example, as Ron Klinger recalled,

> the second World War was a terrible time. It was terrible for the Chinese people. It was terrible for the Jewish people. The story of our family is one among millions, but we were lucky. Our story had a happy ending, thanks to Shanghai…. My parents often told me that while in Shanghai they never encountered any hostility, any anti-Semitism, any unfriendliness from the Chinese people.[116]

Fred Antman similarly wrote in his memoir that

> [p]erhaps as a result of their shared troubles, the Chinese people and the European immigrants formed a common bond, lived together in harmony and warmed to each other. We surviving Jews of the Hongkew Ghetto will always be thankful to the Chinese people for treating us as equals and as human beings (Antman 2011, pp. 78-9).

[114] See footnote 102.
[115] See footnote 101.
[116] This was part of Klinger's speech made at the re-opening of his grandfather's The White Horse Inn café in Shanghai in 2015. The researcher interviewed him on 11 May 2022 and was given his original speech notes.

As a speaker at the opening of the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition at the CCCS, Antman flew from Melbourne, where he resided in Australia, to Sydney to participate in this event and later attended and spoke again at the Melbourne launch of this exhibition. As he said at the JHC in Melbourne,

> life in Shanghai was tough, but bearable—unlike that of our brothers and sisters in Europe who had so much to endure. Thank God most of us managed to survive, helped by the solidarity of the Chinese people who stood by us during those dark days, as they shared our hardship with compassion and friendship, forming a common bond (Antman 2016).

Antman's active involvement in this event showed the exhibition's relevance to Jewish refugees in Shanghai. However, a deeper engagement can further be seen in former "Shanghailanders"' emotional attachment to their broader life experience in Shanghai evoked by this exhibition.

As Ron Klinger shared his recollections of family businesses set up by his grandparents in Shanghai,

> [t]ogether with more than 20,000 other stateless refugees, my grandparents, Leon and Maja Klinger, the Klinger family and Rudolf and Rosa Mosberg, the Mosberg family, fled from Vienna in 1938. They came to Shanghai, a place of refuge where passports and visas were not necessary.
>
> The Klinger family ran the Klinger Restaurant. The Mosberg family set up [the] "Das Weisse Rössl", in English, "The White Horse Inn". They created a typical Viennese coffee-house. It opened in 1939 as a café, a restaurant, a bar, a nightclub. It became very popular and was visited by many people, both Jewish and non-Jewish.[117]

Fred Antman, whose father established a tailor shop upon their arrival in Shanghai, described more generally the working life of Jewish refugees, noting that

> history has taught us that Jews have always been enterprising, so the new arrivals were creative and resourceful, and despite the squalid conditions, busied themselves opening restaurants, cafés, bakeries, barber shops, shoe and clothing repair shops, groceries, tobacconists, dental clinics and even currency dealing depots (Antman 2016).

Aside from memories of family businesses and work of Jewish refugees, the story behind the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition also involved family relationships and love.

As Klinger recounted,

> in 1940 my father, Hermann Klinger, met my mother, Herta Mosberg, in "The White Horse Inn". They married in February, 1941 and I was born here in November, 1941.[118]

[117] See footnote 116.
[118] See footnote 116.

Likewise, Antman shared that

> [m]y wife, Eva, and I met in Shanghai in 1943, when she was 11 years old and I was 13. This was the beginning of a life-long love story which lasted for 70 happy years, until Eva passed away in 2014 (Antman 2016).

To Jewish refugees in Shanghai, these experiences, connected to and evoked by this exhibition, not only carried a sense of pride as Holocaust survivors but also were closely associated with their identity. In other words, it is these experiences that have shaped who they are. When asked about his feeling towards such an exhibition, Ron Klinger said it was "special" (Interviewee 11). As he further elaborated,

> because it was part of our family history. Not just our history, but the history of the Jewish people in Shanghai, and it was a very rare incident back in 1938, 39, 40 for this whole thing to happen (Interviewee 11).

Although more than half a century has passed, Jews who once took refuge in Shanghai still remember this chapter of their life and some of them have even re-visited the city with their families. As Fred Antman remembered,

> Eva and I returned to Shanghai on a sentimental journey to visit our wartime home which we left in 1946. We were keen to revisit our living quarters, school buildings and playgrounds, but most importantly, our Ohel Moshe Synagogue where my father conducted religious services for seven years (Antman 2016).

Ron Klinger, who had returned to Shanghai seven times, said that

> I came to Shanghai in 1987 and my friend, John Zhu, showed me Hongkou where I grew up. In 2007 my wife Suzie and I took the Shanghai Jewish Tour with Dvir Bar Gal. He showed us the original location of "The White Horse Inn" just down the road.[119]

Travelling back to where he used to live as a boy was, in Ron Klinger's words, "all very nostalgic" (Interviewee 11). Taking all such experiences together, he further noted that attending the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition at the CCCS "brought back all these sorts of memories and not quite tears to the eyes but close" (Interviewee 11). As Klinger added, this exhibition also brought back memories to his 96-year-old uncle Kurt Mosberg, whose father created The White Horse Inn and who was present at the opening of the exhibition at the CCCS with his daughter (Interviewee 11). Ron Klinger further shared that "we were very impressed and we appreciated it very much" that "the Centre took interest in all of this", and "the fact that someone took the trouble to actually do this was amazing for us" (Interviewee 11). The exhibition's engagement with local viewers, especially from Jewish communities, as noted by Klinger, contributed to its success (Interviewee 11). This

[119] See footnote 116.

perception was also supported by another participant in this exhibition, who pointed out that "the local engagement obviously made it more successful" (Interviewee 5).

7.6.2 Audience participation and perceptions

As Ron Klinger described participants' reaction to the exhibition, he recalled a wide interest from the audience as a result of the "connection", embedded in this exhibition, between the Chinese and Jewish people. Although there was no record of attendee numbers, photos taken at the opening of this exhibition in Sydney appeared to show a good turnout,[120] which, as Klinger remembered, included both Jewish and Chinese audiences (Interviewee 11). Similarly, the concurrent talk also seemed to be well-attended. According to one interviewee, the demographic of participants consisted of older generations from the Jewish community, "people who had Chinese connections or Shanghai connections who brought their grandkids", and "a lot of people from the Chinese side" (Interviewee 5). Some participants in these activities also left their comments on the message board at the CCCS.[121] For example, one attendee, Joan Jane, wrote on 12 May 2015,

> [t]his is an exhibition of extraordinary meaning! It is filled with hope and shows the tolerance between nations. This is what is missing in this age. I was born in a Jewish family, our nation often has to defend the right to exist. Thank you for bringing this exhibition to Sydney.

One viewer named Adam commented on 10 May 2015,

> [t]his is great and touching exhibition. All of us should learn how to live with others in the world peacefully. This should not be subject to race.

Theresa, another participant, noted on 6 May 2015,

> [t]his rich and well-planned exhibition is worth attending! I've developed a great interest in this historical topic after viewing the exhibition. I'll keep searching and reading documents and books related to it.

Kathy Stein, who was born in Hongkou ghetto in 1943 and whose parents took refuge in Shanghai during the Holocaust, came to Professor Jakubowicz's talk and the concurrent exhibition. She wrote on the message board on 3 May 2015 that,

> I attended the informative talk delivered by Professor Andrew Jakubowicz and viewed this inspiring exhibition yesterday. First, I want to congratulate the China Cultural Centre in Sydney on successfully hosting this extraordinary event…. I would also like to thank those

[120] These photos were taken and posted by the CCCS and can be seen via the following link: https://cccsydney.org/2015/04/23/jewish-refugees-and-shanghai-australia-tour-kicked-off-at-china-cultural-centre-in-sydney/.

[121] These comments were originally written by attendees in English and later translated by CCCS staff into Chinese. They were presented in the exhibition hall at the CCCS over the course of this event. These messages were available to public viewers and observed by the researcher in 2015. Quotes here were translated by the researcher based on the CCCS's Chinese copy of visitor feedback/comments on this event.

> Chinese people who helped preserve this precious history. It is because of you that more people in the world can know this part of history, and learn to cherish and maintain peace.

These accounts reflect a largely favourable audience response to this event in Sydney.

The popularity of the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition among Australian audiences can also be seen interstate. As Reuben Zylberszpic described the opening of the exhibition at the JHC in Melbourne,

> [t]he exhibition attracted a diverse cross-section of the community, including "Shanghailanders" and their families who came out in force to view the exhibition, as well as members of the Jewish and Chinese communities and the general public. The launch of the exhibition saw over 250 people squeeze into our main auditorium (with the overflow viewing the proceedings via video-link from the JHC's downstairs auditorium). This reflected the community's strong interest in this unique story of Jews fleeing Nazi-occupied Europe (Zylberszpic 2016).

The attraction of a mix of audiences further led to possibilities, as perceived by interviewees, of facilitating mutual understanding through such an event. As Klinger saw the value of the exhibition to the general public in Australia, "if they attended, they would've had insight into the relationship between Jewish people and the Chinese people and the Chinese government" (Interviewee 11). Furthermore, one interviewee who attended this event noted that the accompanying lecture of the exhibition,

> would provide a much more interactive bridge between people from the Chinese community and the people from the Jewish community who had an interest in this question, but from very different perspectives, to actually come together and interact around this and engage and discover things they didn't know about each other (Interviewee 5).

When asked about the impact of this event on Australian participants, the same interviewee held that "anything that increases the subtlety of understanding about other people, I think is very positive. I don't think there was anything negative at all" (Interviewee 5).

7.6.3 Australian media coverage

Next to the aforementioned response, a third dimension to examine the reception of this event is through Australian media coverage. One of the first media outlets that picked up the exhibition was *J-Wire*, which is a main online Jewish news source publishing events related to Australian and New Zealand Jewish communities. It provided a historical background and brief overview of the exhibition

and promoted its tour in Sydney and Melbourne.[122] The Melbourne leg of this exhibition was covered by Australia national media *The New Daily* and also mentioned by *The Age*.[123]

Perhaps a highlight of the media coverage was that from the ABC, which approached the CCCS to report the exhibition held in Sydney. This report, aired on the ABC's program, *The World*, included onsite interviews with not only then Director of the CCCS, Zhao Li, but also Australian participants about their views concerning this exhibition. Dan Moalem, who grew up and experienced World War II in Shanghai, commented on this exhibition in the interview that

> [i]t was great. We've got one of the placards of our family here. I feel it's given a very comprehensive range of information about the refugees.[124]

An exhibition viewer featured in this coverage shared her reflection by noting that

> [t]his really shows how love [sic] people can live together, really nothing in common except their humanity. Because these were Chinese people, these were Polish Jews, what do they have in common? They didn't know each other until they met in those circumstances.[125]

The ABC's coverage helped promote the exhibition by showing a positive reception from local participants through a reputable national broadcaster, potentially increasing the reach and influence of this event nationwide. From the perspective of the CCCS, this report was valuable and regarded as an achievement of the centre. This can be seen in the fact that the CCCS specially posted an article on its website, entitled "Director of China Cultural Centre in Sydney interviewed by ABC News" (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2015b), reporting the ABC's coverage of this exhibition.

Australian media's interest in covering the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition further reflected a positive local response from both community and national levels. These news reports, in turn, contributed to the promotion of the CCCS's exhibition among the Australian public. This dynamic is rarely seen in cultural activities delivered through the CCC project's other working modes, namely, global coordination and partnership with Chinese provincial-level governments, as analysed in Chapters 5 and 6.

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[122] This news report can be viewed via the following link: https://www.jwire.com.au/jewish-refugees-and-shanghai/.
[123] The news report by *The New Daily* can be seen via the following link: https://thenewdaily.com.au/entertainment/arts/2015/09/01/holocaust-exhibition-coming-australia/. According to its website, *The New Daily* has a unique monthly audience of over 4.3 million and more than 580,000 email subscribers; the news report by *The Age* can be seen via the following link: https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/jewish-leader-compares-europe-refugee-crisis-to-holocaust-20150909-gjickc.html. In 2021, *The Age* claimed that its readership exceeded 6.1 million.
[124] See footnote 101.
[125] See footnote 101.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the CCC project's collaboration with local partners through the case of the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition planned by the CCCS.

The organisation of this exhibition demonstrated the CCCS's effort to engage with a network of collaborators from China and, particularly, in Australia, ranging from cultural organisations to individuals. Broadly speaking, the inclusion of these non-governmental actors helped dilute an official overtone, which, as mentioned before, connected to a broader political/strategic context of this event. The involvement of the SJRM highlighted the people-to-people exchange, as demonstrated by their ongoing relationships and interaction with Shanghai Jewish refugees worldwide. This was particularly enhanced by the identification and inclusion of Australian "Shanghailanders", whose presence at the opening event increased the authenticity and relevance of this exhibition in Australia.

The inclusion of multiple collaborators in this event boosted the awareness of this exhibition in Australia, as shown in different audiences reached through supports from the SJM, CI at the University of Sydney, and Professor Jakubowicz's lecture, which further added to the depth of this exhibition with an academic dimension. In addition, interstate hosts of this exhibition broadened its national coverage by connecting with participants from outside Sydney.

The CCCS's successful engagement with a diverse range of collaborators reflected the suitability of hosting such an exhibition in an Australian context, and represented, partly, a positive reaction to this event. This is because local partners would not have readily cooperated had they found no appeal of such a program to themselves or to their clientele, regardless of the CCCS's initiative to collaborate. This point echoes Zhao Li's emphasis, as mentioned earlier, on the reception, understanding, and preferences of the local audience (including potential collaborators) for attaining acceptance and facilitating cultural understanding through programs undertaken in the host country.

