

THE
WEST
WING

Policy Advice Track China 2024-2025

FROM PORCELAIN TO JADE

Strengthening the Dutch Perception in China

This report has been published in May 2025 by The West Wing: the official youth think tank of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This external report does not represent the views of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs nor of the experts consulted or interviews or feedback.

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Preface

The West Wing is the official youth think tank of and for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and *Adviesraad Internationale Vraagstukken* (Advisory Council on International Queries). As a youth think tank, we advise the ministry on various areas of Dutch foreign policy. Founded in 2015, The West Wing has grown tremendously in recent years. What began as a think tank for the Western Hemisphere Directorate has since evolved into a think tank for the entire Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We now also collaborate with other ministries and organisations. The West Wing consists of a carefully selected group of 60 young professionals and students from various academic backgrounds. Each year, a new group of members volunteer to ensure that the voice of young people is heard in Dutch foreign policy.

This year, the Dutch Embassy in Beijing, China, tasked the West Wing with a policy research question on public diplomacy efforts. The report is aimed at the Dutch Diplomatic Network in China. This report aims to answer the question: *what causes the declining perception of the Netherlands in China, between 2022 and 2023, and what type of public diplomacy measures can the Dutch diplomatic network in China undertake to reverse this trend?*

The report has combined various research methods, such as literature, interviews, and quantitative methods, to probe into this query. Crucially, a series of recommendations has been constructed to give substance to the research question. The appendices provide further clarity to our study and include a list of tables and figures, a comparative study of the foreign policy decisions on China by different countries, data and conclusions from the survey distributed through the official channels of the embassy, and a list of experts interviewed.

This comprehensive advisory report was written by the following policy advisors: Job De Bolle, Ditte van Dalen, Mike Geerts, Ferdinand Hamer, Olivier Hulst, Carmen Kooij, Laura Nijssen, Petter Reijalt, Friso Smedes, Taco van Thiel, Jade Tolstead, Wicher Verhage, and Cootje van Weerden. The layout of this comprehensive advisory report was designed by Mike Geerts, Petter Reijalt, and Jade Tolstead. On behalf of the authors, our sincere gratitude goes out to the well-experienced co-readers.

This report does not represent the views of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Dutch Embassy in Beijing, the *Adviesraad Internationale Vraagstukken*, or the consulted experts for co-reading this report. This concerns an external advisory report.

Chinese names and terms are transcribed according to the Hanyu Pinyin system (without tone markers), with the Chinese characters provided upon first reference. References are presented according to the 18th edition of the Chicago Manual of Style. Abbreviations can be found in the List of Abbreviations.

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rijnstraat 8, The Hague, The Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Commissioned by The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Beijing.

Published: 22nd of May 2025

Foreword

The Hague, May 2025

It has been an honour to guide 12 talented, enthusiastic, and devoted individuals in completing this policy research for the Netherlands Embassy in Beijing, China. The output is the result of eight months of work, 15 individual track sessions, and countless hours of probing into all aspects of Chinese life, culture, and society. Moreover, it is the combined effort of many people involved, to whom I would like to express my gratitude.

Firstly, much of the gratitude goes out to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and, in particular, the staff of the Dutch Embassy in Beijing, China. First and foremost, thank you for presenting us with an interesting yet challenging policy question, and secondly, for your guidance and expertise on the topic of Dutch public diplomacy efforts in China. In particular, I would like to thank Marit Bastiaansen, Ingrid de Beer, and Ivy Cao for their support. Whether it was meeting once every two weeks, sharing knowledge about Embassy life, or aiding in translation efforts, your help has made a significant difference in the quality of this policy research.

Secondly, I would like to thank the individual members of Track China. Reflecting on eight months of research, the diversity in terms of academic background has made our group both dynamic and effective. Bringing together students from China studies, medicine, computer science, international relations, and law had dawned on me as a challenge, but turned out to be our strongest trait. I sincerely hope that when you browse through the pages of this report in the future, you recognise your academic expertise imprinted on the pages, supplemented with a new dose of knowledge on public diplomacy in China.

The last group concerns an undefinable set of people who have all helped with this policy research. I recognise this is a large group to thank in one go, but they are equally worthy of praise. From the countless people who voluntarily participated in an interview, to the hundreds (!) that filled in our survey. And from the other The West Wing board members for facilitating this research, to the individuals who have proofread our report. There are simply too many people to thank who have been involved in the conception of this report! Hence, on behalf of the members of Track China, I thank all involved.

The coming chapters will guide you through a policy research question that was proposed to us well over 10 months ago. The report has been written in such a way that the main conclusions and recommendations should be clear and succinct. We hope you enjoy reading the report and recognise the work that has gone into it.

非常感谢,

Taco van Thiel

Trackleader China

Board Member The West Wing 2024-2025

Executive Summary

The report discusses the decline of the public perception of the Netherlands in China on the NBI, having declined from the 13th rank in 2022 to the 25th in 2023. Whilst the decline was a source of concern for public perception and its implications for bilateral relations, since China is an essential trading partner, enhancing the Netherlands' image is both a reputational and a strategic economic necessity. This report identifies the main drivers of perception change and offers practical policy recommendations to enhance Dutch public diplomacy in China in diplomatic presence, strategic communication, and institutional engagement with Chinese stakeholders. Relying on a mixed-methods approach —with interviews, survey data, a sentiment analysis, and comparative case studies—this report establishes findings and recommendations that inform efforts to promote the Chinese perception of the Netherlands.

Key Findings:

Governance

- Bilateral trade relations are robust, however, tensions regarding de-risking, export controls of semiconductors and U.S. alignment strain the relationship.
- State visits lack cultural components, follow-up and media interaction, and local partnerships lie underutilised for national diplomatic use.
- External geopolitical tensions influence the broader diplomatic climate.

Social Media

- Social media plays a crucial role in shaping Chinese perceptions of the Netherlands, particularly Weibo.
- Due to limited Dutch visibility in Chinese online discourse, its image is greatly influenced by reports such as ASML export controls and general anti-Western sentiment.
- Amplified by algorithms, social media reports are likely to display negative material and shape public opinion accordingly.
- Dutch online disengagement worsens the image, and strategic digital diplomacy is necessary.

Culture & Tourism

- Culture is a significant soft power tool, but Dutch engagement in China is limited.
- Negative impressions persist due to weak cultural narratives and fewer cultural exchanges between the Netherlands and China (after COVID-19).
- Tourism has a high potential, especially among young Chinese, but readiness is lacking.
- Symbolic, non-political activities foster goodwill.

Education

- Public diplomacy through education, for instance, in the form of educational exchanges or research collaborations, plays a crucial role in fostering long-term bilateral ties and shaping international perceptions.

- Chinese students value Dutch education but face discrimination, strict visa policies, and limited housing options in the Netherlands - the latter three factors contribute negatively to the perception of the Netherlands.
- Developing study opportunities and collaborative research can strengthen relations, particularly when research topics are of interest to both China and the Netherlands.
- Besides study exchange, it is also important to engage with alumni to foster the development of young professionals, for example, by internship facilitation, networking events, or innovation and leadership programmes.

Economy

- Economic relationships are paramount; an apolitical, cooperative partnership based on trust is necessary.
- Sustainability (with a focus on agriculture, water management, renewable energy and circularity) is an enormous collaborative opportunity.
- Demographic transformation generates like-minded healthcare and housing challenges in China and the Netherlands.
- Urban local partnerships and intelligent housing add value.
- Understanding of *guanxi* (关系) and CEO- and COO-driven trade mission prioritisation enhance success.
- The Netherlands must come across as a balanced and equal partner.

Policy recommendations:

Governance

- Promote the use of sister city partnerships.
- Emphasise the role of the Netherlands as a neutral and reliable European partner.
- Incorporate state diplomacy with cultural dignity (e.g., Chinese symbolic and cultural meanings).

Social Media

- Take an active presence on Chinese sites such as Weibo and Douyin with short, visual and apolitical posts that foster positive engagement.
- Promote Dutch icons such as Miffy, tulips, windmills, Heineken, Dutch art, and sports with overt national branding.

Education

- Organise an annual Innovation and Leadership Programme by the DDNC.
- Enhance the accessibility of education exchanges - financially in the form of grants and scholarships, and through information provision.
- Stimulate Dutch universities to strengthen partnerships and educational exchanges, such as exchange programmes, summer schools, academic conferences, and workshops, with Chinese universities.

- Foster academic and research collaborations in mutual fields of interest. Prioritise collaborative research in non-sensitive domains, such as climate, agriculture, and water management.
- Invest in offering internship opportunities to (Chinese) students at Dutch companies for the enhancement of informal ambassadors and people-to-people ties.

Culture & Tourism

- Design replicable Dutch cultural events in China that are youth, family, and women-friendly.
- Invest in city-to-city relations with a blend of culture, education, and business.
- Employ sports and shows to build people-to-people relations.

Economy

- Market Dutch products as 'Made in the Netherlands'.
- Use Dutch agri-tech, water, and energy capabilities to support China's goal of carbon neutrality in 2060.
- Facilitate trade and knowledge missions, with a prominent role for CEOs and COOs, to ensure effective dealmaking.