Evidence of a positive reaction to the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition can be further seen from local society, despite the subtle alignment between SJRM's exhibition and a preferred image of China by the Chinese government. For example, former "Shanghailanders" in Australia showed great interest in the event and were engaged through an emotional attachment to their life experience in Shanghai evoked by this exhibition. Sydney-based viewers responded to such a cultural program with compliments and respect. There was also active participation of audiences from both Jewish and Chinese communities as well as the wider public in Australia, further creating opportunities to foster dialogues and understanding between peoples. In addition, Australian national and Jewish media outlets responded positively to this exhibition through their coverage of the event. Ultimately, the favourable response from local society was achieved based on the

CCCS's attempt to understand and connect with the receiving audience in Australia, through their historical background and contemporary life. It was further underpinned by the CCCS's recognition of the expertise and resources of other collaborators and its openness to work together in possible areas.

From the perspective of cultural diplomacy, this approach to curating the exhibition first reflected an acknowledgement of the plurality of actors and their roles in contemporary cultural diplomacy, as discussed in Chapter 2. These diverse actors could contribute to the implementation of cultural diplomacy by offering needed expertise and resources that governments do not possess. In particular, by engaging with local partners, the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition showed an efficient means to improve the reach and influence of cultural diplomacy. Secondly, it demonstrated an idealistic understanding of cultural diplomacy centred on mutuality and dialogue, different from a functional view which is typically embodied in a one-track projection of culture and largely propelled by political and economic impetus. More specifically, this exhibition exemplified how cultural diplomacy can connect with the local public by adopting a bottom-up approach, which takes into account the audience's reception in such cultural endeavours.

Following the discussion of the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition, the next chapter will present another event held by the CCCS within the working mode of collaboration with local partners, namely, the exhibition of *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists*. The planning and delivery of this event similarly demonstrated the CCCS's active attempt to engage with the Australian audience. However, it differs from the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* exhibition in the sense that the curation of the program was commissioned to a local artist in Australia. In fact, this programming trait distinguishes this event from all cultural activities that have been discussed in this study so far, which were designed in China and, to various degrees, influenced by the Chinese government. What does a locally curated event of the CCC project look like? Does this make the program less influenced by the Chinese government from a curatorial perspective? How does local society respond to such an event? It is with these questions that we move to the discussion of the last case of a cultural program in this study.

CHAPTER 8 THE CHINA CULTURAL CENTRE PROJECT'S WORKING MODE 3: COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL PARTNERS—THE EXHIBITION OF *A RETROSPECTIVE OF CHINESE ARCHIBALD FINALISTS*

Following the previous chapter, Chapter 8 will extend the discussion of the CCC project's collaboration with local partners by analysing a further event. The exhibition, entitled *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists*, held at the CCCS, similar to the case presented in Chapter 7, also demonstrated a programming approach that was inclusive of collaborators in the host country and that attempted to facilitate dialogue and mutual understanding through engagement with the local audience. Nonetheless, it differs from all programs discussed in relation to the CCC project's working modes in this thesis so far, in the sense that the curation of this exhibition was commissioned to a local artist in Australia. Such a distinctive approach deserves further attention.

The analysis of this exhibition provides an additional example showing the involvement of diverse actors and an idealistic understanding of cultural diplomacy in the CCC project's working mode with local partners. It also sheds light on how a CCC cultural activity is curated by a local collaborator rather than government departments or organisations in China. This shows further flexibility in this working mode, as independence and freedom were, to some extent, given to the curator in arranging the program within a local setting. As the analysis in this chapter will further demonstrate, the exhibition effectively engaged with and was positively perceived by Australian diplomatic and cultural figures who were involved in China and/or the arts.

This chapter first provides the background of the *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* exhibition by introducing the Archibald Prize and its connections with Chinese artists in Australia. Situated in the context of cultural diplomacy, it then analyses the planning and delivery of the exhibition through the lens of its purpose and curatorial process, followed by further discussions about the local response to this event. Analysis in this chapter is mainly based on data collected from published comments and reviews related to this event, an exhibition catalogue published by the CCCS,[126] relevant textual and photographic material posted on the CCCS's website, as well as interviews with the curator of and a participant in this exhibition.

[126] This exhibition catalogue, entitled *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists*, as mentioned in Chapter 1, is hard to locate today. Based on an online search performed by the researcher, the hard copy of this material is available at the National Library of Australia and the State Library of New South Wales.

8.1 An introduction to the Archibald Prize

The Archibald Prize was established by the Australian journalist John Feltham Archibald, who was the founding editor of *The Bulletin*, a periodical that was published weekly between 1880 and 2008 and remains one of Australia's longest-running magazines. This publication was initially supported by those, including Archibald, who sought to separate Australia from the control of and attachment to British rule and was perceived by the late Edmund Capon (2015, p. 7), former Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) and scholar of Chinese art, as "a first tentative attempt to promote the notion of an Australian Republic".

Mr Archibald died in 1919, leaving one-tenth of his 90,000 GBP estate (a significant fortune at the time) as an endowment for setting up an eponymous annual portrait prize to be judged by the trustees of the AGNSW (Capon 2015). According to his will, this prize would be awarded to the best portrait

> preferentially of some man or woman distinguished in art, letters, science or politics, painted by any artist resident in Australasia during the 12 months preceding the date fixed by the Trustees for sending in the pictures (cited in Art Gallery of New South Wales n.d.-a).

In the early days of the Archibald Prize, there was no limit to the number of paintings each participating artist could submit and all entries were exhibited. This rule was changed in 1946, when artists were allowed to submit no more than two works in one year and only selected portraits would be displayed in the finalist exhibition at the AGNSW.[127] The annual entry quota for each artist was further limited to one since 2003.[128] Based on figures listed on the AGNSW's website, the average number of yearly entries between 2018 to 2022 was 907, with an average of 53 paintings selected as finalists in a single year.[129] The winner of the Archibald Prize has been announced on an annual basis since its initiation (with the exception of 1964 and 1980) and awarded 100,000 AUD since 2015.[130]

The Archibald Prize enjoys great popularity among the Australian public. Helen Pitt (2023) of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, describing the event as "the oldest and most prestigious portrait competition in Australia", calls it "the paint that stops the nation". Similarly, Capon (2015, p. 7) regarded the prize as "arguably the most known and talked about art event in Australia". To him, the longevity and success of the Archibald Prize lie in two points, which are

[127] See details from the AGNSW's webpages: https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/art/prizes/archibald/facts/; https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/prizes/archibald/1946/.
[128] See: https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/prizes/archibald/2003/.
[129] The average numbers are calculated based on figures provided by the AGNSW. See: https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/prizes/archibald/ for entry and finalist numbers in each year.
[130] According to the AGNSW, trustees decided not to award the prize in 1964 and 1980 on the grounds that no submitted entry was "worthy of the award".

> [f]irstly, that it be judged **not** by curators and art professionals but by Trustees who as representatives of the community at large and entrusted with the overall management of the institution are essentially art amateurs; and secondly, that the portrait has to be painted in the 12 month period leading up to the award, meaning that it was always about people of our place and our time. The Archibald Prize was, therefore, always going to be topical (Capon 2015, p. 7, emphasis in original).

The topicality of sitters in these portraits creates an interest from and connections with the general public. As Shen Jiawei, a 14-time Archibald finalist, held, "a portrait of a well-known figure is, by itself, a topic that appeals to newspapers and mass media every year" (Interviewee 4). In the early days of the Archibald Prize, these figures, as noted by Capon, were people who

> the general public looked up to—they were the leaders and stalwarts of society, and in those roles they represented the most honourable of positions and acceptable of professions; they were professors, politicians, the occasional general, governors, chancellors of universities… (Capon 2015, p. 8).

The popularity of this art event among local residents in Australia can be seen in a photograph taken by Harry Martin, capturing the public's interest in seeing Archibald Prize entries at the AGNSW in 1957.[131] As the prize caught the attention of Australian viewers, it became a part of popular culture of the country, though not without controversies and even court cases related to the status of sitters or how the portrait was completed (Pitt 2021).[132] Nonetheless, such disputes seemed only to have increased public enthusiasm towards this event, as demonstrated by the fact that people flocked to see William Dobell's controversial winning portrait of artist Joshua Smith in 1943.[133] As Pitt (2021) referred to the AGNSW archive record, visitors "stood 10 people deep before it, and at one point a gallery attendant had to take the painting off the wall to persuade the crowd to go home". She further explained that

> [a] record 7,800 people jammed into the gallery one afternoon and the exhibition had to be extended a month to cope with demand. When the Archibald show closed that year, 140,000 people had viewed the painting; 10 per cent of Sydney's population (Pitt 2021).

The contemporary relevance of the Archibald Prize to Australian society is partly reflected in the change of sitters in these paintings, evolving from perceived "'worthy' citizens" in the early 20th

[131] This photograph was featured in *Sydney Morning Herald*'s "Archibald Prize: Sydney's answer to the Melbourne Cup turns 100", which can be accessed via the following link: https://www.smh.com.au/culture/art-and-design/archibald-prize-sydney-s-answer-to-the-melbourne-cup-turns-100-20210507-p57q12.html.
[132] Arguments were commonly manifested regarding whether a particular subject was considered "distinguished" in accordance with Archibald's will or if the portrait was painted in real life as opposed to a photograph.
[133] When Dobell's portrait was announced as the winner in 1943, two other entrants in that year subsequently sued Dobell and the trustees "on the grounds that the painting was not a portrait as defined by the Archibald Bequest, but a caricature". The case was heard in 1944 in the Supreme Court, which eventually found in favour of Dobell's painting (Pitt 2021).

century to an increasing number of "actors, artists, celebrities from television, even museum curators and celebrity chefs" in the 21st century (Capon 2015, p. 8). In the view of Capon,

> [t]he panorama of people who appear as the subjects in the Archibald [Prize] in the twenty-first century reflects the personalities of our times just as it reflects, I think, our view of the world around us today so conditioned by the media and the fragile fleeting world of fashion and 'celebrity' (Capon 2015, p. 8).

The contrast manifested in sitters between the 20th and 21st century, therefore, as argued by Capon (2015, p. 8), has shown "a history of changing social structures and orders, a change in our perceptions of 'leaders' in the community and of our heroes". Indeed, this can be seen in recent appearances of luminaries, including actress Cate Blanchett, singer Tim Minchin, writer and performer Benjamin Law, former soccer player and sport analyst Craig Foster, and Australian chef and restaurateur George Calombaris, just to name a few. These subjects, representative of topical figures in Australia today, attract current attention of the mass media and public.

The topicality of Archibald subjects is not limited to fame and reputation but also closely linked to immediate social issues that are of concern to the wider public. As veteran art critic and regular commentator on the Archibald Prize, John McDonald (2022), puts it, the Archibald Prize is "a reflection of the changing face of Australian society, with all the problems, issues and conflicts that entails".[134] For instance, William Dargie's 1956 winning portrait of Albert Namatjira, a well-known Aboriginal person who was deprived of Australian citizenship at the time, was highly political. Blak Douglas' *Moby Dickens*, which won the 2022 Archibald Prize, reflected the public's mood with respect to the then Australian government's ineffective responses to Lismore floods and to natural disasters at large. The growing number of female and Indigenous subjects in Archibald portraits, as identified by Bo Seo (2019) of the *Australian Financial Review*, echoes broader social debates about gender and race in contemporary Australian society. The increasing presence of Indigenous sitters in the Archibald Prize, especially in 2012, was a reminder to Joanna Mendelssohn (2012), a former curator at the AGNSW, of Archibald's original intention "to create a body of work to change a culture". As Mendelssohn argues,

> [Archibald] knew that in the early years of the 20th century Australians thought that both history and personal success was something that happened in England…. [He] left his money for a portrait prize so that many portraits would be painted and succeeding generations of Australians would know what their forebears looked like (Mendelssohn 2012).

Interpretation like this is largely resonant with the wider social and academic debates about Australian history and cultural identity. These aforementioned topics embedded in the Archibald

[134] John McDonald is one of Australia's "best-known art critics" (ABC News n.d.). He contributes a weekly art column for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and a weekly film column for the *Australian Financial Review*. He has a long focus on the Archibald Prize and its associated art events and been reviewing the annual Archibald exhibition for the past three decades.

Prize connect with the Australian public through political, social, and cultural dimensions. It is in this sense that Natalie Wilson, curator of the *Archie 100: A Century of the Archibald Prize*, said in an interview that "the Archibald is a Prize for all Australians, everybody has a vested interest in the story of the Archibald" (The Sydney Morning Herald & The Age 2021).[135] This, to Capon, is the key to the success of the art competition, as "the general public feels a strange sense of ownership of the Archibald" (cited in Pitt 2021).

It is perhaps because of its strong focus on iconic figures of the day and association with current affairs that critics of the Archibald Prize do not treat it seriously as an art competition. Andrew Taylor (2014) is of the opinion that the "Archibald has little to do with art and a lot to do with our fascination with celebrity". To Taylor, this is why "the Archibald Prize circus is the one time of the year when commercial TV networks send reporters to the gallery to feign an interest in the arts". In a similar vein, McDonald admits that,

> [a]fter writing about the Archibald Prize for more than 30 years I've come to the conclusion that one shouldn't take the whole affair too seriously. Our affection for the Archibald is based on pure sentimentality. It has become part of local folklore, like Anzac Day or the Melbourne Cup. Visitors enjoy arguing about the winner, pitting their views against those of the judges (McDonald 2019).

Instead of dwelling on the aesthetic merits of the prize, McDonald suggests to consider it as "high entertainment" and that "[f]or better or worse, it's still the greatest publicity bonanza in Australian art" (cited in Pitt 2021). While it is beyond this study's scope to discuss the artistic merits of the Archibald Prize, such comments do show, again, the popularity of this art competition in Australia and, in a way, the Australian public's obsession with it.

As a highly topical event in Australia, the Archibald Prize draws wide attention of and connects with the public. In the context of Chinese cultural diplomacy, crafting a program in association with the Archibald Prize is, therefore, useful in the sense that it creates opportunities for engaging with the local audience. The utilisation of such a locally recognised event is also appropriate as the development of the Australian artistic and social landscape, particularly manifested in a more diverse participation in the Archibald Prize, involves a noticeable presence of Chinese-born artists in the past three decades. In other words, the Archibald story includes a narrative of Chinese migrants and their adaptation, interaction, and achievement in the adopted country.[136]

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[135] The *Archie 100: A Century of the Archibald Prize* was a retrospective exhibition curated by the AGNSW to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Archibald Prize (1921–2021). It featured 100 portraits, which were chosen from more than 6,000 paintings submitted to the Archibald Prize competition over the course of a century.

[136] In this chapter, Chinese migrants refer primarily to those who came to Australia in and after the late 1980s. This will be discussed more closely in the following section.

8.2 The presence of Chinese-born artists in the Archibald Prize

Between the late 1980s and 1990s, a large influx of Chinese emigrants made their journey to Australia. Among this cohort was a group of Chinese artists, who, as perceived by McDonald (2002), led to "a revitalisation of contemporary Australian art". The historical background of their emigration was, however, not one-dimensional. When Deng Xiaoping took power in the late 1970s, China began to open up and re-connect with the world for reviving its much-damaged economy caused by the calamitous Cultural Revolution. Deng's Reform and Opening-up policy led China to a gradual liberalisation, followed by the country's rapid economic growth in the coming decades. Meanwhile, Australia recognised China's potential to rise and intended to benefit from its economic development by seeking closer ties with the country. This dynamic between the two nations provided a broader background for the then Australian Labour government's signing of an agreement with China, permitting state-funded students from China to enrol in English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) programs in 1986, a time when education was seen by the Australian government as a profitable export industry.[137] These offers for going to a Western country like Australia somewhat resonated with young Chinese artists' desire to explore opportunities abroad, advance their career internationally, and look for the origins of foreign ideas that were imported into China after the Maoist era (Burchmore 2022).[138]

While inspired by internal ambitions and encouraged by external possibilities, many Chinese artists' departure from China was further motivated by the Tiananmen Square incident,[139] which provoked "fear and anxiety" that precipitated their move overseas (Burchmore 2022, p. 77). In the wake of the Tiananmen Square incident, their relocation to Australia was facilitated through the aforementioned student visa programs launched by then Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke. As Alex Burchmore (2022) noted, those who left China before 20 June 1989 were given a four-year extension to stay in Australia and eventually granted Australian permanent residency, whereas others who departed after that date were able to apply for political asylum.

A number of Chinese-born artists who came to Australia between the late 1980s and early 1990s have now become well-known and active figures in the Australian art scene. Their popularity, as indicated by McDonald (2002), can be seen in that "barely a week goes by in Sydney and Melbourne nowadays without a Chinese exhibition or art event, or without Chinese émigrés featuring prominently in some competition or group show". The social and artistic importance of

[137] The number of Chinese students enrolled in such programs, as Burchmore (2022) summarised, was 13,142 by 1990, representing nearly 80 per cent of the entirety of Chinese students in Australia.
[138] Western culture was purged during the Cultural Revolution as it was deemed as capitalist and bourgeois. This situation was somewhat eased after Mao's death in 1976, marking the end of the decade-long Cultural Revolution.
[139] Also known as the June Fourth incident, the Tiananmen Square incident referred to the Chinese government's crackdown on demonstrators in Tiananmen Square on 4 June 1989.

these artists and their works have also been underlined by Michael Reid (2001), who recognises the influence of the “talented Asian art wave” on Australian society as well as its art scene and market.

One particular accomplishment of these artists in the past three decade is notably demonstrated by their presence in the Archibald Prize, where Chinese painters have become “a regular fixture” (McDonald 2015b). According to a list on the AGNSW’s website, entitled “Chinese artists in the Archibald Prize”, 89 portraits painted by 25 Chinese-born artists have made it into the finalists exhibition from 1990 to 2022 (Art Gallery of New South Wales n.d.-b). Among this group of artists, Shen Jiawei is arguably the most esteemed painter and now a leading Chinese–Australian portraitist, with sitters such as former Australian Prime Minister John Howard, Queen Mary of Denmark, and Pope Francis featured in his paintings.

The early days of these artists in Australia were, nonetheless, not always easy and could even be tough at times, especially given their lack of English skills, funds, and local networks. While Shen spent his first two years sketching portraits for tourists at Darling Harbour, Sydney in order to make a living, others had to be pragmatic by taking low-paid jobs that had less to do with their original profession (McDonald 2002). For example, following his immediate arrival in Australia after the Tiananmen Square incident, Ah Xian, one of the prominent Chinese–Australian contemporary artists, eked out a living by painting houses instead of fully dedicating himself to his artist dream. As he shared this difficult experience in an interview,

> [i]t was extremely hard in term [sic] of surviving…. We restart our living from nothing in a new country with totally different language, cultural, political and natural environments. We've just lived our lives over again like a reborn in Australia (cited in Chester 2003).

Nonetheless, these Chinese artists, who were mostly trained or self-taught in China, continued to explore and adapt their artistic practice in an Australian art environment, gradually establishing their reputation among local viewers. In his essay about Chinese Archibald finalists, McDonald (2015b) has identified a shift in such painters as Wang Xu, Chen Jun, and Song Ling, whose selected portraits have shown characteristics that are largely different from their previous art training as traditional brush-and-ink painters. He has further noted adaptation seen in Archibald portraits from Adam Chang, Chen Jun, and Chen Zhong, who have painted in a “vigorous, expressionist style” by using thick paint applied with sweeps of the brush, as opposed to a realist manner that is more accustomed to their generation of Chinese artists (McDonald 2015a, p. 13). However, this is not to say that Chinese Archibald finalists cease to maintain their artistic and cultural heritage in such a transition, as observed by Capon (2015, p. 7) that they have “retained some mysterious and hard to define Chinese aesthetic” in their Archibald Prize entries, which, despite the adoption of Western media and a figurative style of representation, remains “a recognisable quality”.

While Chinese painters' appearances in the Archibald Prize have demonstrated their efforts to adapt, culturally and artistically, in their new home, it has also led Australian artists to reflect on their own artistic practice. This was clearly manifested in Shen Jiawei's early interaction with his art colleagues in Australia. Shen noted what he perceived as an "interesting cultural phenomenon", which had been noticed by some Australian artists in the 1990s when the group of Chinese emigrant artists started to become known in Australia (Interviewee 4). As Shen said,

> our generation of Chinese artists were all trained very professionally in China. Even artists like me, who only had a two-year study experience in the Central Academy of Fine Arts instead of an undergraduate or postgraduate degree, grasped well the realistic technique that Australian artists lacked (Interviewee 4).

This point is echoed and further explained by McDonald, who has pointed out that

> Chinese students during this period received the kind of rigorous, skills-based training that virtually disappeared from Western art schools during the 1970s when "self-expression" became the ultimate aesthetic ideal. At a time when Western students are demanding to be taught those skills again, Chinese artists have the jump on their local counterparts (McDonald 2002).

One Australian artist, George Gittoes recognised this contrast and called for more attention to such distinct traits of Chinese emigrant artists. As Shen continued to share,

> I got to know George Gittoes in 1996…. He was living in Bundeena with his wife who was researching art history. I was then invited by them to visit their studio in Bundeena and it was through that visit I deeply felt the Australian artists' interest and welcome towards us, a group of artists who came from Mainland China…. When Gittoes invited me, he asked me to bring a few Chinese friends. I quickly called five to six Chinese artists to come along…. As we arrived at his studio upstairs, I saw five to six [of] Gittoes' Australian friends at the table waiting for us. Among them, he especially invited the art collection curator at the Canberra Parliament House, a director of an art gallery in Sydney's southwest, a commentator, the well-known Chinese Australian photographer, William Yang, and, importantly, the dean of the art college of the University of Wollongong. Why did Gittoes invite them? He made it very clear in his speech that Australian artists needed these Mainland Chinese artists to teach [them] their realistic technique, noting that this was something that had been absent in Australian art colleges (Interviewee 4).

McDonald (2015a, p. 13) sees this technique from the Chinese artists as a result of their "rigorous, old-fashioned art education", which has in fact facilitated their style transition in Australia. The lack of such a technical component in Western art education, as he further argues, "has left many students with ambitious ideas they lack the skills to accomplish". Following these views, Shen held that Australian artists' focus on the distinct painting style of Chinese artists and reflection on their own artistic training and practice were partly led by the exposure of Chinese artists' artwork as "we had entered as Archibald Prize finalists continuously in many years" (Interviewee 4). In this light, it is perhaps not too much of a stretch to say that Chinese artists' presence in the Archibald Prize has offered what Capon (2015, p. 7) considers as a "refreshing injection of inspiration and diversity" to the event itself and, broadly, to the Australian arts and cultural landscape.

Looking at the representation of Chinese artists in this event, it first shows their adaptation and development in the adopted country from cultural, artistic, and social perspectives. It also reflects their Australian peers' evolving perception of art and the formation of a richer Australian cultural scene that has been stimulated by Chinese artists' emergence in the Archibald Prize. The ongoing interaction among these artists further embodies a process of mutual learning and understanding. These narratives broadly echo what the CCCS intended to promote through its exhibition of *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists*.

8.3 The purpose of the *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* exhibition

The origins of the *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* Exhibition lie in inaugural CCCS Director Zhao Li's interest in Chinese artists' participation in the Archibald Prize. When Zhao was still Cultural Counsellor at the Chinese Consulate in Sydney, she had already noticed Chinese-born artists' continued appearance in the Archibald Prize over the past decades. That was a time prior to the existence of the CCCS, however Zhao was heavily involved in its setup and subsequently took the directorship (2014–2017). According to Shen Jiawei, Zhao had closely followed the Archibald Prize and Chinese artists' participation in this event, and expressed to him the intention to organise a program for showcasing works by Chinese Archibald finalists once the CCCS had been established (Interviewee 4). This point was supported by Zhao Li, who noted in her interview with the Australia Chinese TV Station that

> I formerly worked as cultural counsellor at the Consulate-General [of China in Sydney]. I know the hardship that our [Chinese] artists have gone through here as well as the achievement they have made. I have always hoped for such a venue and opportunity to establish a platform for holding such a retrospective exhibition for our Chinese artists.[140]

It should be noted that, given Zhao's background as a Chinese cultural diplomat, the idea of connecting with Chinese emigrant artists in Australia aligns with China's broader strategy of engaging with overseas Chinese, who are considered by the Chinese government as the "inheritor, spreader, and demonstrator" of Chinese culture and further seen as "critical strategic resources" for improving China's international image and communication with the world (Li 2022).[141]

A little over half a year after the CCCS's official inauguration in November 2014, this program came to fruition. *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* exhibition was held from 25 July to 27 August 2015 at the CCCS, featuring 23 finalist portraits from 16 Chinese-born painters. Selected

[140] This interview can be seen on the CCCS's website: https://cccsydney.org/2016/11/11/a-retrospective-of-chinese-archibald-finalists-launched-in-china-cultural-centre-in-sydney-by-aucntv-people-cn-sbs-24-07-2015/.
[141] In October 2011, China's State Council introduced "public diplomacy through overseas Chinese" for the first time, since when the strategic role of overseas Chinese in China's public diplomacy has been continuously highlighted in Chinese government's policy documents (Bao 2018).

paintings in this exhibition range from 1993 to 2014, during a period in which at least one Chinese-born artist was nominated as a finalist every year. In her remarks at the front of the exhibition catalogue, Zhao Li noted that

> as someone who has long been engaged in China–Australia cultural exchange, I feel an overwhelming sense of pride and delight in the accomplishments of Chinese artists in Australia over the past two decades, whose works were nominated as finalists in the most acclaimed Archibald Prize or even selected as winners of [the] People's Choice Award for many times. Deeply touched by the passion and devotion of the Chinese-born artists towards arts in their adopted country, I have been holding this strong desire of having an exhibition "A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists" for a long time (Zhao 2015).[142]

One former Australian cultural diplomat to China similarly identified a sense of "pride" as part of the CCCS's motivation for organising such an exhibition (Interviewee 9). The impetus to acknowledge and celebrate what Chinese emigrant artists had achieved was seen by Shen Jiawei as "a natural motivation" (Interviewee 4). Professor Stephen Fitzgerald (2016), Australia's first Ambassador to China (1973–1976), also argues, "[i]t's so large and distinctive a string of works that it warranted a retrospective in its own right". Moreover, this pride was also felt by participating artists. As Shen said, the remarkable record of Chinese-born artists' participation in the Archibald Prize competition was "a cultural achievement" that deserved attention and emphasis (Interviewee 4). It is, however, worth asking why Shen, whom McDonald (2015a, p. 13) considers as the "best performed Chinese artist" in the Archibald competition, called for such recognition. The same former Australian cultural diplomat shed some light on this, noting that

> there's a number of artists from China who had a very strong background in portrait painting in that kind of academic painting, very strong training in China before they came to Australia, and they were very often included in the Archibald prize, but they didn't win. And, so the question is why? Was there prejudice against them as Chinese? Was there prejudice against them because of their style of painting? What was it, because they had done really good work and it was a great achievement to be included in the Archibald. So, I guess one of those artists, Shen Jiawei in particular, has a very high profile as a portrait painter internationally and has painted many famous people and can also get a very high price if people want to pay him to have their portrait painted. And I think he felt that he deserved recognition, but also deserved understanding of the kind of painting that he does … and I think other artists, not only him, probably felt that way [too]… (Interviewee 9).