Abstract

This report analyses the Netherlands' public image volatility in China, as measured by the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brand Index (NBI)—plummeting to 25th in 2023 before rebounding into the top 10 by 2024. Drawing on the Chinese proverb 修身齐家治国平天下 (by improving upon yourself first, one can manage the family, govern the state, and bring harmony to the world), the report situates national image-building not as cosmetic diplomacy, but as a practice of moral cultivation that requires long-term consistency, cultural empathy, and strategic intent. The Netherlands' reputation in China, once as fragile as porcelain, now requires the strength of jade—valuable not for perfection but for virtue and sincerity.

With a mixed-methods strategy—combining expert interviews, Chinese sentiment analysis, surveys, and comparative case studies—the report tracks the key drivers of Chinese public opinion towards the Netherlands in five themes: governance, digital diplomacy, culture and tourism, education, and economic cooperation. It reveals that tensions over technology exports and geopolitical alignment have strained mutual trust, but the Netherlands continues to resonate through its sustainable innovation, water management and agri-tech, higher education, and quality manufacturing strengths. However, these strengths have yet to translate into a strong reputation in China due to low online presence, muted cultural branding, and underutilised subnational and people-to-people diplomacy.

Traditional Dutch public diplomacy must now resort to the Chinese proverbial adaptive proverb 以柔克刚 (overcome the rigid with the gentle). The report recommends gentle but strategic action to rebuild and sustain Dutch presence in the Chinese public domain: active engagement on social media like Weibo, Douyin; building symbolic diplomacy through tulips, Miffy, art, and cycling culture; reviving city-to-city relations as modern-day trade guilds for the information age; and strategic repositioning of Dutch universities, water, tech and circular economy knowledge as neutral, high-added-value assets.

Finally, the 2024 recovery of China's position towards the Netherlands cannot be viewed as a fleeting seasonal tide, but rather as the pre-emptive reaping of more fertile diplomatic sowing. Like the Dutch dikes that protect the country from the sea, reputation strength needs to be consistently maintained, lest the erosion of trust creeps back. In a reality where perception increasingly governs access, and symbolism carries strategic meaning, the Netherlands must base its public diplomacy less on strategy alone, but also on sincerity—the exchanging of merchant instinct for the philosopher's hand, and confronting China's subtlety with humility, foresight, and cultural fluency.

Keywords: *Public diplomacy, social media, cultural sensitivity, sustainable innovation*

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List of Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
ASML	Advanced Semiconductor Materials Lithography
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COO	Chief Operating Officer
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
DAAD	Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (German Academic Exchange Service)
DDNC	Dutch Diplomatic Network in China
EU	European Union
F1	Formula One
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
KLG-ITM	Kuijken Logistiek Groep - In The Money
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NBI	(Ipsos-Anholt) Nation Brands Index
NL	The Netherlands
NLP	Natural Language Processing
NSFC	National Natural Science Foundation of China
PCA	Principal Component Analysis
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PRC	People's Republic of China
R&D	Research and Development
QR	Quick-Response (code)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
U.S.	United States (of America)
VNG	Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten (Association of Netherlands Municipalities)
VWS	(Ministerie van) Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport (Dutch Ministry of) Health, Welfare, and Sport

Introduction

The Netherlands and China share a pragmatic relationship that is steeped in a history of significant interconnectedness. Whilst several differences divide the two countries, both benefit greatly from the economic partnership that has ensued from their long-standing diplomatic ties. The longevity of this relationship has, usually, ensured that the Netherlands enjoyed a strong reputation as an open and global country.¹ In other words, the Dutch brand has been regarded favourably.

Indeed, for some parts the positive image of the Netherlands in China can be attributed to specific narratives of history, particularly, the Dutch historical (but also contemporary) expertise in water management and the country's maritime heritage, earning it the title of the 'coachman of the sea' (海上马车夫).² Although these narratives are tied to the Dutch colonial past, mostly experienced by China through the colonisation of Taiwan in the 17th century and the Dutch participation in the unequal treaty system, the Chinese perspective on this mainly focuses on other countries that had a greater role in the (semi-)colonialism of China.³ Furthermore, the Netherlands is also appreciated by the Chinese because it was one of the first Western countries that recognised the PRC, as early as 1950, even though diplomatic relations were actually normalised in May 1972.⁴

However, recently, cracks have started to appear in this positive reputation. According to the NBI of 2023, the Netherlands has experienced a significant decline in public perception among the Chinese population, falling from 13th place to 25th place within a single year.⁵ This sudden change necessitates an analysis of the causes and targeted measures. As multiple scholars have highlighted, although China lacks direct electoral accountability, public opinion has the power to influence foreign policy decisions because of the party-state's focus on maintaining political legitimacy.⁶ A declining public perception of the Netherlands in China can thus be linked to the bigger picture: the risk of structural decline of the bilateral relations, which in turn could have a significant negative influence on investment flows and weaken collaboration on issues of mutual interest.

This policy paper thus seeks to delineate the perception of the Netherlands in China, and the future role the Dutch Diplomatic Network in China (DDNC) can serve to further improve the perception. Therefore, the recommendations that have been drafted centre around the underlying purpose of providing the DDNC with a clear and cohesive narrative that can be applied in the exercise of public diplomacy. As such, this report highlights the need for a narrative in which the DDNC can operate with clarity, cohesion, and stability. The current Chinese public perception of the Netherlands is the result of a complex sum of factors, such as geopolitical incidents, cultural differences, educational mishaps, political polymorphisms, and the new forms of digital interaction.

In light of this, this report aims to answer the following question:

What causes the declining perception of the Netherlands in China, between 2022 and 2023 and what type of public diplomacy measures can the Dutch diplomatic network in China undertake to reverse this trend?

The report is structured into five main research areas that shed light on the decline of perception: governance, social media, culture & tourism, education, and finally, economy. These five main research areas have been chosen based on factors analysed by the NBI. The NBI factors ‘culture and heritage’ and ‘tourism’ are merged in one chapter. ‘Exports’ and ‘immigration and investments’ are merged into the economic research area. The NBI has originally highlighted the significant shift in public opinion toward the Netherlands, which makes it a key reference point for understanding the dynamics at play and lies at the foundation of this paper. Following a detailed description of the current state of affairs in the area pertaining to the specific chapter, subsequent recommendations can be found in the recommendations chapter.



The Governance chapter will discuss the different levels of diplomatic and governmental relations which shape the narrative of interaction.



In the Social Media chapter, the prominent role of social media in shaping Chinese perceptions of the Netherlands is examined.



In the Culture chapter, the effects and future of cultural diplomacy and tourism will be explored against the backdrop of the relationship between the Netherlands and China.



In the Education chapter, the potential effects of education diplomacy on the perception of the Netherlands in China are explored.



In the Economy chapter, the significance of the economic cooperation between the Netherlands and China is put into the framework of sustainable development, demographic shifts, and culturally informed business practices.

Methodology

This report employs a diverse methodological approach, combining the analysis of primary and secondary literature and primary sources in Chinese, English, and Dutch, interviews with numerous experts, and statistical analysis based on existing data and a survey. This mixed-method approach allows us to answer the research question in a comprehensive and well-rounded manner, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data. Further details regarding the interview methodology and statistical analysis are provided in the appendices.

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INTRODUCTION



Nation Brand Index

Origin and purpose of the index⁷

In today's interconnected world, a strong national reputation can be a valuable asset for a country, positively influencing its social, economic, and cultural progress. Like businesses and products, countries, cities, provinces, and regions each have distinct identities. Simon Anholt introduced the concept of 'competitive identity', which involves analysing and refining these identities, so that a nation can strengthen its global standing through strategic policies and initiatives.

The term 'nation brand' was first coined by Anholt in 1996, marking the start of a new field of research and practice. Anholt helped countries in planning policies, investments, and innovations aimed at improving their global reputation.

Since 2008, Ipsos, a leading global market research firm, has partnered with Anholt to deliver the NBI on a yearly basis. The NBI provides a tool for governments to understand and improve their international reputation, supporting growth in trade, tourism, and global influence.

Methodology⁸

The NBI measures the image of 60 different nations through an online survey. The survey respondents are from 20 major advanced and emerging economies, reflecting a balanced geographical and economic representation. The respondents themselves are selected to provide a representative sample of their country's key demographic characteristics.

The NBI examines the perceptions of six aspects of a nation's identity. These six aspects — exports, governance, culture, people, tourism, and immigration investment — together make up the 'Nation Brand Hexagon', providing a multidimensional country image.



Figure 1: The 'Nation Brand Hexagon'.

The NBI score is calculated as the average of the scores from the six factors mentioned above. Each index consists of three to five rating questions, where responses are measured on a 1 to 7

Likert scale. 7 represents the highest or most favourable rating, 1 the lowest or least favourable, and 4 serves as a neutral midpoint, indicating neither a positive nor negative perception.

Components of the Nation Brand Index⁹

This metric comprises several factors.

Exports

Firstly, whether a country is considered innovative on the national and global stage. Secondly, whether a country has notable strengths in science and technology. Lastly, the presence of a ‘country-of-origin effect’, which states how more or less likely a product is to be bought based on knowing the origin of the product.

Governance

This aspect incorporates global behaviour in the realms of reduction of world poverty, environmental protection, and international peace and security. Additionally, it includes a government’s respect for its citizens’ rights and how it treats its those, and lastly the perceived honesty and competency of the government.