It is in this sense that the CCCS's hosting of this exhibition somewhat resonated with Shen and his fellow Chinese Archibald finalist artists' desire as it championed wider recognition and understanding of Chinese painters' artistic practice in Australia. This intention was stated as a goal of this exhibition, which "highlights the artists' contribution to the multicultural dynamism of Australia" (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2015e). More specifically, their value, as discussed in the previous section, is manifested in enriching the arts scene in Australia, both from a participatory and cultural

[142] The People's Choice Award is an additional prize in association with the Archibald Prize. First initiated by the trustees of the AGNSW in 1988, this award is given to the finalist portrait that receives the most votes from public viewers.

point of view. This purpose of the event was further emphasised by Zhao Li at a gathering with participating artists, organised by the CCCS in the lead up to the exhibition opening. As she said,

> [i]t is noteworthy that Chinese artists have made a great contribution to the multiculturalism of Australia, China Cultural Centre in Sydney is very pleased to offer such platform for thoughts exchange and experiences sharing (cited in China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2015a).

The planning of such a meeting for networking and re-emphasising Chinese-Australian artists' role in their adopted country appeared to have been welcomed by these participants. According to a photograph posted on the CCCS's website, a number of Sydney-based artists, including Shen Jiawei, Adam Chang, and Liu Dapeng, attended this activity, while others, such as Fu Hong, Zhou Xiaoping, and Zhao Dalu travelled from Melbourne to join this conversation.[143] One present Chinese artist expressed gratitude towards the CCCS's organisation of this occasion, noting that "[w]e are really thankful that China Cultural Centre in Sydney could create such a wonderful opportunity for us to exchange ideas and build up connections" (cited in China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2015a).

Another participating artist further pointed out the need for promoting mutual understanding through an exhibition like this, stressing that

> Chinese and Australian artists should communicate and interact with each other more often and in a much deeper sense, promoting one another's culture on a platform which is predicated on further enhanced mutual understanding and appreciation towards each other (cited in China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2015a).

This, in fact, leads to a another goal of this exhibition, through which the CCCS "aims to inspire exchange of ideas and mutual understanding between Chinese and Australian artists" (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2015e). Similar to this purpose, one respondent specified "a kind of educative purpose" in this exhibition to the Australian audience, with an intent to "increase understanding amongst the Australian community of the kind of work these [Chinese-born] artists do, why they do it, what the background is in terms of Chinese tradition and Chinese history of art" (Interviewee 9).

In sum, based on Chinese artists' achievement in the Archibald Prize competition, this exhibition aimed to promote their works as well as contribution to the increasingly diverse and vibrant arts and cultural landscape in Australia. In so doing, it also intended to foster further understanding of the background and artistic practice of these Chinese painters, and, in a broader sense, to create opportunities for intercultural encounters and the exchange of ideas among artists and audiences in Australia. These motivations were loosely resonant with participating artists, who were supportive of such an exhibition. While this event can be perceived as situated in China's strategic engagement

[143] This photograph can be seen via the following link: https://cccsydney.org/2015/07/28/china-cultural-centre-in-sydney-held-art-salon-prior-to-a-retrospective-of-chinese-archibald-finalists-exhibition/.

with overseas Chinese, its overall purpose was more centred on an idealistic understanding of cultural diplomacy. This can be further seen in this exhibition's curatorial process, which the following section will discuss more closely.

To curate this kind of exhibition was, however, not easy. It was a tremendous undertaking that involved the selection of paintings from a large pool of finalist portraits from Chinese-born artists, organising a loan process for artwork through public and commercial galleries as well as private collectors, liaising with participating artists, and coordinating logistics for transporting exhibited paintings. The implementation of such a mammoth task would, therefore, require a comprehensive understanding of the Archibald Prize, familiarity with and experience in dealing with various organisations in the art field, and a strong relationship with all participating artists. Such expertise and resources were critical elements to this event that the CCCS needed. This led to the CCCS's collaboration with Chinese–Australian portraitist, Shen Jiawei, who was commissioned to be the curator of the *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists*.

8.4 The curatorial process of the *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* exhibition

8.4.1 Initial interaction between the China Cultural Centre in Sydney and Shen Jiawei

As someone who left China in 1989, Shen Jiawei admitted that he was "ideologically different" from the Chinese government and Chinese domestic politics (Interviewee 4). Nonetheless, he appeared to hold a pragmatic view when it came to cultural engagement with Chinese state-led institutes, such as the CCCS. As Shen argued,

> regardless of how different or even antagonistic the two countries' ideologies might be to each other … I think we should use this opportunity to conduct exchange. Otherwise, the world will become isolated. It is unthinkable to cut off cultural exchange [between countries] just because one sees the other as hostile (Interviewee 4).

Shen's pragmatism can also be seen in the CCCS's initial proposal for the retrospective exhibition, which involved a large number of Chinese-born artists who migrated to Australia around 1989, and was to be curated by Shen who saw a divergence between his political beliefs and China's official ideology. Although the exhibition itself was not about politics, CCCS's open attitude to engage and work with this cohort of Chinese-Australian artists still showed flexibility in conducting Chinese cultural diplomacy, especially given that issues around the Tiananmen Square incident remain highly sensitive in China and discussions related to this topic are still heavily censored and supressed by the Chinese government. The CCCS's organisation of this event was, therefore, indicative of an approach that was less centred on an ideological basis. Instead, it put more focus on the program and its outcome, as further shown in the curatorial process.

When Shen was approached by the CCCS's then Director, Zhao Li, who was seeking his help as curator of this retrospective exhibition, he accepted the offer rather quickly as he was self-assured in his qualification to assume such a role. As he elaborated,

> until that year, I had been selected as Archibald Prize finalist 13 times in the past two decades, and this was a very rare record. I also had a very deep knowledge of this event and maintained contact and relationships well with all other participating artists. Therefore, I had a fairly accurate understanding of the overall picture [of this event] (Interviewee 4).

Shen's acceptance for curating the exhibition was, nonetheless, conditional. As he recalled his requests to Zhao Li from the outset,

> I said [to Zhao Li] that if I were to curate this exhibition for you, I would request that everything [related to this exhibition] to be done as per Western curatorial standards for art exhibitions. In my understanding, these standards included sufficient budget to support professional wall-to-wall policy, which needed to have insurance. This work should be undertaken by professional transport companies. Secondly, I said that I believed there should be a catalogue [for the exhibition] that incorporated relevant texts. [I said that] I was happy to be the editor but all of this would need funding. I said that, based on my experience, there should be at least 10,000 Australian dollars for producing the catalogue, in addition to transport and insurance costs which would need to be calculated separately (Interviewee 4).

These demands, according to Shen, were immediately agreed to by Zhao, who also dedicated the CCCS's program manager and assistants to providing administrative support to Shen. This "largely reduced my workload as I effectively had a team", as Shen further noted (Interviewee 4).

From the perspective of the CCCS, Zhao Li specifically asked Shen to invite John McDonald to write a review for this exhibition. This request was agreed to by Shen, who was a friend of McDonald's. To Shen, Zhao's suggestion showed her long-term focus on the Australian arts scene, not least the Archibald Prize competition. As Shen explained,

> obviously, she was well aware that John McDonald must write a review of the Archibald [Prize] every year, being the most involved Australian art critic in the Archibald [Prize] and a top-level commentator. Therefore, this proved that she had some understanding of the history of this event (Interviewee 4).

This initial interaction indicated a few points in relation to the CCCS. First, Zhao had an ongoing interest in and understanding of popular arts and cultural activities in Australia, such as the Archibald Prize. Based on this knowledge, Zhao, as a Chinese cultural official, was also able to conceive such a program that fitted in both Chinese and Australian contexts. By commissioning Shen as the curator and accepting his curatorial requests, Zhao recognised the local partner's expertise and resources and showed a somewhat genuine focus on ensuring the quality of the exhibition. Related to this, the attempt to feature reviews from well-known local art critic signified Zhao's intention to increase the influence of this exhibition in local society. These objectives were largely achieved with Shen's help.

For example, the loan process involved liaison with ten local artists who held their finalist paintings and other organisations as well as an individual collector that owned the rest of the exhibited portraits.[144] Some of these owners included the National Portrait Gallery, Gene & Brian Sherman Collection, Macquarie Group, UNSW Art & Design, Niagara Galleries, Hughes Gallery Sydney, King Street Gallery on William, and Museums & Galleries of NSW. While detailed communications with these parties were delegated to the program manager and assistants at the CCCS, the identification of artwork owners and contact strategies were, as Shen recalled, first planned by him as he took up the curatorship (Interviewee 4). Secondly, Shen also contributed to the publication of the exhibition catalogue. As the editor, he arranged the brochure in an informative manner by incorporating sufficient contextual information for each painting, aiming to facilitate the audience's understanding of each work and the exhibition as a whole. As Shen recounted his editorial process,

> I was very careful [when editing the exhibition catalogue]. [I] tried to present information in the catalogue and captions about the identity of the sitter, the experience of the subject and painter, and stories behind [each portrait]. In this way, the audience would view [the exhibition] more closely and joyfully (Interviewee 4).

Furthermore, Shen, as he agreed to the CCCS, managed to invite John McDonald to write an exhibition review, which was featured in the catalogue. An expanded version of this review was also published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and on McDonald's personal blog, further promoting this event in Australia.

8.4.2 Shen Jiawei's curation of the exhibition

When it came to the curation, Shen was given the freedom to select paintings on his terms. These selected works, as complied in Table 8.1 based on the exhibition catalogue, reflected his perceptions of Chinese-born artists' achievements in the Archibald Prize event and, broadly, the cultural and social interaction between Chinese emigrant artists and figures from Australian local society.

[144] At the time, four exhibited portraits by Shen Jiawei were collected by himself, hence the access to which did not involve any external communications regarding permission for loan.

Table 8.1 Details of participating artists and their works

Number	Year	Portraitist	Portrait name
1	1993	Shen Jiawei (沈嘉蔚)	*Hedda's Camera (Claire Roberts)*
2	1997	Shen Jiawei (沈嘉蔚)	*Eyewitness (George Gittoes)*
3	1998	Zhou Xiaoping (周小平)	*Zhou Xiaoping & Jimmy Pike*
4	1999	Shen Jiawei (沈嘉蔚)	*William Yang*
5	2002	Shen Jiawei (沈嘉蔚)	*The Lady from Shanghai (Jenny Sages)*
6	2003	Shen Jiawei (沈嘉蔚)	*Edmund Capon*
7	2003	Xie Huihai (谢慧海)	*Bannerman (Guan Wei)*
8	2003	Zhao Dalu (赵大陆)	*'Lao Fei' (Stephen FitzGerald)*
9	2005	Zhang Hongjun (张鸿钧)	*Gene & the Doorway (Gene Sherman)*
10	2006	Fu Hong (傅红)	*Cathy Freeman*
11	2006	Xie Huihai (谢慧海)	*A Groom (Liu Yang)*
12	2007	Wang Xu (王旭)	*John Yu and George Soutter*
13	2008	Chen Zhong (陈中)	*Nicholas Harding*
14	2008	Chi Zhansui (池展穗)	*Julius*
15	2008	Wang Xu (王旭)	*Nick Waterlow*
16	2008	Wang Yi (王毅)	*Long Hair (self-portrait)*
17	2011	Adam Chang (张鸿钧)	*John Coetzee*
18	2011	Song Ling (宋陵)	*My Name is Fartunate (self-portrait)*
19	2011	Yin Xiaoyan (尹晓燕)	*Hearing • Meditation (Cheryl Barker)*
20	2012	Chen Jun (陈军)	*John Yu with Artist*
21	2012	Jenny Sages	*After Jack (self-portrait)*
22	2014	Liu Dapeng (刘大鹏)	*Portrait of Yin Cao on Blue-and-green Landscape*
23	2014	Zhang Qiang (张强)	*Here (Li Yang)*

As the curator, Shen included five of his finalist portraits in this exhibition. One of them was a portrait of George Gittoes, who, as mentioned before, recognised the artistic uniqueness and value of early Chinese emigrant painters to the Australian art field. More specifically, as the exhibition catalogue wrote, Gittoes

> played a major role in opening a path in the Australian art world for recently settled Chinese artists such as Shen by curating a milestone exhibition of thirteen artists called *Beyond China* at the Campbelltown City Art Gallery in 1998 (*A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* 2015, p. 18).

Shen's portrait of Edmund Capon was another work featured in the exhibition. Capon, an expert on ancient Chinese art, had served as Director of the AGNSW from 1978 to 2011. The last two decades of Capon's tenure coincided with the large and continued presence of Chinese-born artists in the Archibald Prize and, therefore, the inclusion of this painting was of great symbolic meaning. As Shen noted, Capon was virtually "a witness and participant" of what this retrospective exhibition had covered—the emergence and achievement of Chinese Archibald finalists (Interviewee 4).

The inclusion of Shen's painting of Jenny Sages as well as her own finalist portrait was not anticipated by the CCCS, which, according to Shen, "was a little surprised" (Interviewee 4). Sages was born in a Russian–Jewish family in Shanghai. She lived there for 14 years and left in 1948, when Shen was born in the same Chinese city. In this sense, Sages is an Australian artist of Chinese origins, different from the rest of the painters included in this exhibition, who are of Chinese cultural heritage. Despite this, the CCCS accepted such an addition to the program, showing a sense of respect to Shen's curatorial decisions. Shen's rationale for including Sages in this event was personal on the one hand, given their shared birthplace and the fact that Sages' mother's family lived in Shanghai for over three decades with their businesses established in Joffre Street, which was close to where Shen's parents used to live (*A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* 2015). A further reason for her appearance was out of Shen's admiration for her artistic achievement, as Sages had been a finalist on 20 occasions since 1990, surpassing Shen's 13 paintings selected for the Archibald Prize and subsequently making her "the most successful artist of Chinese *origins*" (McDonald 2015a, p. 13, italics in original).[145] In Shen's view, Sages was "a very important participant in the Archibald [Prize competition]" (Interviewee 4).