Culture

This metric considers contemporary cultural aspects of a country, including films, music, literature, arts, and excellence in sports. This coupled with the country’s heritage forms the cultural aspect of the NBI.

People

The metric regarding people is measured by assessing the country’s ‘friendliness’. This is in turn, assessed by measuring whether an individual feels welcome when they visit the country. In addition to this, the respondents are asked whether they would want to be close friends with individuals from this country, to measure the appeal of the people on a personal level. Lastly, an inference is made concerning the professional level by measuring how willing one is to hire someone from this country.

Tourism

The tourism aspect consists of three factors: vibrancy of urban life and attractions, historic buildings and monuments, and natural beauty. By assessing how likely someone is to visit a country under the condition that money is not an issue, the index also measures the potential for tourism.

Immigration & investment

The last factor, immigration & investment, aims to measure a country’s power to attract capital and talent. This includes several factors; the perception of quality of life in that country, whether people would consider living, working and studying in that country, the perception of economic prosperity of a country, and lastly equality of opportunities.

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GOVERNANCE



1 Governance

- Bilateral trade relations are robust, however, tensions regarding de-risking, and export controls of semiconductors and U.S. alignment strain the relationship.
- State visits lack cultural components, follow-up and media interaction, and local partnerships lie underutilised for national diplomatic use.
- External geopolitical tensions influence the broader diplomatic climate.

The Netherlands and China share a long history of political and diplomatic relations, which form the foundation of their strong and enduring economic partnership. The official diplomatic relations between the two governments were formalised in 1972.¹⁰ The 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations was grandly celebrated by both countries in 2022.

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To shape effective public diplomacy strategies aimed at improving the perception of the Netherlands in China, it is essential to understand the effects that political and diplomatic engagements can have on this perception. Therefore, the following chapter starts by outlining the three levels of government interactions: multilateral, bilateral, and local, in order to grasp the different levels of relations. Secondly, the chapter highlights the strategic value of state visits between China and the Netherlands by comparing two such visits and drawing lessons from each in relation to public diplomacy efforts. Thirdly, the chapter examines the effect of Dutch foreign policies on China's perception.

1.1 Levels of government interaction

Multilateral ties

As the Netherlands actively participates in multilateral organisations and supports the rules-based international order, China views it as a constructive and pragmatic actor. This pragmatic attitude is a stance that the Netherlands should take in its diplomatic efforts.¹² Medium-sized powers that support multilateralism are often seen by China as valuable for building coalitions, especially when larger economies (like the U.S.) take more confrontational stances.¹³

However, the evolving strategic posture of the European Union, particularly its shift toward “de-risking” from China, contributes negatively to the Chinese perception of the Netherlands. As an EU member state, the Netherlands is aligned with broader European efforts to reduce strategic dependencies on China in critical sectors like technology and supply chains. For example, Dutch restrictions on the export of advanced semiconductor technology to China, influenced in part by U.S. pressure, have drawn strong criticism from Beijing.¹⁴ Although the Netherlands often frames such decisions within the context of EU security and economic resilience, China may perceive these moves as aligning with Western containment strategies. These strategies refer to the coordinated efforts by the U.S. and its allies to curb China's rising global influence through technological restrictions, economic measures, strategic alliances, and ideological positioning.¹⁵ This could undermine the previously positive image China had of the Netherlands as a neutral and trade-focused partner.

Bilateral ties

The bilateral relations between the Netherlands and China have significantly strengthened over the past decades. Economically, China is an important trade partner for the Netherlands. In 2021, the trade volume between both countries exceeded \$116 billion, making the Netherlands China's second-largest trade partner within the European Union.¹⁶

However, there are also tensions, particularly regarding technology and export controls. In January 2025, Chinese Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang met with King Willem-Alexander in The Hague, where China expressed its willingness to strengthen cooperation to maintain the stability of the global supply chain. This meeting took place shortly after the Dutch government expanded export controls on advanced semiconductor equipment on request of the United States.¹⁷ These tensions led to a shifting narrative from pragmatic cooperation towards de-risking and de-coupling China strategies at the EU level.

Local ties

At the local level, there are many city-level and province-level relationships between China and the Netherlands. Several Dutch cities and provinces have formalised their partnerships with Chinese counterparts through sister city agreements. Such formalised relationships are meant to facilitate (economic) cooperation and improve mutual understanding.¹⁸ For example, the Rotterdam-Shanghai sister city partnership celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2019. During the event, the cooperation between the cities was further deepened, with the mayors of both cities signing a renewed MoU.¹⁹ The value of this partnership is the establishment of KLG-ITM, a supply chain service joint venture which has positioned Rotterdam as a European hub for Chinese business, enhancing its global trade connections.²⁰

These multilateral, bilateral, and local-level ties demonstrate the diverse and dynamic relationship between the Netherlands and China, offering both opportunities and challenges at various levels.

1.2 The strategic value of state visits in shaping the Netherlands' image in China

In an era where diplomatic visibility is deeply linked with public narratives, state visits play an influential role in shaping how the Netherlands is perceived in China. Whether conducted by the monarch, the prime minister, or municipal leaders, these visits are vital channels for building trust, projecting values, and cultivating long-term cooperation.²¹ Their importance is amplified in China's political culture, which places high value on ceremonial symbolism and personal presence in diplomacy.²²

The 2015 state visit by King Willem-Alexander and Queen Máxima embodied many of these elements. The programme included official ceremonies in Beijing, cultural visits to Dashilan during Beijing Design Week, and environmental tours on the Loess Plateau. The couple also attended a youth football training session, visited the Sino-Dutch Dairy Development Center, and met with civil society and business leaders.²³ The visit's geographical breadth, across Beijing, Shaanxi, Shanghai, and Hangzhou, reflected an awareness of China's regional diversity

and urban transformation. At Alibaba's headquarters in Hangzhou, the launch of the 'Holland Pavilion' illustrated a forward-looking e-commerce agenda. Gary D. Rawnsley, "China Talks Back: Public Diplomacy and Soft Power for the Chinese Century," in *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, ed. Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2008), 302–311.

Despite these accomplishments, the visit fell short in some respects. Although it included symbolic and sectoral diversity, the public diplomacy dimension remained limited. The engagement with youth, though present, did not extend to major university platforms, interactive formats, or digital outreach via Chinese social media. Cultural activities, whilst substantive, were not embedded in strategic communication campaigns that could have expanded their reach and resonance.²⁴ Furthermore, many agreements signed lacked visible follow-up mechanisms to ensure sustained collaboration.²⁵

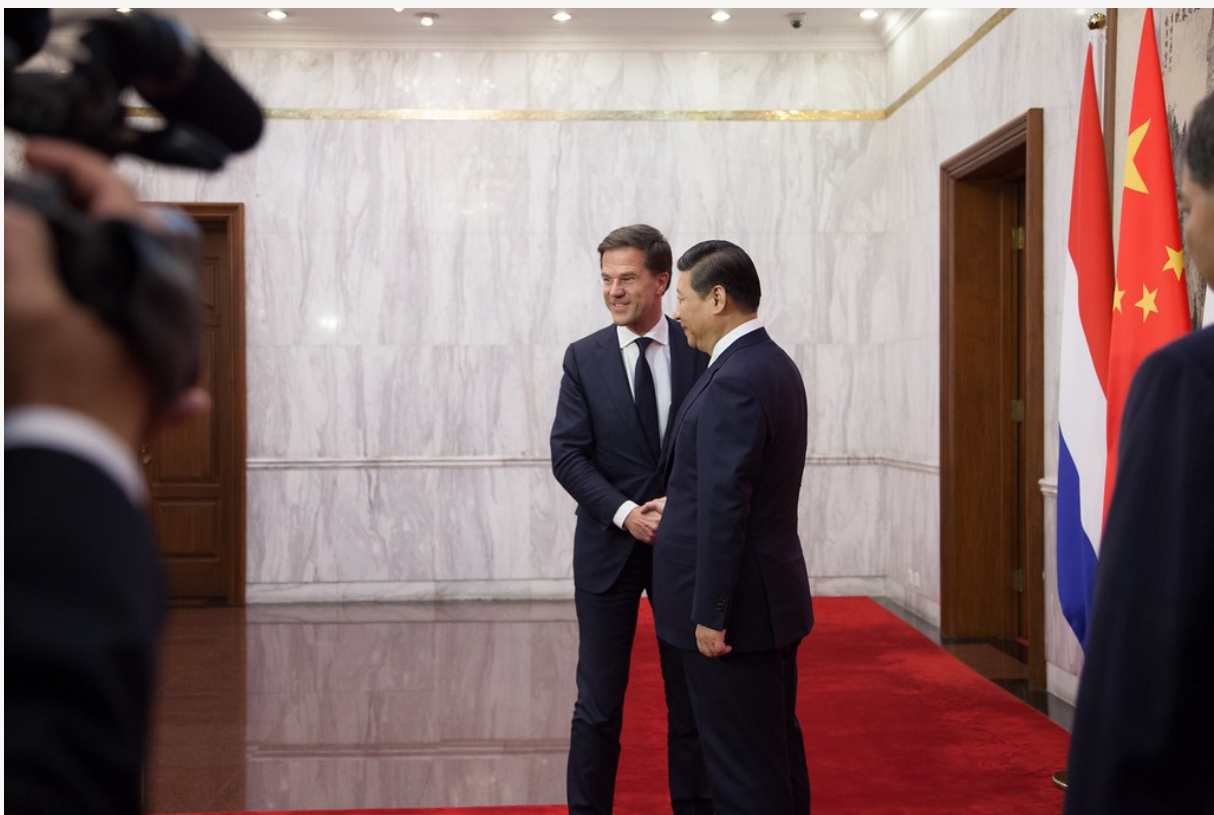


Figure 2: Mark Rutte and Xi Jinping

In contrast, Prime Minister Mark Rutte's 2024 working visit reflected more focused yet timely engagement. Alongside Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation Van Leeuwen, Rutte participated in a dinner with Dutch business representatives in China and met with both President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang. Topics included bilateral trade, the war in Ukraine, and the Middle East.²⁶ The visit also included a notable public diplomacy component: a 'college tour' discussion with students at Peking University, a roundtable with Chinese and Dutch students, and a walking tour of Dashilan with local entrepreneurs. These elements addressed a previously underused avenue, youth and academic outreach, helping to personalise the Dutch presence.