Alongside Shen's own works was an array of paintings from other Chinese artists. Zhou Xiaoping and Fu Hong, both seen by Shen as "representative painters in Melbourne" (Interviewee 4), were selected in this exhibition with their portraits of Australian Indigenous figures. Born and educated in Anhui Province, China, Zhou Xiaoping came to Australia in 1988 and had since spent many years living and forging relationships with First Nations communities in Arnhem Land and the Kimberley. In particular, Zhou's collaboration with the late Aboriginal artist Jimmy Pike resulted in the first Indigenous art exhibition in China at Hefei-Kurume Friendship Art Gallery in 1996, heralding "an unusual and significant cultural exchange between Chinese and Aboriginal artists" (*Australia China Stories* 2022, p. 100). In 1999, the two artists jointly held a second exhibition at the National Art Museum of China (National Portrait Gallery 2018), which "established a new chapter for audiences in China gaining a deeper understanding of Australian culture" (*Australia China Stories* 2022, p. 100). To capture their working relationship and celebrate the friendship between them, Zhou painted

[145] As Shen was curating this exhibition, he had been a finalist in the Archibald Prize 13 times. He became a 14-time Archibald finalist by the time the exhibition was delivered.

a double portrait entitled *Zhou Xiaoping & Jimmy Pike* (1998), which was featured in the *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* exhibition. This painting encapsulated the fostering of cultural understanding through people-to-people interaction, as manifested in the exhibition catalogue's description of Zhou and Pike's encounter,

> Xiaoping met the Aboriginal artist Jimmy Pike in 1990 for the first time in Broome and became good friends. A few years later in 1995, they met again in Fitzroy Crossing. Jimmy took Xiaoping travelling in outback of the region, teaching Xiaoping how to live in the bush, such as reading animals tracks, hunting, distinguishing poisonous and non-poisonous fruits and sharing Aboriginal stories with Xiaoping. In the evenings, they camped under a big tree in Fitzroy Crossing. The tree was very dense like an umbrella. It was Jimmy's home in Fitzroy Crossing.
>
> On cold evenings, they made bush fires, sharing the heat back to back. They often told each other their own stories and drew on their sketch books. They chose the subjects from what they saw during the day. They also drew each other, sometimes on the same page (*A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* 2015, p. 20).

Like his other works, Zhou's art is largely inspired by his life experiences in Indigenous communities. Such cultural immersion over the past decades, as Melissa Compagnoni (2022) notes, has "led to a lot of sharing and dialogue about painting styles and artistic choices. The two cultures, First Nations and Chinese, meet in Xiaoping's artworks". It is worth mentioning that this painting, *Zhou Xiaoping & Jimmy Pike*, was also selected as the cover of *Australia China Stories*, a book that was published by the Australian government on the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Australia and China in 2022. Underpinned by stories of people-to-people exchange and collaboration, it presented 50 vignettes that represented the rich fabric of the relationship between the two countries. The use of Zhou's double portrait in this context was indeed an apt choice.

Similarly, Fu Hong's portrait of Cathy Freeman, torch bearer and champion of the women's 400 metres at the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000, also reflected Chinese emigrant artists' interaction with Indigenous people in Australia. Fu first met Freeman at his exhibition of *Retrospective Exhibition of 15 Years in Australia*. As he recalled,

> Cathy loves my works, as she is such an excellent Aboriginal [sic], I did want to paint her…. I tried to present Cathy's tough and calm personality as a sport woman in my painting. Especially, her feet, the feet that used to break the world record (*A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* 2015, p. 34).

Until 2022, Fu has been an Archibald finalist four times. He was also the only Chinese-born artist included in the aforementioned *Archie 100: A Century of the Archibald Prize* retrospective exhibition.

A noticeable group of works included in this retrospective exhibition was concerned with reputable Chinese-Australians, particularly represented by Wang Xu and Chen Jun's portraits that both

involved John Yu, who migrated with his family in 1939 at the age of two. Yu is an eminent figure in Australia, achieving a series of professional and honorific titles. As introduced in the exhibition catalogue,

> John Yu is a distinguished paediatric doctor. A former chancellor of the University of NSW, he was chief executive officer of the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children during its relocation to Westmead. He was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 1989, a Companion of the Order in 2001 and was named Australian of the Year in 1996 (*A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* 2015, p. 38).

As the portraitist, Wang Xu expressed great respect for John Yu, as he said,

> [a]s a Chinese migrant myself, we share a similar cultural background, though I arrived in Australia much later. It must have been very difficult for Chinese migrants when John arrived here but he has made an extraordinary contribution to Australian society. I see him as a good example for migrants (*A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* 2015, p. 38).

Wang's feeling was echoed by Shen Jiawei, who perceived John Yu as "the pride" and "a representative figure" of Chinese–Australians (Interviewee 4), as he indicated the reason for including this portrait. Likewise, several other works selected by Shen also featured prominent Chinese-Australians. Such works included Shen's portrait of William Yang, a renowned photographer known for his documentation of the LGBTQI community; Xie Huihai's painting of Guan Wei, one of the top Chinese contemporary artists in Australia; and Liu Dapeng's portrait of Cao Yin, curator of Chinese art at the AGNSW. Clearly, the selection of these artworks demonstrated Shen's intent to underline Chinese migrants' accomplishments in Australia through such an exhibition.

Among all exhibited works, two portraits had achieved what Shen described as a "noteworthy" record, as they were the only portraits from Chinese Archibald finalists that had won the People's Choice Award (Interviewee 4). The first Chinese-born artist to receive this award was Zhao Dalu with his painting of Professor Stephen FitzGerald.[146] This painting was the only one that featured a sitter who was a former Australian official and, in Shen's opinion, was of "distinct meaning" (Interviewee 4). FitzGerald's career was deeply connected with China. He worked as a China specialist within the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs before taking up the role as China advisor to former Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam (1972–1975), followed by becoming the first Australian Ambassador to China from 1973 to 1976 (Whitlam Institute 2012a). As Shen noted,

> [FitzGerald] was an [Australian] ambassador who had seen China's first generation of leadership, including Zhou Enlai, Mao Zedong, and so on. [His] Mandarin is excellent, and both he and his wife speak Beijing dialect (Interviewee 4).

[146] The second Chinese-born artist who won this award was Adam Chang, also known as Zhang Hongjun, in 2011 with his painting of John Coetzee, recipient of the 2003 Nobel Prize in Literature.

FitzGerald was a key member in the process of Australia's recognition of China. In 1971, he was part of the Australian political delegation to China led by Gough Whitlam, then Opposition Leader of the Australian Labor Party, to discuss matters concerning the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries (Whitlam Institute 2012b). Despite being "a politically risky venture" at the time, this trip was a breakthrough in Australia–China relations, leading to the agreement with the Chinese government to initiate diplomatic relations on 21 December 1972, less than three weeks after Whitlam became the new Australian Prime Minister (Whitlam Institute 2012b). This bold initiative was a milestone in Australia's foreign policy in relation to China, marking a shift from a mindset dominated by "distrust, anxiety and paranoia" to focus on developing "a mature cultural, social and economic relationship" (Whitlam Institute 2012b). As a witness to this change, FitzGerald was representative of such a historical moment in the bilateral relationship between China and Australia. This portrait of Professor Stephen FitzGerald was donated by Zhao Dalu in 2011 to the National Portrait Gallery, from which Shen loaned the artwork for display in this retrospective exhibition.

In sum, Shen was given a great level of freedom to curate the content of this exhibition, which particularly showcased what Chinese-born artists had achieved in the Archibald Prize competition. The exhibition also reflected cultural and social interaction between Chinese-born artists and their fellow Australians as well as accomplishments of Chinese migrants in Australia at large, through stories behind exhibited paintings, portraitists, and sitters. The rich content manifested in this exhibition, therefore, provided opportunities for Australian viewers to understand the ongoing and multi-dimensional exchange between China and Australia particularly on a people-to-people level and, more broadly, a segment of the history of Chinese migrants in Australia. The curatorial outcome of this exhibition echoed a somewhat idealistic aim through the lens of cultural diplomacy: to facilitate the exchange of ideas and mutual understanding, which, as discussed before, was also a primary goal of this event.

8.5 Local response to the *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* exhibition

According to the CCCS, over 100 participants attended the opening of the retrospective exhibition, including politicians, arts and cultural professionals, general audiences, and media (China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2015d).[147] Some local perceptions of this exhibition are reflected in remarks from

[147] As mentioned in Chapter 1, the CCCS is located on one level of an office building in central Sydney. As a result, all of its onsite events are subject to a maximum occupancy limit for safety reasons. The CCCS's venue capacity limit, as Shen Jiawei recalled, was about 100 people, meaning that the attendance number for this opening event reached a full house in the context of a CCCS activity.

guest speakers, published comments on this exhibition, and recollections from a former Australian cultural diplomat to China, who participated in the launch of the exhibition.[148]

One main theme that appeared in remarks and comments on this exhibition was the acknowledgement of Chinese–Australian artists' accomplishments in Australia and their contribution to the Archibald Prize as well as Australia's multicultural dynamism. For example, Mr Mark Coure, Member for Oatley, emphasised the value of this exhibition and Chinese artists in Australia, stating that "this is certainly a great way for us here in New South Wales to witness the magnitude and cultural significance that Chinese artists play in our great state" (cited in China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2015d).

A large portion of attendees were people from the arts and cultural sphere, including many of the participating artists and their portrait sitters. In particular, as Shen recalled, Edmund Capon and Stephen FitzGerald were both invited and present at the launch of this event.[149] Capon spoke highly of the Chinese emigrant painters' contribution to the Archibald Prize and Australian society, remarking in his speech that the fact that the Archibald Prize

> has been so enlivened, stimulated and made more dynamic by the Chinese artists, I think it's an extraordinary contribution the Chinese artists have made in our community here. They are not just part of our life, they're part of our culture, they're part of our imagination, and they're absolutely part of our society (cited in China Cultural Centre in Sydney 2015d).

While not present at the opening event, Michael Brand, then Director of the AGNSW, underlined the significance of Chinese artists in Australia in a congratulatory letter, which was featured in the exhibition catalogue and read,

> Chinese artists as well as sitters have contributed greatly to the success of, and interest in, the Archibald Prize over many years…. Chinese artists' unique style and perspective on Australian culture add an invaluable dimension to Australia's art scene, making a significant contribution to Australia's multicultural society. I thank and congratulate the China Culture Centre for staging this exhibition, "A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists". It not only gives viewers a rare opportunity to understand the achievements of these Chinese artists, but

[148] There is limited public information regarding a wider audience's reaction, such as attendance and direct response, to this event over the entire exhibition period. The researcher acknowledges this as a limitation in terms of understanding the broader implications of this event on the general public. Nonetheless, this chapter draws on perceptions of key figures from diplomatic and arts spheres, whose views on this exhibition are publicly accessible. While they may only represent a group of Australians who are already involved with China and/or, more broadly, the arts, they are oftentimes opinion leaders in areas such as Australia–China relations and Chinese art and culture, hence having strong discourse power in shaping Australia's understanding of China and Chinese culture. Therefore, their perspectives on this exhibition are important in discussing the outcome of this event.

[149] According to Shen, portraitists Wang Xu and Jenny Sages, whose paintings were featured in this exhibition, also attended the opening event. A photograph posted by the CCCS captured the presence of Cao Yin and her portrait painter Liu Dapeng. This photo can be accessed via the following link: https://cccsydney.org/2015/07/28/a-retrospective-of-chinese-archibald-finalists-launched-in-china-cultural-centre-in-sydney/.

> also encourages further artists to participate [in] the Archibald Prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in the future (Brand 2015).

Stephen FitzGerald (2016) has gone further, arguing that the recognition of these Chinese artists' artistic and cultural contribution to Australian local society is important in the sense that the "interplay of influence and inspiration" shown in some of their works leads to a reflection of Australia's evolving perspectives of Asia and a deeper understanding of ourself as a nation. This point is loosely echoed by McDonald (McDonald 2015b), who notes that while the Archibald Prize was "a strictly Caucasian affair" as it was first awarded in 1921, reflective of "the homogenous nature of Australian society" at the time, the current exhibition is "an exercise in applied multiculturalism". Commenting on Zhao Dalu's win of the People's Choice Award in the Archibald Prize, FitzGerald was of the view that

> Dalu's People's [Choice Award] Prize was an important affirmation of the place and the contribution of all of these Chinese painters to the artistic life of Sydney, a small but illustrative part of a much wider story of Australia's coming to terms with Asia, from the White Australia in which I grew up in the 1950s to the opening of the Australian mind to Asian people, Asian influences in our daily lives, and Asian contributions to the creative and performing arts, as also in medicine, science, technology and the economy. This is a quite remarkable story of change … and I see this change as a significant turning or maturing in our history, and worth more than all the celebration people give to historical landmark events, like ANZAC, because it's about a society that showed itself able to move from insularity and narrow intellectual horizons and racial exclusiveness towards being an open, tolerant and accepting one (Fitzgerald 2016).

Following FitzGerald's point, one former Australian cultural diplomat, who attended the opening event, saw a specific value of this exhibition in enriching our understanding of Australia–China relations, as it "tells that there is a history that the relationship between Australia and China is not just what's happening today, it's what was happening 10 years ago, 20, 30, 40 years ago" (Interviewee 9).

The same interviewee also observed great interest from the audience at the exhibition. In this interviewee's opinion, the exhibition engaged with viewers through stories and connections evoked by the artwork, and this engagement was further enhanced by the presence of featured painters and sitters. As this interviewee elaborated,

> there was great interest [in the exhibition] … a lot of the people in the audience had some connection with it, as I recall. I mean, which is like the Archibald [Prize] itself, it's very popular because people know the people who have been painted, they know the subject. So, there were a lot of people in that exhibition, I can't remember exactly who, but I think Stephen FitzGerald was one, the first ambassador to Beijing from Australia. I think Edmund Capon was probably one. So, people feel a sense of connection, and they are connected, they know these people, and I think it was exciting because when I say they know them, it's usually because of a story about Australia and China, some connection between Australia and China that with the subjects of the paintings. So, Stephen FitzGerald is a very good example of that, and so, people who are connected to Australia–China relations in particular really liked that exhibition. And it was good to bring it all together, bring those works together (Interviewee 9).

It is in this sense that this interviewee perceived the exhibition as a successful attempt to appeal to local audiences, not least those who were involved with China and/or, more broadly, the arts. Speaking in the context of Chinese cultural diplomacy in Australia, the same former Australian cultural diplomat was in favour of such engagement, stressing the importance of "finding the point of connection". To this interviewee, *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* was

> an exhibition which was created locally, it wasn't just an exhibition that was coming from China and going to many different places, it was customised to the context (Interviewee 9).

Seeing this exhibition as a successful cultural diplomacy program, this interviewee even suggested the continuation of such an approach, noting that

> the Chinese Cultural Centre could continue that Archibald approach, that could be an ongoing event, because I'm sure every year there are more Chinese artists in the Archibald [Prize], [and] all those other prizes [associated with the Archibald Prize] (Interviewee 9).

In sum, the retrospective exhibition was interpreted, as shown in the above local perceptions, as a meaningful promotion of Chinese emigrant artists' contribution to Australia's arts and cultural landscape as well as its multiculturalism. Adopting a locally driven approach to the curation of this exhibition, the program was considered as an effective attempt in connecting with an Australian audience, whose professional and/or personal lives were broadly involved with China and/or the arts scene. The value of this exhibition was seen by these viewers in that it enhanced the understanding of Chinese artists and their artistic practice and of Australia's progression in its cultural and social perspectives, particularly in relation to China. These perspectives from the receiving end of Chinese cultural diplomacy broadly correspond to the CCCS's primary intentions to deliver this cultural event, which, as discussed before, aimed to promote the accomplishments of Chinese artists in Australia and foster mutual understanding.

8.6 Conclusion

This chapter has extended the discussion about the CCC's collaboration with local partners by presenting a further case event of the CCCS, *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* exhibition. From the CCCS's point of view, the purpose of this exhibition was primarily focused on promoting Chinese-born artists' achievement in the Archibald Prize and their contribution to the Australian arts scene and multiculturalism. Related to this, it further aimed to foster an understanding of the background and artistic practice of Chinese emigrant painters as well as to facilitate the exchange of ideas between artists and among audiences in Australia.

Unlike all previously analysed cultural programs, which were designed in China, the curation of this exhibition was commissioned to a Chinese–Australian artist in Australia. This showed further flexibility in the CCC project's working mode of collaborating with local partners. By working with the

curator and supporting his curatorial requests for improving the professionalism of this event, the CCCS, in turn, benefitted from the local partner's expertise and resources in organising a complicated event that involved selecting paintings from Chinese-born Archibald finalists, arranging loan process for the artwork, liaising with participating artists, and coordinating logistics for exhibited portraits.

The content of this exhibition mainly showcased what Chinese-born artists had achieved in the Archibald Prize. The exhibition also reflected cultural and social interaction between Chinese-born artists and their fellow Australians as well as accomplishments of Chinese migrants in Australia at large, through stories behind exhibited paintings, portraitists, and sitters. The exhibition content, therefore, provided opportunities for Australian viewers to understand the ongoing and multi-dimensional exchange between China and Australia particularly on a people-to-people level and, more broadly, a segment of the history of Chinese migrants in Australia.

In the context of cultural diplomacy, the goal of this exhibition was reflective of an idealistic understanding of cultural diplomacy, which is based on advancing mutual understanding, as discussed in Chapter 2. This intention was consistently shown in themes and topics evoked in the exhibition, including those showing the history and achievements of Chinese emigrant artists in Australia, and their continued engagement with Australian peers.

The curatorial approach demonstrated a more genuine focus on ensuring the quality of this exhibition, as can be seen in the initial negotiation between the CCCS and the curator. The CCCS's proactive engagement with the local collaborator further indicated a recognition of non-state actor's role in providing expertise and resources that the government oftentimes lacks while implementing cultural diplomacy.

Overall, the outcome of this exhibition aligned with its objectives, as manifested in comments, remarks, and recollections from attendees at the exhibition opening and concerned commentators. These people's professional and/or personal lives were typically already connected with China and/or the arts, and therefore, represent a particular group of the Australian public. Although there is a lack of information concerning a wider audience's participation in and perceptions of this exhibition, perspectives from those key figures in Australian diplomatic and cultural circles, whose views carry weight in these fields, provided valuable insights into the outcome of such an event. The program was largely perceived by these viewers as a meaningful promotion of Chinese artists' contribution to Australia's arts and cultural diversity as well as its multicultural society. The value of this exhibition was further appreciated and seen by such Australian diplomatic and cultural figures in that it helped comprehend Chinese artists and their artistic practice as part of the Australian story,

while enhancing the understanding of Australia's progression in cultural and social perspectives, particularly in relation to China.

Designing a Chinese cultural program in association with the popular Archibald Prize was an innovative choice. The conception of such an exhibition, which naturally combined Chinese-born artists and a topical art event in Australia, reflected familiarity with the local arts and cultural environment. It further showed the adoption of a bottom-up approach to conducting cultural diplomacy and the aim to increase the likelihood of connecting with the receiving audience in the host country. It is contributed to such a programming strategy that the exhibition was further considered as an effective attempt in engaging with the target audience in Australia.

So far, this study has discussed all three working modes of the CCC project and associated events through the case of the CCCS. Based on these analyses, the following chapter will summarise the main findings and arguments of this thesis, and identify avenues for further research.

CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSION

9.1 Overview

Along with China's rise in the 21st century, the Chinese government has placed a heavy emphasis on the value of culture in its national policy and international engagement. Since the launch of the "going out" policy in cultural sectors in the early 2000s, cultural diplomacy has been systematically conducted to increase the country's appeal and influence in the world. It is against this background that China Cultural Centres have begun to expand globally and come to the forefront of Chinese cultural diplomacy.

Although over two decades have passed since the commencement of its global expansion, the CCC project has not drawn sufficient academic attention and remains understudied. The aim of this study was to fill this gap by examining the CCC project in the context of China's cultural diplomacy. This research focused on two main questions. First, what is the role of the CCC project and how does it relate to China's cultural diplomacy in the 21st century? To address this inquiry, two sub-questions were formulated, namely, 1) what is the purpose of the CCC project and how does it operate? and 2) what programs does the CCC project deliver? The second research question asked how does the CCC project add to the understanding of China's cultural diplomacy in the 21st century? This question led to another two sub-questions: 1) what implications do the establishment, operation, and programming of the CCC project have for Chinese cultural diplomacy? and 2) what lessons can be learnt from the CCC project through the lens of cultural diplomacy?

This thesis consisted of nine chapters. Chapter 1 began by providing the context for this research, followed by explaining its rationale, design, and limitations. Chapter 2 started by discussing different views concerning the roles and forms of culture in the context of cultural diplomacy. By critically engaging in international debates about cultural diplomacy, it further distinguished cultural diplomacy from other related terms, including public diplomacy, cultural relations, propaganda, and soft power. Following this, the chapter presented two theoretical perspectives—functional and idealistic understanding—of cultural diplomacy and explained how cultural diplomacy was understood in this study. Facilitated by a review of China's foreign policy in the 21st century and its understanding of soft power, Chapter 3 discussed how cultural diplomacy was seen in China, particularly in relation to its purpose, actor, and approach. Based on the existing academic literature, this chapter also underlined perceived limitations in Chinese cultural diplomacy and presented Chinese scholars' alternative thoughts on China's conduct of cultural diplomacy. Chapters 2 and 3 discussed cultural diplomacy as a core concept in this research, reviewing similar and diverging views by theoreticians and practitioners from both inside and outside China. Taken together, these two chapters set up a theoretical background against which CCCs' purpose, setup, working modes,

and programs were examined in the following chapters. Chapter 4 started by outlining the history and development of the CCC project, followed by an analysis of its purpose, key relations, setup, and activities. It also identified practical issues of the CCC project from financial and operational perspectives. Chapters 5 to 8 discussed three working modes of the CCC project and their associated cultural events through the case of the CCCS. In particular, document and thematic analysis were conducted to examine selected cultural programs in terms of their goals, actors, approaches, and local reception in Australia. Based on data collected from government policy documents, media reports, and semi-structured interviews, Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 addressed the first research question from operational and programming perspectives. They further explained the implications of these aspects for the CCC project as part of China's cultural diplomacy, thereby responding to the second research question of this study. Chapter 9, the present chapter, concludes this study by presenting its main findings. It also discusses lessons that can be learnt from the CCC project in the context of cultural diplomacy. Furthermore, it identifies possible areas for future research.

9.2 Summary of main findings

9.2.1 The China Cultural Centre project in Chinese cultural diplomacy: rationale, primary purpose, and setup

Driven by a series of national policies, the recommencement of the CCC project started at the turn of the century. The number of CCCs has increased rapidly in the past two decades, during which China's international engagement has gradually become more proactive and forward-leaning as it aspires to re-emerge as a global power. The global expansion of the CCC project is also situated in a time when the concept of "cultural soft power" has gained traction among Chinese politicians and scholars who perceive culture as a valuable means for achieving the country's strategic goals, such as increasing its global appeal and influence. China has since heavily invested in promoting Chinese culture abroad through cultural diplomacy, attempting to shape a positive image, advance its ideas and values, and seek influence in the world. These strategic motivations are an integral part of the establishment of CCCs abroad, as manifested in both Chinese policymakers and Australian interviewees' perceptions of the primary purpose of the CCC project, as well as certain programs delivered at CCCs abroad. In this light, the recommencement and development of the CCC initiative is driven by a functional understanding of cultural diplomacy, which denotes "the deployment of aspects of a state's culture in support of its foreign policy goals or diplomacy" (Mark 2010, p. 66), and, as reviewed in Chapter 3, prevails in Chinese political and academic spheres.

Structurally speaking, CCCs are supervised by the MCT's BIEC, and operated through their headquarters formed by the MCT-affiliated entities. The administrative structure of the CCC project demonstrates a centralised approach to managing cultural diplomacy initiatives. This method is

indicative of the Chinese government's leading role in undertaking its international cultural promotion campaigns, as discussed in Chapter 3. The operation of CCCs also intersects with other public institutions, enterprises, and non-governmental organisations. These actors, though not part of the Chinese government, are either connected with or under the guidance of the MCT, further showing China's top-down style in conducting cultural diplomacy.

CCCs are established based on mutual consent between China and the host country at a national government level. Currently, they are spread across five continents, with Europe and Asia being their primary locations and no presence in North America. CCCs are set up as standalone organisations, which are physically independent entities without fixed partners in their host countries. This approach is similar to that of European cultural institutes, such as the Alliance Française, Goethe Institute, and British Council, which are created abroad as branches that are structurally independent of local collaborators in host countries and coordinated by a governing body in the home country (Hartig 2015). Meanwhile, China's approach to establishing CCCs differs from that of CIs, which are commonly established as "joint ventures" between Chinese and international partner organisations within foreign universities (Hartig 2015, p. 103). In practice, flexible models have been adopted to construct CCCs with the aim to increase the development efficiency and meet expected growth numbers, reflecting an emphasis on speed and quantity in China's cultural diplomacy, as noted in Chapter 3. Despite this, the development of the CCC project also faces practical issues, particularly in relation to funding and staffing.

9.2.2 Programming of the China Cultural Centre project: delivering cultural activities in the context of Chinese cultural diplomacy

In terms of programming, the CCC project is primarily focused on presenting arts and cultural activities, which range from visual and performing art programs to Chinese language and culture courses. From an operational standpoint, cultural events of the CCC project can be broadly understood through three working modes. One of them is the MCT-led global coordination. Events organised through this mechanism tend to follow unified themes that are prescribed by the MCT and largely aligned with China's diplomatic goals and national policy, hence reflective of a top-down programming approach. For the Chinese government's part, the implementation of this working mode is considered as a way to increase the influence of Chinese cultural promotions abroad through the global network of the CCC initiative. This indicates a perceived connection between the scale of cultural events, oftentimes manifested in numerical terms, and their impact. These characteristics of the global coordination approach have been demonstrated, as analysed in Chapter 5, in the planning and delivery of the commemoration of Tang Xianzu and William Shakespeare through the feature exhibition of *Dialogue Across Time and Space*.

A second working mode is the partnership between CCCs and Chinese provincial-level governments, which dispatch cultural programs to be presented at overseas CCCs on a yearly basis. Contributing to a sizeable portion of the CCC project's annual programming, this working mode adds to the number and scale of China's international cultural promotion through overseas CCCs. This global cultural projection is further seen, by the Chinese government in particular, as beneficial to showcase the perceived global appeal of Chinese culture and impact of Chinese cultural values. Guided and vetted by various levels of the Chinese government, these cultural programs have embodied strategic orientations and even a political overtone, as shown in the analysis, in Chapter 6, of the underlying objectives of the Happy Chinese New Year event and other cultural activities from provincial and municipal levels. The curation and selection of cultural events under this working mode have demonstrated tight control exercised by the MCT and Chinese provincial governments, indicating a strong governmental influence on China's conduct of cultural diplomacy. In general, the first and second working modes, though distinct from each other, both reflect traits of Chinese cultural diplomacy, as discussed in Chapter 3, including the functional understanding of cultural diplomacy, leading role of the Chinese government, and a quantity-driven mindset.