Chinese media framed the visit as strategically significant, taking place amid tensions over ASML's restricted chip exports. Whilst acknowledging the strain, coverage emphasised shared interests in green technology, biopharmaceuticals, and AI, and welcomed Rutte's affirmation that "decoupling is not a Dutch policy option." President Xi stressed cooperation over confrontation, positioning the Netherlands as a pragmatic European actor.²⁷ However, Rutte's visit remained constrained in time and lacked a coordinated cultural programme, engagement with Chinese media, or broader ministerial presence that could have maximised its impact.

In addition to national-level visits, there remains an underutilised opportunity in municipal and regional diplomacy. Rotterdam maintains a sister-city partnership with Shanghai and shares interests in sports, technology, culture, and sustainable urban development. These subnational interactions, when strategically aligned with national goals, can generate durable forms of localised trust and cooperation.²⁸

1.3 Foreign policies and strategies

Geopolitical tensions have influenced diplomatic relations between the Netherlands and China. The motion by Sjoerd Sjoerdsma (D66) to declare genocide against the Uyghur minority created a ripple effect that negatively impacted diplomatic ties.²⁹ In this context, different experts mentioned that the Netherlands should prioritise a more discreet, diplomatic dialogue rather than public condemnation on sensitive issues. Putting a focus on cooperative topics, as mentioned in the other chapters, could foster a sense of mutual understanding.

A key challenge for the Netherlands is navigating the binary narrative between Western critiques of China and China's counter-narrative. The Netherlands must emphasise its role as a neutral and reliable European partner, committed to fostering international cooperation without aligning too closely with either side. The Dutch government must not let geopolitical considerations outweigh the importance of economic and technological partnerships, ensuring that economic decisions remain strategic and mutually beneficial.³⁰

Moreover, the Netherlands is often associated with the EU and NATO in the eyes of the average Chinese citizen. This association complicates and influences perceptions of the Netherlands, particularly regarding its foreign policy choices.³¹ To improve this perception, the Netherlands must carefully balance its national interests with its obligations as an EU member state, emphasising its independent, pragmatic approach in engaging with China.

1.4 Conclusion

At the multilateral level, the traditionally positive image of the Netherlands as a neutral and constructive partner is under pressure due to its alignment with broader European efforts to reduce strategic dependencies on China. On the bilateral side, whilst economic ties remain robust, tensions surrounding technology and export controls pose significant challenges. At the local level, cultural and economic partnerships continue to flourish, yet aligning these local ties to national goals can enhance broader development.

State visits have played a central role in shaping Chinese perceptions of the Netherlands. A

closer analysis of recent visits reveals both the strengths of the current approach and opportunities for deeper engagement, such as embedding cultural components, leveraging Chinese (social) media, and strengthening regional diplomatic channels. In terms of economic collaboration, aligning Dutch expertise with China's long-term priorities opens avenues for mutually beneficial cooperation. Finally, the chapter highlighted how geopolitical tensions, especially regarding sensitive issues, have influenced the broader diplomatic climate.

THE
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SOCIAL MEDIA



2 Social Media

- Social media plays a crucial role in shaping Chinese perceptions of the Netherlands, particularly Weibo.
- Due to limited Dutch visibility in Chinese online discourse, its image is greatly influenced by reports such as ASML export controls and general anti-Western sentiment.
- Amplified by algorithms, social media reports are likely to display negative material and shape public opinion accordingly.
- Dutch online disengagement worsens the image, and strategic digital diplomacy is necessary.

2.1 Introduction

In today's hyperconnected world, social media posts can significantly shape people's perception of nations. Tools such as the NBI surveys, which ask whether someone has visited a website or social media site from or about a country,³² do not capture the complexities of how national perceptions are constructed in this digital age. We argue that social media is one of the most important drivers of public perception in China. As a form of mass communication, social media has existed since the early days of the internet, and has steadily grown in importance for users worldwide.³³ Social media enables real-time interaction between individuals and plays an active role in shaping perceptions. Content shared about a country can quickly attract attention and influence the perception of that particular country.³⁴ The chapter starts with a general overview of how social media and public diplomacy intersect. We then turn to the Chinese social media landscape to illustrate the importance of social media in shaping perceptions of other nations. Finally, we examine how this can lead to declining perceptions of the Netherlands among Chinese social media users through statistical analysis and discussion of a few posts on Weibo. Our analysis is grounded in secondary and primary sources, a statistical analysis, and a discussion of the findings from the interviews.

2.2 Social media as a tool of public diplomacy

The core goal of public diplomacy is to influence foreign publics to better align with the geopolitical goals of an international actor. Public diplomacy through social media is not bound by hard power, which means small power states or non-state agents can use it to achieve their goals.³⁵ Manor and Segev state that what they call "ICT-based networks" can increase small(er) states' influence in international diplomacy.³⁶ Kosovo, for example, managed to overcome its limitations in the small number of staff and physical embassies it has and still became an integral part of various UN missions.³⁷ Individual citizens and politicians can also affect the image of a nation through the use of social media.³⁸

The possibilities of social media are endless, yet governments do not seem to fully capture its potential. States see their social media platforms merely as a method to broadcast their

messages. However, the importance of listening and two-way communication with audiences should be emphasised in light of the public diplomacy efforts of countries.³⁹

2.3 Operating in Chinese social media discourse

In China, social media use has skyrocketed in the past decade, and Chinese netizens are now the largest online community in the world.⁴⁰ In 2018, 758 million Chinese people were using social media, which has grown to 1.08 billion at the start of 2025, 76.5% of the total population.⁴¹ Chinese netizens have the ability to choose from many different platforms. For example, a platform such as Weibo, frequently called the ‘Chinese Twitter’, serves as a social space for both casual chatting and serious discussions on trending topics and international news, whilst a platform like Douyin revolves more around entertainment in short video format. The trendy Xiaohongshu (小红书) or RedNote, as it is more commonly known in English, offers a mix of lifestyle and travel content, but is also a space for social discussions. The latter platform fosters a community that is mostly upper-class, educated, and female.⁴²

China’s online media landscape can be characterised as increasingly regulated. However, there is sometimes still room for considerable debate. Official state media narratives found on Chinese social media aim to guide public perception and build support for both domestic and foreign policies. Despite this, experts, scholars, citizens, and occasionally even officials, express diverse opinions on social developments, government policies, and international affairs, through social media, not always aligning with the views of the Chinese party-state.⁴³ For example, one clever way to evade censorship on social media is the use of homophones. One famous example among the many is the use of the word “harmony”, *héxié* (和谐), a government slogan promoting social unity. Due to its association with censorship, users would say “I have been harmonised” (我被和谐了) when their content was removed. Netizens later replaced it with the homophone “river crab”, *héxiè* (河蟹). This wordplay became a symbol of resistance against censorship. Of course, the Chinese authorities can also censor the new homophones used in online discourse. However, the flexible nature of the Chinese language, combined with some human creativity, ensures that new alternatives will always emerge, keeping the cycle of resistance and censorship ongoing.⁴⁴

2.4 Social media and the Chinese worldview

Several recent studies have shown that for Chinese people, social media is now the main source of information about other countries, overtaking ‘traditional’ media like newspapers and television.⁴⁵ Platforms such as WeChat and Weibo serve as tools for fostering national unity and controlling domestic discourse whilst selectively disseminating information abroad.⁴⁶ Though, as argued above, differing opinions can indeed be found, online discourse is closely managed to reflect government narratives as much as possible, especially on international affairs. Particularly, the platform Weibo may be of interest here. Weibo is the most dominant social media in the category of trending news and popular culture.⁴⁷ Research on Chinese international students in the Netherlands reinforces these findings and suggests that social media is also the most relevant source of information for Chinese immigrants and Chinese people specifically

interested in the Netherlands. Based on this information, it is reasonable to conclude that social media may be one of the most important factors in determining the Chinese perceptions of the Netherlands.⁴⁸

This does not necessarily mean that direct experiences with the Netherlands through a study abroad programme or tourism, political events, or state-led cultural diplomacy, are irrelevant in shaping perceptions. However, social media functions as a platform where those experiences and events are interpreted. Users often see other people's experiences on social media, even if they haven't lived them themselves, and form their own ideas based on what others share. The power of social media in shaping the Chinese perception of the Netherlands thus lies in acting as a lens through which other things, such as political developments, cultural exchanges, or personal experiences, are interpreted. As a result, social media plays a central role in constructing broader narratives and perceptions about the Netherlands.

Interviews overwhelmingly support the assertion that social media is a fundamental driver of Chinese perceptions of the Netherlands. A majority of interviewees emphasised that digital platforms play a crucial role in shaping public awareness and attitudes toward the Netherlands and other countries. To gain insight into how Chinese people see the Netherlands, it is important to consider how the country is represented on Chinese social media. As such, this phenomenon is explored by analysing several posts on Weibo.

2.5 Chinese social media perceptions of the Netherlands

Weibo is the most dominant social media in the category of trending news and popular culture.⁴⁹ The platform's users frequently express strong opinions about various countries, including the Netherlands. Furthermore, researchers examining Weibo have observed that anger might be one of the most infectious emotions on the platform. Anger frequently focuses on social issues within the country as well as diplomatic disputes, leading to extensive reposting and heightening hostile views toward the countries involved.⁵⁰ For example, researchers found that among Chinese social media users, those who primarily used Weibo were more likely to hold unfavourable perceptions of EU-China relations than users of platforms such as WeChat or Douyin.⁵¹

Indeed, anti-Western sentiment is common, with official messaging often framing China's relationship with the West as a fundamental rivalry, something that is likely to intensify if tensions with the U.S. keep escalating.⁵² Europe, meanwhile, receives relatively little attention in Chinese media. Chinese media generally focuses more on the U.S., Japan, and neighbouring countries.⁵³ When Europe is focused on, though, it is frequently depicted as an extension of American interests. This is all summed up very well in a Chinese headline from last year of a quote from Vladimir Putin: "Regarding China, Europe is a dog on a leash held by the U.S."⁵⁴ Important to realise is that this narrative of subordination extends beyond just Europe as a continent or the European Union as a whole; it also applies to individual European countries. Looking at the Chinese online discourse surrounding the Netherlands, this narrative increased when the Dutch government, under pressure from Washington, partly restricted the export of photolithography machines made by ASML.

The two takeaways confirmed in the interviews make up for a lack of literature and information on the Chinese perception of the Netherlands. Firstly, social media is the primary source of information about foreign countries. Secondly, the identifying characteristics of the Netherlands remain largely invisible in the Chinese digital discourse. This lack of visibility can lead to a limited awareness of Dutch business and cultural strengths, with the Netherlands only gaining (often negative) attention through major national news stories, such as the ASML export restrictions.⁵⁵

The figure below shows a sentiment analysis of translated posts in Weibo for the period 2015 to 2025. The posts collected are scored based on sentiment. The higher the ‘sentiment score’, the more positive the sentiment expressed in the post. The sentiment score is calculated using *deberta-v3-base-absa-v1.1*, which is a Natural Language Processing Model (NLP). From the sentiment analysis, two conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, it is evident that the trend line is decreasing. This indicates that the sentiment score in collected Weibo posts is decreasing over time. Secondly, the analysis shows a relation between posts that mention particular news events and the sentiment score. We have highlighted two news events of interest, namely news on Taiwan and on ‘Tech Keywords’ like ‘ASML’, ‘lithography’, and ‘chip’. For example, when the Dutch Royal Navy passed through the Taiwan Strait, posts with a lower sentiment score started appearing. This indicates that the Chinese sentiment towards the Netherlands is sensitive to current events.

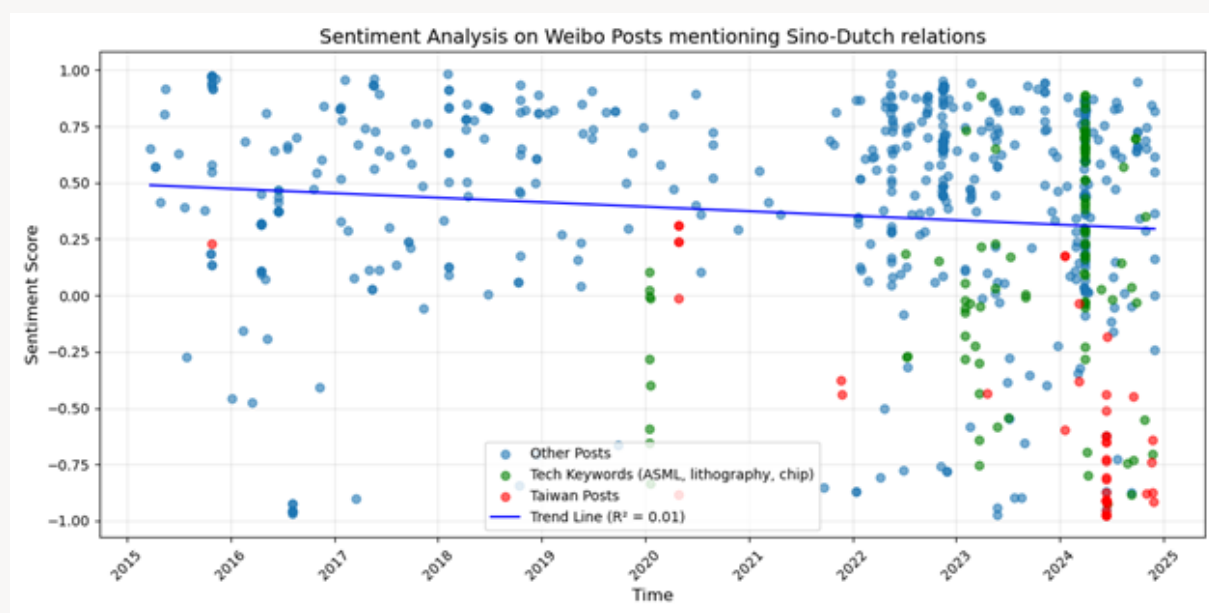


Figure 3: Sentiment Analysis on Weibo Posts mentioning Sino-Dutch relations

To illustrate how such sentiment is expressed in practice, it is helpful to examine two Weibo posts. These posts, whilst anecdotal, capture broader patterns in Chinese online discourse and offer insight into how specific events are framed and received by the public.

One notable post was shared by the user 寰亚 SYHP on March 21, 2023, from Hong Kong.⁵⁶ The account, which has nearly 2 million followers and frequently shares news about the West,

gained attention with their post, now having over 1000 likes and 150 comments. The post is one amongst many that highlighted the warning of the Chinese Ambassador to the Netherlands, Tan Jian, that Dutch export restrictions on lithography machines to China would harm Sino-Dutch relations, global trade, and the Netherlands' technological leadership. Tan Jian notes that it was very clear that the U.S. was behind the push to suppress China's development. Most comments are quite negative about the Netherlands. One user commented for example that, "If they [Dutch people] don't listen to the advice [of the ambassador], they will [only be able to] eat grass later" (不听劝那就让你以后吃草), with another mockingly replying under it that, "They could eat tulips" (可以吃郁金香).

Another post with a similar sentiment was posted by the account of Phoenix TV on the 24th of June, 2023.⁵⁷ Phoenix TV is a news outlet coming out of Hong Kong. Though it is sometimes more liberal than its mainland counterparts, it is under significant influence from the CCP.⁵⁸ In this instance, the outlet shared a video of Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang addressing the press in Beijing following discussions on export restrictions with Dutch Foreign Minister Wopke Hoekstra. The post gained considerable traction, with the most-liked comment stating: "The humiliation of the Eight-Nation Alliance invasion should be remembered" (八国联军入侵的耻辱应该牢记). The Eight-Nation Alliance was a military coalition that invaded northern China in 1900 during the Boxer Rebellion. Their goal was to break the siege on foreign legations in Beijing, which had been surrounded by Boxer militias seeking to expel foreign influence from China. Interestingly, although the Netherlands did benefit from Western imperialism in China, it was not an actual member of the Eight-Nation Alliance.⁵⁹ This post shows how historical narratives, even if they do not align with how history actually unfolded, play a crucial role in shaping public discourse in China.

Posts like these are common and highlight the Chinese state's role not only as a regulator of the national internet but also as a driver of anti-Western nationalist discourse, as seen in the narratives promoted by CCP-influenced media outlets.⁶⁰ Furthermore, just like X (formerly Twitter), discussions frequently centre around news posted by official or semi-official news channels, thriving on emotionally charged content, whilst more positive or neutral news struggles to gain traction. As the saying goes, "Good news never leaves the door, whilst bad news can easily spread a thousand miles" (好事不出门, 恶事传千里).⁶¹ Social media platforms, driven by profit motives, design algorithms that prioritise viral content. In China, those algorithms often reinforce extreme, nationalist, anti-Western discourse. In this regard, a platform like Weibo functions quite the same as many other Western social media networks.⁶²

2.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, social media plays a crucial role in shaping Chinese perceptions of the Netherlands, particularly through platforms like Weibo. Due to limited Dutch visibility in Chinese online discourse, its image is greatly influenced by reports such as ASML export controls and general anti-Western sentiment. Amplified by algorithms, social media reports are likely to display negative material and shape public opinion accordingly.