A further way in which CCCs carry out cultural activities is by collaborating with partners in host countries. This approach, though less often employed compared to the first and second working modes, shows the Chinese government's intent to make use of local resources for its cultural diplomacy practice. The utilisation of this approach can be identified, on the one hand, along the first two working modes, as manifested in Chapters 5 and 6 regarding the CCCS's work with Australian scholars and the AFC. On the other hand, it can also be seen in the CCCS's organisation of the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* and *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* exhibitions, as analysed in Chapters 7 and 8 respectively. Seen through the lens of cultural diplomacy, working with partners in host countries reflects the recognition of the value of non-state actors, such as civil organisations and individuals, in conducting cultural diplomacy. This emphasis is broadly in line with contemporary discussions about cultural diplomacy and connects with the view held by some Chinese scholars, as noted in Chapters 2 and 3. What could be further seen in the CCCS's collaboration with local partners, not least through the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* and *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* exhibitions, is a somewhat bottom-up approach to engaging with the local audience. Unlike the top-down approach adopted in the first two working mechanisms, this approach has suggested some level of programming flexibility and a more genuine attitude in facilitating mutual understanding and dialogue by consciously taking the audience's reception into consideration. This resembles what has been discussed in Chapter 2 as an idealistic understanding of cultural diplomacy.

In sum, the above section has presented the main findings of the CCC project in this research, which has drawn on the case of Australia and incorporated a wide range of data collected from policy documents of the Chinese central and local governments, websites of the headquarters of and individual CCCs, and reports from Chinese and foreign media on various CCCs. While this study does not claim to present definitive generalisations of CCCs worldwide or a specific account of any particular CCC, it has, instead, underlined the main aspects of the CCC project in relation to Chinese cultural diplomacy, as shown in the findings. Such themes may be manifested differently in various host nations and individual centres, but are, nonetheless, pertinent to the CCC initiative as a whole. The findings of this research further lead to certain implications of the CCC project as part of China's cultural diplomacy, to which the following section will turn.

9.3 Implications of the China Cultural Centre project as part of Chinese cultural diplomacy

9.3.1 Establishment, setup, and programming focus

As shown in its key relations, development, and primary purpose, the CCC project is closely associated with the Chinese government and its strategic motivations. While it is true that government links to cultural organisations can also be seen in cultural initiatives of other countries, such as the Cervantes Institute, Alliance Française, and Japan Foundation, cultural diplomacy scholars have cautioned the danger of state-led cultural diplomacy, which tends to be perceived as propaganda by the general public (Gienow-Hecht & Donfried 2010a). This is a particularly relevant point in relation to Chinese cultural diplomacy, as demonstrated by the case of CIs, which have caused ongoing controversy partly due to their connections with the Chinese government. Such concerns, compounded by geopolitical reasons, have further led to the closure of some institutes in North America, Europe, and Australia.

Interestingly, however, the CCC project, despite its strong affiliation with the Chinese government, has caused little controversy and resistance in host nations (Liu 2021; Zhang & Guo 2017). As shown in the present study, this is first concerned with its establishment and setup. As China's national cultural centre abroad, typically, only one CCC will be set up per host country. Admittedly, this approach has somewhat limited the pace and scale of its development, especially compared with those of the CI project, which is university rather than nation-based, and therefore has less self-inflicted constraints in its proliferation. Nonetheless, the CCC project's relatively moderate pace and smaller presence have been identified by some researchers as one reason for it receiving less criticism (Liu 2021; Zhang & Guo 2017). Secondly, the fact that there has been no CCCs established in North America, particularly the US, where China's cultural diplomacy has arguably been the most controversial, has also contributed to a less critical reaction to the CCC project from overseas. A comparison has been drawn between the presence of the CCC and CI projects in North

America in Chapter 4 to make this argument, albeit there has been no direct evidence showing that the lack of CCCs in the US is an intentional act of the Chinese government. Thirdly, the CCCs' standalone structure is similar to that adopted by foreign cultural institutes of other countries, such as the US and Germany. This structural similarity has led to perceptions, as informed by interviews in Australia, that the way CCCs have been set up is "familiar", "more easily understood" (Interviewee 7), and follows "international convention" (Interviewee 4). Their physical independence in host countries has also been compared with CIs and further seen as less intrusive (Interviewee 5). It is in this sense that the structural approach of the CCC project can be said to have helped ease potential concerns in such Chinese cultural diplomacy efforts.

Next to the nature of its establishment and setup, the CCC project's primary programming focus on presenting cultural activities at its self-owned venues is another aspect that leads to less controversy. In comparative terms, this approach contrasts with campus-based language instruction, which has been adopted by CIs and subsequently spurred concerns about the loss of academic freedom and integrity due to the Chinese government's potential influence, directly or indirectly, on Chinese language and cultural studies in foreign universities. This is not to say that questions around Chinese government influence do not apply to the programming of CCCs. In fact, the working modes of the CCC project, especially the first and second ones, have demonstrated noticeable influence from the Chinese central and local governments on shaping cultural activities presented at CCCs. As further manifested in Chapters 5 to 8 through the case of the CCCS, certain elements of cultural events have also reflected discernible alignment, to various degrees, with the Chinese government's policies and preferences. All these aspects have shown that, from a programming perspective, the CCC project is no less concerned with the issue of Chinese government influence than the CI initiative. However, it is the presentation of arts and cultural programs, coupled with a standalone structure, that makes the CCC project less prone to be exposed to and confronted with such issues and concerns that CIs have encountered in conducting teaching activities in a foreign educational setting.

9.3.2 Working modes and associated cultural events

The CCC's working modes of global coordination and partnership with provincial-level governments, as noted before, have shown a top-down approach to conducting cultural diplomacy. In practical terms, this is manifested in the projection of vetted cultural programs, which are closely aligned with China's strategic and political objectives, for boosting perceived cultural appeal and influence abroad. While such working modes can increase the number and scale of cultural activities through the global network of CCCs, they lead to two implications from a programming perspective.

First, cultural events carried out through a one-way projection tend to be less focused on the reception of the public in the host nation. This point has particularly been reflected in views of

Australian interviewees about cultural programs dispatched from Chinese provinces, indicating a homogenous programming and a lack of diverse themes and genres that appeal to various groups of local audiences. It should, however, be noted that this is not just a problem of the CCC project as it does not have much control and flexibility in curating and selecting such cultural activities. It is, rather, the top-down approach that risks these events being less responsive to the local audience's interests and preferences, as programming decisions have been made by the MCT and Chinese provinces, which do not directly interact with the overseas public and tend to approve these cultural activities as per domestic guidelines in China.

Secondly, cultural events delivered through these two working modes appear to have little impact in terms of gaining local exposure and reaching the general public, as can be seen in cases analysed in Chapters 5 and 6. This, on the one hand, could be concerned with a lack of intention/motivation to promote such events locally, as explained in those chapters. On the other hand, it could be partly related to a limited capacity that Chinese state actors, including the MCT, Chinese provincial-level governments, and CCCs, have to publicise these activities among a wider local public, as can be seen in the CCCS's presentation of cultural programs from Chinese provinces in Australia.

The third working mode of the CCC project differs from the above-mentioned approaches in that it involves collaborators in the host country. One implication that can be seen consistently from Chapters 5 to 8 is that these local partners have contributed to the CCCS's activities, albeit to different degrees and in different ways. In the case of the supplementary panel discussion on Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare, organised separately by the CCCS alongside the MCT-led global commemorative event, Australian scholars' expertise and support have helped add an extra layer to a highly uniform exhibition through dialogue and the exchange of ideas. In the CCCS's collaboration with the AFC, the latter has played an important role in increasing local exposure of cultural programs from Chinese provinces through its publicity and audience resources. The CCCS's cultural activities have similarly benefited from the knowledge, skills, influence, and network of different local partners, as demonstrated in the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* and *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* exhibitions. Moreover, as the planning of these two events has largely been locally-driven, with a noticeable attempt to engage with their viewers and promote understanding and dialogue, it has also led to a positive reaction in the host nation. This can be seen in local partners' willingness to collaborate, local media reports, and perceptions of interviewees, attendees, as well as commentators. Such response further represents demonstrable impacts of these events, which have been curated through a bottom-up approach, on their receiving audiences.

9.4 What can be learnt from the China Cultural Centre project in the context of cultural diplomacy

The CCC project, as noted earlier, has attracted little controversy during its global development over the past two decades. While some researchers consider this lack of criticism as proof of its success, Liu (2021) challenges such an assumption by suggesting that the purpose of cultural diplomacy is not simply about evading criticism. The researcher agrees with Liu in the sense that cultural diplomacy, as understood in this study, is "the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding" (Cummings 2003, p. 1). Therefore, the CCC project's avoidance of controversy is not direct evidence of its success as part of Chinese cultural diplomacy. However, a less critical reaction to CCCs from overseas audiences remains valuable in China's cultural diplomacy. This is because the prospects of such cultural endeavours, as shown in Gil's (2022) research, are partly "shaped through responses to them" in host countries, as demonstrated in the case of CIs. In this light, a lack of resistance to CCCs abroad leads to a less harsh international environment, which, in part, reduces the external hindrance to their continued operation and development in the world. More specifically, this is manifested in the fact that there has so far been no reported termination or public calls to oppose the establishment of CCCs. Reflecting on the development, setup, and programming emphasis of the CCC project, it can be said that a relatively moderate pace, less intrusive setup, and primary focus on cultural events are meaningful lessons that can be drawn upon in China's future cultural diplomacy practice.

Following this, a further question emerges, namely, what could potentially contribute to the success of the CCC project through the lens of cultural diplomacy? One relevant aspect is related to audience reception. The above reflection concerning how the CCC project is viewed outside China reminds us of the important element of the receiving audience, who, as Rawnsley (2021) suggests, essentially decides the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy. As such, cultural diplomacy, which promotes understanding and dialogue with those in the host nation, is not a monologue but needs to reach and engage with its target audience abroad. From a programming point of view, this further means that the success of the CCC project is concerned with the reception of its cultural programs and the impact they have on the foreign public. To this end, CCCs should be given more flexibility and freedom to self-curate cultural programs by adopting a bottom-up approach, which, as shown in this research, increases the likelihood of engaging with the receiving audience and generating more qualitative outcomes in cultural diplomacy, particularly compared with other working modes of the CCC project. Furthermore, CCCs should also be encouraged to collaborate with partners in host countries, so as to harness local resources for reaching and connecting with audiences abroad. In the partnership between CCCs and Chinese provincial-level governments, the latter should consult with the former on local audiences' cultural preferences and habits and offer more tailored programs

to be presented at CCCs in host nations. In the meantime, CCCs should also actively facilitate such a localisation process by providing necessary assistance in translation, contextualisation, and presentation of cultural programs from Chinese provinces and cities. In other words, a country-specific strategy is necessary in implementing cultural diplomacy activities for connecting with audiences in different geographical locations, in which historical, political, religious, and cultural contexts vary (Richter 2022). As Cynthia Schneider (2003) notes, while symphony performances from the US can attract a large number of audience in countries, such as Germany and Russia, where similar musical traditions are shared, a visiting American symphony engaged only with foreign diplomats in Oman, where, in contrast, hundreds of local residents showed up to a lecture by Tomas Friedman—a respected author on the Middle East. In connection with this, a former Canadian High Commissioner to India recalled that tapping into the Indo–Canadian artistic community and connections between Bollywood and the Toronto International Film Festival worked better in providing opportunities for engagement across different cultures, languages, and religions, as opposed to simply promoting what Canadians consider to be their great artists (Goff 2013). To re-orient programming strategies of CCCs, it would further require the Chinese government to adopt a less centralised approach to managing the CCC project. That is to say that CCCs need to have more operational and programming autonomy.

The success of the CCC project is also dependant on how its practical challenges can be further tackled to ensure a sustainable and effective operation abroad. These challenges, as exemplified before, are particularly manifested in such issues as funding and staffing, which are reflective of broader problems in China's cultural diplomacy and may become more obvious as the number of CCCs continue to rise. As Liu (2021, p. 216) argues, the success of China's cultural diplomacy "needs to be measured not by how big the stride is or how extensive the footprints are, but by how deep the footprints are and how long-lasting the impact is". While those practical issues are unlikely to be fully resolved quickly, more attempts can be made to reduce their impact. From a budgetary perspective, for example, CCCs should continue to make use of and further explore local partnerships to co-fund their cultural diplomacy programs. This can be an efficient way to lower the costs of delivering cultural activities in host countries, as manifested in the CCCS's collaboration with the AFC, which effectively covered venue hire as well as publicity and marketing costs that constituted a significant part of the event budget. In addition, CCCs could also introduce more for-profit events, such as concerts and performances, in addition to existing language and cultural courses, hence broadening their sources of income. In terms of staffing, ongoing training and proper selection processes should be implemented to help address the lack of professionals and experts at overseas CCCs. On the one hand, more resources and opportunities need to be provided on a continued basis to the MCT's dispatched staff, building and strengthening their language and

cultural capacity to undertake activities in host countries.[150] One relevant example that can be drawn on is manifested in the Australian foreign services system, in which a range of professional development programs are available to government officials and diplomats to build their diplomatic and international engagement capacity. In particular, the Diplomatic Academy, a specialist learning hub and key partner of the Australian Public Service learning system, offers training that covers "geographic literacy, languages, negotiation and advocacy skills, global governance architecture, bilateral and multilateral agreements, foreign policy, security and trade diplomacy, with a strong focus on the Indo-Pacific region" (Diplomatic Academy n.d.). Moreover, language tuition services have recently been launched by the University of New South Wales (UNSW) to prepare Australian diplomats for their overseas postings (Inside UNSW 2022). On the other hand, when selecting personnel for CCCs, the MCT should consider their familiarity with the language, culture, history, religion, and values in the host nation, because, as Mulcahy (1999b, p. 5) emphasises, "[e]ffective cultural diplomacy must be sensitive to intellectual, religious, artistic, and other ostensibly nonpolitical developments abroad". Such linguistic and cultural capacity would, at least in part, reduce barriers to CCCs' communication and interaction with the local public. More importantly, for CCCs' managerial staff, having an understanding of the social and cultural milieu in local society may also contribute to programs that are more connected with the local audience. This has been reflected in the design of the *Jewish Refugees and Shanghai* and *A Retrospective of Chinese Archibald Finalists* exhibitions, both of which were conceived by CCCS's inaugural Director Zhao Li, whose long-term working and living experience as a Chinese cultural diplomat in Australia afforded her the knowledge, skills, and network to devise those cultural programs. To further address the lack of staff with local language proficiency, the MCT could further consider offering some junior positions at CCCs to Chinese university graduates who are specialised in host country languages, especially those other than English.