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CULTURE & TOURISM



3 Culture & Tourism

- Culture is a significant soft power tool, but Dutch engagement in China is limited.
- Negative impressions persist due to weak cultural narratives and fewer cultural exchanges between the Netherlands and China (after COVID-19).
- Tourism has a high potential, especially among young Chinese, but readiness is lacking.
- Symbolic, non-political activities foster goodwill.

3.1 Introduction

The main tools that allow culture to be employed for public diplomacy are cultural diplomacy, nation branding, and tourism. These methods excel at encouraging people-to-people and avoiding misunderstandings and cultural clashes whilst staying resilient against the corroding influence of politics and news. Yet, despite this importance, Dutch culture seems to be under-utilised when it comes to public diplomacy. As our survey shows, Dutch cultural heritage is still rated highly, but despite that, the Netherlands does not have a particularly strong image in China. This has become even worse after the pandemic, as cultural exchanges and tourism have declined in both countries.

The position of a country in the world not only depends upon its political and economic power but also upon its cultural capital. Nation branding is closely related to culture. For instance, art forms, habits, heritage, language, and social values all play a central role in creating a national identity and image.⁶³ This chapter will examine the opportunities and challenges of cultural diplomacy, nation branding, and tourism. All methods utilise culture for public diplomacy goals, even if it is done unconsciously by citizens. This chapter will additionally explore how these methods have affected the relationship between the Netherlands and China, and how they might positively affect it in the future.

3.2 Cultural diplomacy

Through the employment of cultural elements, countries can make themselves attractive partners for tourism, investment, and trade and influence global assumptions regarding their people, history, and values. This is the essence of cultural diplomacy.⁶⁴ It rests on the premise that the establishment of connections through shared culture can minimise misunderstanding and enable cooperation. By performing activities such as cultural exchanges, international festivals, art exhibitions, and educational partnerships, countries can facilitate communication and establish bridges with various publics.

Cultural diplomacy's power and potential

Besides the scholarly literature, the power and potential of cultural diplomacy is also highlighted in almost all interviews we have done with experts. Many of the experts we interviewed highlight a decrease in the frequency of cultural exchanges between China and the Nether-

lands. Two factors contribute to this decrease: a decrease in the number of trips between both countries and, secondly, the Chinese government's increasing control over international cultural narratives. Less cultural interaction, and thereby less cultural understanding, can in turn worsen perceptions and lead to mutual misunderstandings. As mentioned in multiple interviews, positive cultural narratives could potentially counterbalance these views.

Multiple experts have told us about the potential of softer cultural initiatives without a political and ideological overtone.⁶⁵ Historian of modern Chinese history, Chang, provided us with a useful example on which he had worked himself. In 2015, he was commissioned to research the first hydraulic research laboratory in China: The Central Hydraulic Research Institute (中央水工试验所), later renamed the Nanjing Hydraulic Research Institute (南京水利科学研究院). The initial aim was to erect a bust honouring François Bourdrez, one of the Dutch founding engineers of the Chinese institute. Roland van den Berg, who served as the Dutch ambassador to China from 1986 to 1992, established a special committee for this purpose and raised funds from major players in the Dutch water sector. Ultimately, instead of a bust, a memorial stone of the Dutch engineer Bourdrez was unveiled at an event marking the 80th anniversary of the institute, with an emotional speech by the late ambassador van den Berg.⁶⁶ The event is a great example of cultural diplomacy because it acknowledged shared history, honoured international contributions to scientific progress, and fostered mutual respect between the Netherlands and China, all whilst remaining quite apolitical.

3.3 Sports Diplomacy

Three core resources underpin sports diplomacy: (1) sports events, (2) sports human capital, and (3) sports producers and products. Events include international tournaments, domestic leagues, friendly matches, and charitable games. Human capital focuses on athletes, coaches, fans, and academic exchanges. Sports producers and products include merchandise, media content, and the construction of sporting facilities.⁶⁷ In the survey, the Netherlands were ranked as good and excellent in terms of sports achievements, where football, ice skating, cycling, F1, and field hockey are mentioned as sports that people associate with the Netherlands.⁶⁸

3.4 Tourism as a tool to improve the perception of the Netherlands in China

Tourism is seen as a highly important tool of soft power, which can be used to improve the perception of the Netherlands in China.⁶⁹ Experts also underwrite this sentiment, stating the Netherlands should utilise this tool more by, for instance, cultural festivals and travel grants.⁷⁰ When promoted in an apolitical way, these cultural festivals could form mutual understanding and break negative perceptions that might exist presently.⁷¹

However, since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a decline in international flights and reduced cross-cultural interactions. Experts suggested that this has contributed to a situation of asymmetrical perceptions within the sphere of Dutch-Sino cultural exchanges.

An aspect that could have a negative effect on the perception between China and the Netherlands is the narrative. The Dutch narrative is quite heavy in nature by being focused on exports,

technology, and political themes. Instead, the Netherlands should focus on showcasing youth culture, digital art, and festivals to align with the interests of young Chinese audiences.⁷²

Our survey has shown the potential for the Netherlands as a travel destination, with 88% of the respondents in the survey in Chinese finding the Netherlands either ‘very attractive’ or ‘attractive’ as a travel destination. Dutch cultural heritage, such as Van Gogh, the canals, and tulips, continues to appeal, but there is also interest in destinations such as Rotterdam and Utrecht as sights of Dutch heritage.

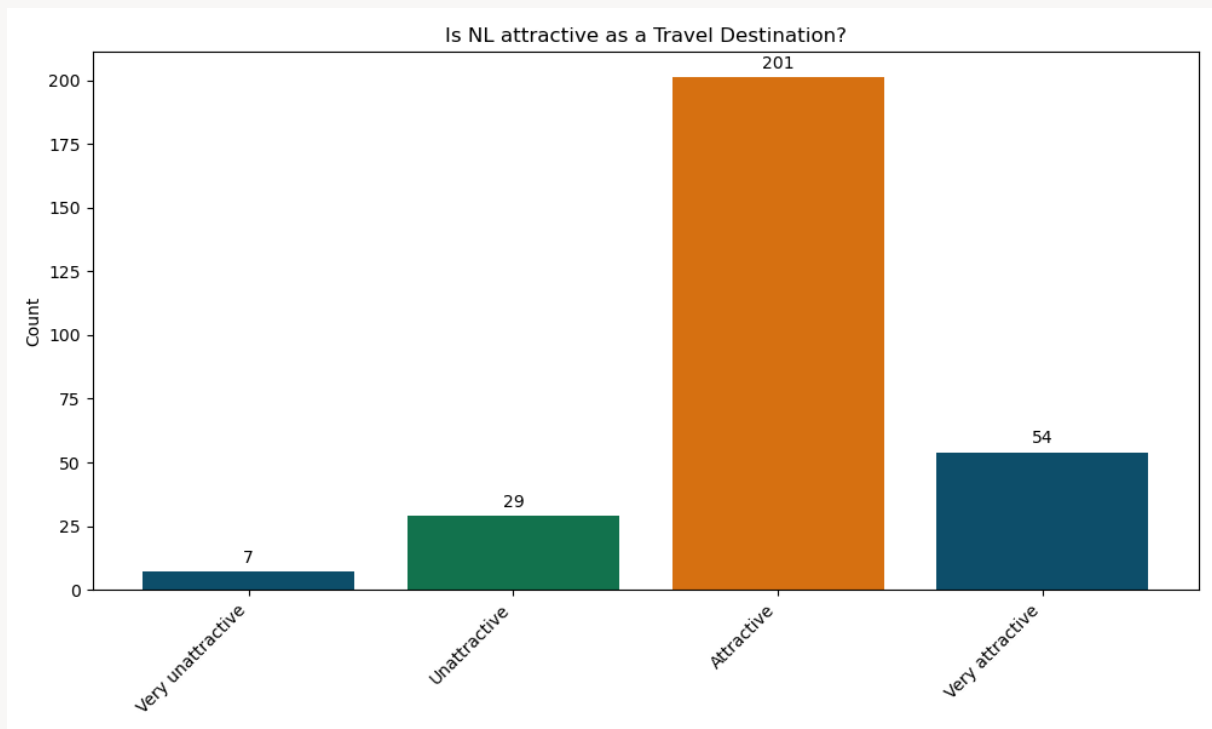


Figure 4: Do you think the Netherlands is attractive as a holiday destination?

However, with regards to how prepared the Netherlands is for Chinese tourists, only 44% of Chinese respondents view the Netherlands as “well prepared” or “very well prepared” for Chinese tourists, whilst another 43% feel “neutral”. These results show that there is potential for increasing the Netherlands’ preparedness for Chinese tourists. This can help in increasing the overall visitor experience and make Chinese tourists feel like they are more welcome.