9.5 Avenues for future research

This research opens the door to further studies on the CCC project through the lens of Chinese cultural diplomacy. The following section identifies several directions for future research from both thematic and methodological perspectives.

9.5.1 Research on other China Cultural Centres

Firstly, while the present study draws on the case in Australia, CCCs in other countries could be further examined. Despite recent studies by Chen and Wang (2019), as well as Wang et al. (2021),

[150] The MCT has previously organised some training sessions for staff working at CCCs. Nonetheless, such trainings appear to be short-term and discontinued. See details of the first training which was held in 2017 in Beijing for eight days: https://cn.chinaculture.org/pubinfo/2022/07/22/200001003006/a73d4b3a21eb479ea405393de6b9d1ad.html.

having focused on the CCC in Bangkok, Thailand, there has, to the researcher's knowledge, not been sufficient case studies conducted based on CCCs in Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Such research will provide more insights into the CCC project through different geographical focuses. In addition, comparative analysis could also be conducted on CCCs across these different geographical locations. This will help add to the understanding of the CCC project as a whole.

9.5.2 Research on China Cultural Centres through a domestic lens

Secondly, it would also be worthwhile looking at the CCC project from a domestic point of view and examining its value and impact in relation to Chinese domestic politics. This is because, as pointed out by Yang Yifan (2020, p. 369), Chinese public and cultural diplomacy not only target the foreign public but also shoulder "the responsibility of accruing legitimacy for the country, both internationally and domestically". As such, further studies can be conducted with a focus on domestic publicity and reports concerning CCCs by the Chinese government and state-owned/affiliated media, and how such portrayal of the CCC project is received by the Chinese public in relation to the country's rise and interaction with the world. Research through this angle may lead to different understandings regarding the implications of the CCC project. This will also provide another dimension to assess the effectiveness of the CCC project, in line with Yang Yifan's (2020) call to re-evaluate Chinese public and cultural diplomacy by looking inward.

9.5.3 Quantitative research on China Cultural Centres

Thirdly, from a methodological point of view, quantitative research will be useful to further understand the impact of the CCC project on foreign audiences' perceptions of itself and its cultural events. For example, a recent study conducted by Wang et al. (2021) integrated statistical analysis to investigate the CCC in Bangkok's international communication capacity in Thailand. Based on 195 questionaries, it examined local residents' overall perceptions of China, understanding of the CCC in Bangkok, participation in its events, preferences in media use, and general comments on the CCC in Bangkok. This type of research will be of value to offer more generalisable conclusions concerning the performance of CCCs in their host countries.

9.5.4 Comparative research on China Cultural Centres and Confucius Institutes

Fourthly, while this study has drawn preliminary comparisons between the CCC and CI projects in relation to their setup and programming focus, more in-depth research could be undertaken to examine the similarities and differences in their cultural activities, audience reception, and efficacy as Chinese cultural diplomacy initiatives. These research agendas will further enrich the knowledge and lessons with respect to Chinese cultural diplomacy.

9.6 Final remarks

This thesis has made an original contribution to the understanding of the CCC project through the lens of Chinese cultural diplomacy. In-depth analysis has provided insights into the CCC's establishment, operation, and programs through a range of data sources, including 13 semi-structured interviews in Australia, which the existing academic literature on CCCs lacks. More specifically, this study has explained why the CCC project has attracted little controversy, especially compared with China's other flagship cultural diplomacy project, the CIs, in relation to its setup and programming focus. It has further shed light on the CCC project's operation and, based on the case of the CCCS, examined its implications for Chinese cultural diplomacy. These aspects can deepen our knowledge of the CCC project and have yet to be fully investigated in the current academic literature, which, as pointed out by Wang et al. (2021), tends to be largely focused on describing the development and history of the CCC project. As an important cultural diplomacy initiative of the Chinese government, the CCC project requires further study. Therefore, it provides ample and diverse research agendas that will help advance our understanding of China's interaction with the world through cultural means.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I List of interviewees

Number	Occupation	Date	Method
Interviewee 1	Australian academic	26 February 2022	Email
Interviewee 2	Chinese Australian artist	11 March 2022	Zoom
Interviewee 3	Australian arts leader	7 April 2022	MS Teams
Interviewee 4	Chinese Australian artist	9 April 2022	Zoom
Interviewee 5	Australian academic	13 April 2022	MS Teams
Interviewee 6	Australian musician	13 April 2022	Email
Interviewee 7	Former Australian cultural diplomat to China	19 April 2022	Zoom
Interviewee 8	Australian arts administrator	24 April 2022	MS Teams
Interviewee 9	Former Australian cultural diplomat to China	26 April 2022	Zoom
Interviewee 10	Australian curator	29 April 2022	MS Teams
Interviewee 11	Holocaust survivor	11 May 2022	Zoom
Interviewee 12	Australian academic	12 May 2022	Zoom
Interviewee 13	Former Chinese cultural diplomat to Australia	15 June 2022	Email

Appendix II Interview questions (Chinese and English)

关于项目 Cultural programs

- 您曾经参与（或参加）了悉尼文化中心的那项活动
  Could you talk about the program on which you worked with/in which you participated in the CCCS?

- 您或您所属的组织是如何参与到该项目中的？
  How were you/your organisation involved in this program?

- 您或您所属的组织为何选择参与该项活动？
  What motivated you/your organisation to attend or to be involved in working with the CCCS on this program?

- 您在该项活动中主要做了哪些事情？
  What role did you/your organisation play in this program?

- 悉尼文化中心为该项目提供了哪些支持？
  What did the CCCS provide for the program?

- 该项目的主题是如何选定的？您觉得选择这一主题的原因是什么？
  How was the theme/content of the program designed? In your view, why such theme/content was chosen?

- 该项目的受众是谁？
  Who was the target audience?

- 通过参与该项目，您希望向观众表达什么？您觉得悉尼文化中心通过该活动想向观众表达什么？
  What message did you/your organisation wish to convey to the target audience through this program? What message do you think the CCCS intended to send to the target audience?

- 您个人或您所属机构是否对该活动进行了宣传推广？如果是，请说明推广目标。
  Was the program promoted through you/your organisation? If so, what was the promotional goal?

- 您或您所属的组织在参与该活动过程中，是否存在不顺利的地方？如果有，可否举例说明？
  Was there any challenge during the process in which you/your organisation worked with the CCCS on this program? If so, what was it?

- 您觉得该项活动在组织方式上有哪些优势和不足？
  What is your view regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the way in which this program was organised?

- 您觉得该活动在组织方式上是否存在可以改进的方面？如果有，可否举例说明？
  Do you think there was anything that could have been done differently to improve the organisation of the program? If so, what was it?

- 据您观察和了解，参加该项目观众的数量和结构是怎样？
  Do you have any information about the audience demographics and number of this program?

- 您觉得该项目受众是否对此项目感兴趣？如果是，您觉得程度如何，并且，该项目是如何吸引其受众的？
  Do you think the audience was interested in this program? If so, to what extent did the program engage with the target audience? How did the program do it?

- 您觉得这样的吸引力是否使项目变得更加成功？
  Do you think this engagement made the program more successful?

- 您觉得项目哪些方面可以改进以便进一步吸引观众？
  Do you think there was anything that could have been implemented to improve the engagement with the audience?

- 您是否了解观众对该项目的反馈或评价？
  Have you had any information about audience feedback and comments with respect to this program?

- 您所属的组织是否对该项目进行了评估？如果是，结论是什么？
  Was there any evaluation of the program from your organisation? If so, what was the main conclusion?

- 当地媒体对该项目有何反应？
  Have you had information about how local media responded to the program?

- 您觉得该项目对澳洲观众关于中国的看法上有影响吗？如果有，可否举例说明？
  Do you think this program had any impact on the Australian audiences' view towards China? If so, what is it/are they?

关于组织结构 Structure

- 您对悉尼文化中心的设立方式怎样看？悉尼文化中心的结构是否与中国在澳其他文化外交项目（例如孔子学院）存在异同？
  What is your view regarding the way in which CCCS is set up? What are the similarities and differences between CCCS's structure and that of China's other cultural diplomacy initiatives in Australia such as the Confucius Institutes (CIs)?

- 在您看来，悉尼文化中心的结构有哪些利弊？
  What do you think are the pros and cons of the CCCS's structure?

- 与中国在澳其他文化外交项目（例如孔子学院）相比，文化中心似乎未引起较大争议，您同意这样的看法吗？如果同意，您觉得导致这样差异的原因是什么？
  It appears that, compared to China's other cultural diplomacy initiatives in Australia such as the CIs, the CCCS is less controversial, do you agree with this view? If so, what might be the reasons for this disparity?

- 您觉得悉尼文化中心的官方背景是否对其项目策划和运行有影响？如果是，请举例说明？
  Do you think the CCCS's official background has any impact on its programming and operation in Australia? If so, what is it?

- 您觉得悉尼文化中心的官方背景是否对澳洲民众对中心本身及其项目的看法有影响？如果是，请举例说明。
  Do you think the CCCS's official background has an impact on how Australian people perceive the centre and its programs? If so, what is it?

- 就此方面，您觉得悉尼文化中心有哪些值得借鉴之处？
  What lessons do you think the CCCS can learn in this regard?

一般性问题 General questions

- 您觉得澳洲民众对中国文化和艺术的哪些方面最有兴趣了解？
  Which aspects of Chinese art and culture do you think the Australian audience is most interested in knowing?

- 您觉得悉尼文化中心的项目总体上是否反映出对澳洲当地观众喜好的考量？如果是，请举例说明。
  Do you think CCCS's programs, in general, reflect the consideration about such local preference (s)? If so, could you elaborate with an example?

- 请您举出一个您认为中国在澳最为成功的文化外交项目，并阐述原因？
  Could you give an example of what you consider a successful Chinese cultural diplomacy initiative/program in Australia? What makes you think this initiative/program is successful?

Appendix III Interview questions for former Chinese cultural diplomat to Australia (Chinese and English)

- 您认为在澳设立中国文化中心的目的是什么？
  What do you think is the purpose of establishing the China Cultural Centre in Australia?

- 中心如何在澳实现这样的目标？
  How does the China Cultural Centre in Australia achieve its purpose?

- 中心主要通过哪些机制在澳开展文化艺术项目？
  What are the main working modes through which the China Cultural Centre in Australia carries out arts and cultural programs?

- 中心通过这些工作机制在澳取得了怎样的成效？
  What has the China Cultural Centre achieved through such working modes?

- 中心文化艺术项目中既有来自国内的（如文旅部或合作省份）也有中心在当地自主策划的，这两类项目在内容和组织方式上有哪些不同？
  What are the differences between the China Cultural Centre's programs that are dispatched from China (for example, through the Ministry of Culture and Tourism or partner provinces) and curated locally in relation to their content and approach?

- 中心在澳开展文化艺术活动面临哪些机遇和挑战？
  What are the opportunities and challenges for the China Cultural Centre in Australia to conduct arts and cultural events?

- 有些人认为，文化中心与孔子学院在目标、工作方式及活动内容上具有相似性。您对此怎么看？
  Some people hold that China Cultural Centres and Confucius Institutes are similar in their purposes, working approaches, and activities. What is your view on this?

Appendix IV Explanation and examples of themes and sub-themes

Theme 1 General understanding of the CCC project

"General understanding" includes participants views on the CCC project's function, form of activities, structure, affiliation, and influence. It applies when participants articulate their perceptions of the above aspects in relation to the CCC project. This themes further contains the following sub-themes:

Subtheme 1 Function
Subtheme 2 Form of activities
Subtheme 3 Structure
Subtheme 4 Affiliation
Subtheme 5 Influence

Theme 2 Working modes

"Working modes" concerns the ways in which the CCC project operates. It is used when interviewees describe their understanding of the CCCs' approach in association with both Chinese domestic partners and local collaborators in the host country. This theme includes the following sub-themes:

Subtheme 1 Domestic dimension
Subtheme 2 Local dimension

Theme 3 Cultural programs

"Cultural programs" is related to interviewees' response to cultural activities planned and delivered in CCCs. It includes sub-themes concerning how cultural events are designed, target audiences, and how such events are perceived by the respondents, as summarised below.

Subtheme 1 Design
Subtheme 2 Target audience
Subtheme 3 Perception

Theme 4 Implications

This theme contains participants' views regarding the implications of the CCC's working modes, cultural programs, and other general aspects including its function, form of activities, structure, affiliation, and staffing on its operation in the context of cultural diplomacy. It is manifested in the below sub-themes.

Subtheme 1 General aspects (*function*, *form of activities*, *structure*, *affiliation, staffing*)

Subtheme 2 Working modes

Subtheme 3 Cultural programs

Theme 5 Lessons

"Lessons" relates to participants' views regarding what can be drawn on from the CCC project through the lens of Chinese cultural diplomacy.