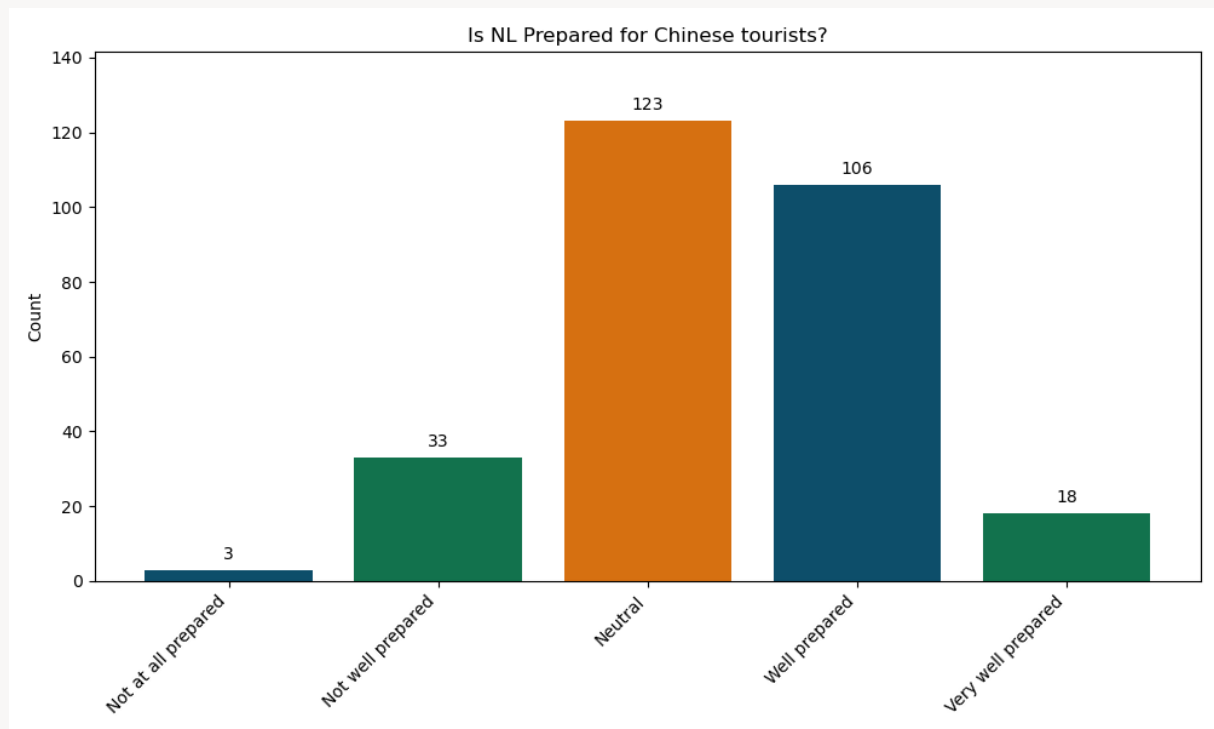


Figure 5: How prepared do you think the Netherlands is for Chinese tourists? (e.g. in terms of language, information, facilities)

As previously mentioned, experts stress that tourism promotion should not be overly politicised or heavy.⁷³ Initiatives such as Dutch Days, featuring the iconic Miffy, and niche tourism efforts are examples of how the Netherlands could target this promotion.⁷⁴ The Netherlands should use tourism to create a powerful story since “a good story can circulate in China for ten years”.⁷⁵

3.5 Conclusion

The main tools that allow culture to be employed for public diplomacy are cultural diplomacy, nation branding, and tourism. These methods excel at encouraging people-to-people and avoiding misunderstandings and cultural clashes whilst staying resilient against the corroding influence of politics and news. Yet, despite this importance, Dutch culture seems to be underutilised when it comes to public diplomacy. As the survey shows, Dutch cultural heritage is still rated highly, but despite that, the Netherlands does not have a particularly strong image in China. This has become even worse after the pandemic, as cultural exchanges and tourism have declined in both countries.

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EDUCATION



4 Education

- Public diplomacy through education, for instance, in the form of educational exchanges or research collaborations, plays a crucial role in fostering long-term bilateral ties and shaping international perceptions.
- Chinese students value Dutch education but face discrimination, strict visa policies, and limited housing options in the Netherlands - the latter three factors contribute negatively to the perception of the Netherlands.
- Developing study opportunities and collaborative research can strengthen relations, particularly when research topics are of interest to both China and the Netherlands.
- Besides study exchange, it is also important to engage with alumni to foster the development of young professionals, for example, by internship facilitation, networking events, or innovation and leadership programmes.

4.1 Introduction

Public diplomacy can be employed in many ways, and one of those ways is through the educational sphere; this sort of public diplomacy is at times referred to as educational diplomacy.⁷⁶ There is a growing body of literature examining the efficacy of educational diplomacy, with rather positive judgements usually, showcasing its importance in soft power. Educational exchanges form the cornerstone of this chapter. Nearly every nation participates in these exchanges. Educational exchanges excel in creating strong, long-term ties between two different nations.⁷⁷ As Metzgar (2015) put it: “Educational exchange will turn nations into individuals, leading to the humanisation of foreign relations like no other means of communication.”⁷⁸

Certain European nations are more prodigious than others in utilising this method, one only needs to look at the large numbers of French, British, and German language centres.⁷⁹ Furthermore, the well-known Fulbright program in the US has allowed over 400,000 students to obtain valuable skills and acquire an appreciation of American culture and values.⁸⁰ These alumni consequently influence their nation back home to be more receptive to American soft power. This is a powerful form of public diplomacy. This chapter will explore challenges, experiences, and opportunities for educational diplomacy between the Netherlands and China, combining insights from interviews, literature, and survey results.

4.2 Dutch Students in China

The educational outreach of the Netherlands in China has dwindled in the past few years. Several Dutch universities have broken ties with their Chinese counterparts, partially shutting down educational communication in the process.⁸¹ Bilateral interaction in the field of education, taking the form of academic conferences, workshops and exchange programmes, remains a key paradigm of public diplomacy in the Sino-Dutch relationship. Such exercises are crucial instruments in fostering mutual respect and establishing and maintaining sustainable,

long-term ties.⁸²

Several experts have stated that renewing the efforts to strengthen the educational ties between the two countries could be useful. The Netherlands could increase educational exchanges towards China by facilitating mutual exchange programmes.⁸³ Exchange programmes produce the additional, but not insignificant, bonus of acquiring highly educated and internationally orientated Chinese students. As such, investment in exchange programmes would in turn result in forming the crucial intercultural bridge and form stronger ties between the two countries.

However, the restoration of exchange programmes alone will not be the equivalent to a sustainable relationship. Other investments in the field of education remain crucial in this regard, such as the establishment of long-term (research) projects, according to multiple interviews. In this regard, the Netherlands would do well to examine overlapping domestic concerns and interests. These overlapping topics, such as climate change, technological innovation, and green production, can serve as the bedrock for future bilateral educational and academic cooperation.⁸⁴ Achieving this academic dialogue between the two countries, could aid the perception of the Netherlands, as it would no longer be an adversary in this regard, but a partner. An illuminating example of this is Wageningen University & Research, which has close ties with several Chinese universities. This university is viewed as an authority in developments in the area of sustainability and agricultural policy.⁸⁵ These are research fields in which China has expressed a strong interest.⁸⁶ As such, establishing long-term research projects can encourage a level playing field of interests. Chinese students in the Netherlands For decades, Chinese



Figure 6: The Sino-Dutch Agriculture Green Development (AGD) Programme aims to evaluate options for sustainable integrated crop-livestock systems (ICLS). This an example of collaboration between Wageningen Unviersity and the China Agricultural University

students have constituted a large portion of the total number of international students in the

Netherlands. As one of the top non-EU countries sending students to the Netherlands, China holds a crucial role in the internationalisation of Dutch education. The number of Chinese students studying in the Netherlands is growing. According to a recent Nuffic report, the 2023-2024 Nuffic academic year saw a 23% increase in enrolled Chinese degree students, reaching 3,164 students, which accounts for 6.1% of the total number of new international students.⁸⁷ Nuffic attributes this increase to the end of COVID-19 restrictions, allowing Chinese students to study abroad again.

Despite the growth, Chinese students in the Netherlands face challenges. Interviews have shown that discrimination against Chinese students is rising, which has a great influence on the perception of the Netherlands. Chinese students feel increasingly less welcome to come and study in the Netherlands, deeming it a possible explanation for the decrease in perception.⁸⁸ Furthermore, stricter visa policies, national security concerns, and shifting geopolitical priorities could explain a decline in the number of educational exchanges. However, it must be noted that not all interviewees believe it is justified to attribute the fall in perception to discrimination against Chinese students, stating that ASML's export restrictions are a far more important factor in this decrease.⁸⁹

With regards to the survey results, it can be said that Chinese students have a varied perspective on the accessibility of Dutch higher education. In the English survey, responses varied from 'excellent' and 'very accessible' to concerns that education is becoming a 'way of making revenue'. Housing was also mentioned as an obstacle. The quality of education in the Netherlands was perceived as excellent by 50% of the survey respondents, with another 47% calling it good. Lastly, respondents also seemed to think that the Dutch education system prepares students for the job market in a good or excellent fashion (90 percent of the respondents)

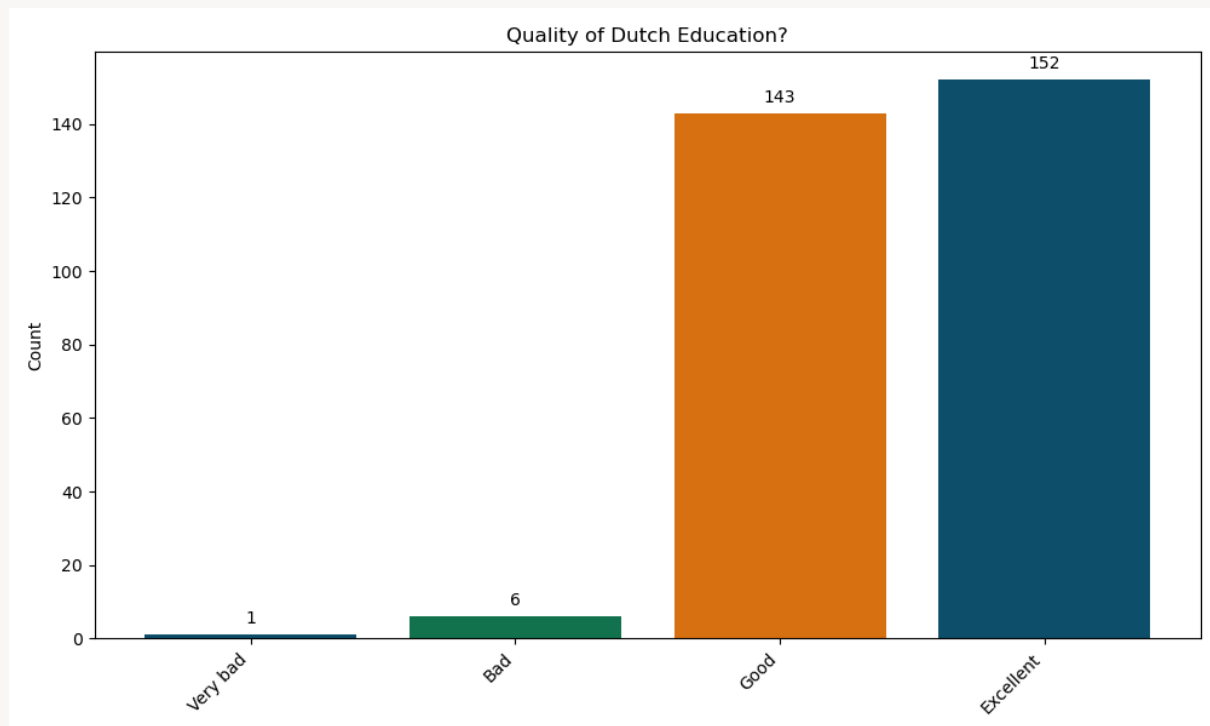


Figure 7: How would you rate the quality of education in the Netherlands?)

Educational exchanges between the Netherlands and China are crucial as universities and other knowledge centers can be deployed as diplomatic bridge builders. Moreover, several experts stated that communication with Chinese students and academics needs to be improved to increase perception and decrease diplomatic tension. An expert in this field underwrites this by stating that Chinese students are an underutilised asset in fostering stronger bilateral ties. Higher education exchanges and research partnerships are one of the few areas not heavily politicised and can serve as a neutral diplomatic channel. As mentioned in the previous section, there is sufficient interest in Dutch expertise in climate change research, water management, food security, and infrastructure, presenting opportunities for research collaboration.

4.3 Conclusion

Public diplomacy through education plays a crucial role in fostering long-term bilateral ties and shaping international perceptions. Educational exchanges serve as key instruments in building sustainable relationships, creating long-term connections that can translate into diplomatic and economic benefits. Additionally, research collaborations between Dutch and Chinese institutions have led to important scientific and technological advancements, demonstrating the mutual benefits of this academic engagement. However, the declining perception of the Netherlands among Chinese students, influenced by factors such as discrimination concerns, visa restrictions, and broader geopolitical tensions could potentially weaken the impact of educational diplomacy. To counter these concerns, strengthening academic partnerships in non-sensitive sectors such as climate change, food security, water management, and technological innovation could be beneficial. By maintaining strong academic ties the Netherlands

can continue to leverage education as a pillar of public diplomacy with China.

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ECONOMY



5 Economy

- Economic relationships are paramount; an apolitical, cooperative partnership based on trust is necessary.
- Sustainability (with a focus on agriculture, water management, renewable energy, and circularity) is an enormous collaborative opportunity.
- Demographic transformation generates like-minded healthcare and housing challenges in China and the Netherlands.
- Urban local partnerships and intelligent housing add value.
- Understanding of *guanxi* (关系) and CEO- and COO-driven trade mission prioritisation enhance success.
- The Netherlands must come across as a balanced and equal partner.

5.1 Introduction

The Netherlands and China share a crucial strategic economic partnership, with the Netherlands being one of China's largest foreign direct investors and a key EU trading partner.⁹⁰ In a shifting global landscape, it is essential to focus on apolitical economic cooperation, prioritising sustainability, innovation, and long-term societal resilience.⁹¹ Public diplomacy plays a vital role in ensuring that trade relations are built on trust, transparency, and mutual benefit. This chapter explores three key economic dimensions for sustainable cooperation. Firstly, sustainable development: expanding collaboration on climate resilience, renewable energy, and the circular economy. Secondly, demographic shifts: addressing the impact of ageing populations on labour markets and healthcare innovation. Lastly, culturally informed business practices: recognising *Guānxì* (关系) as essential for trust-based, long-term trade relations.

These themes align with the DDNC's priorities: sustainability, climate action, and a happy, healthy, and creative society.⁹² The Netherlands' expertise in water management and green technology complements China's advancements in digital infrastructure and energy transition, offering opportunities for joint innovation.

5.2 Sustainable development

One of the areas of expertise the Netherlands is well-regarded for internationally is its sustainability sector, more specifically agriculture, water management, energy and circular economy, often combined with high technology.⁹³ According to this report's survey, this advantage of the Netherlands is well-known in China. Deepening collaboration will be mutually beneficial and appeal to Chinese strategic priorities. Sustainable development is therefore a key area in which to focus public diplomacy efforts and strengthen the positive image of the Netherlands.

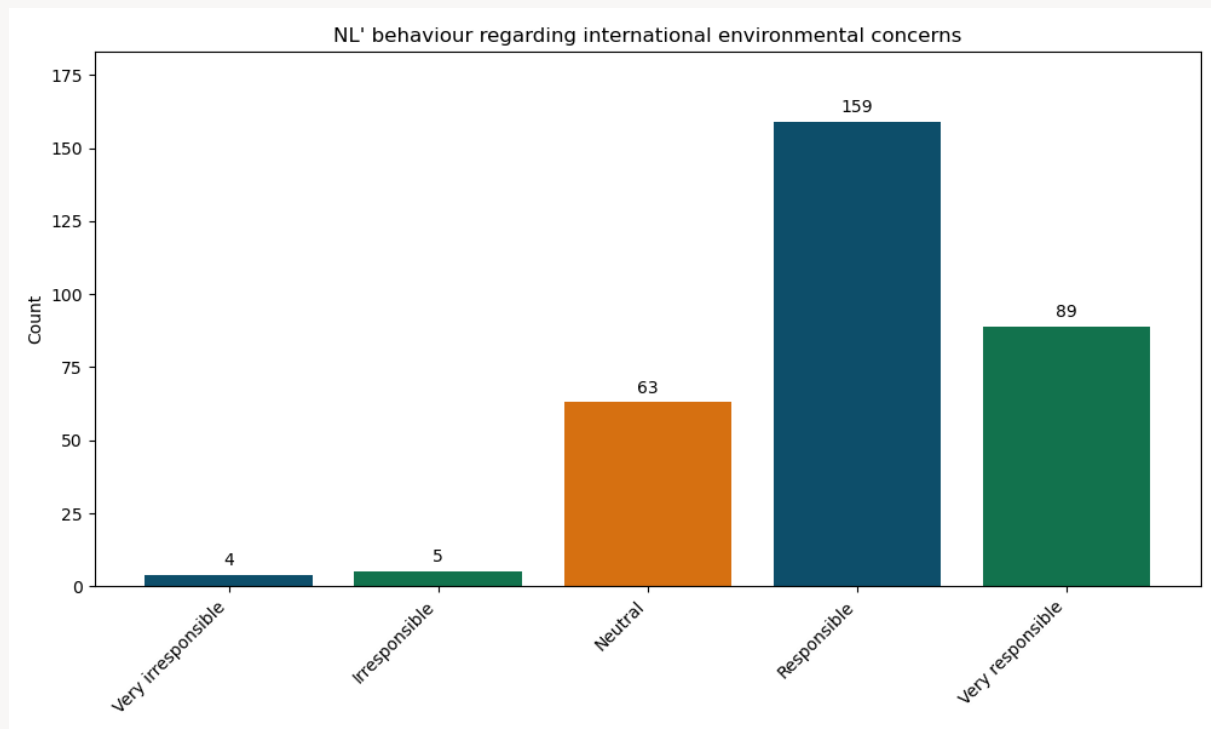


Figure 8: How would you rate the Netherlands' performance on international environmental issues?

Agriculture presents a promising avenue for deepening bilateral cooperation, particularly given the Netherlands' strong international reputation in this field. Surveyed on their perception of the Netherlands' behaviour regarding international environmental concerns, 74% of our respondents considered the Netherlands to be 'responsible or very responsible'.⁹⁴ When asked to indicate which Dutch sectors stand out in their view, 78% selected agriculture. Multiple interviewed experts also emphasised the competitive advantage of the Netherlands in agriculture, particularly agrotechnology. Dutch expertise, like Wageningen University's contribution to sustainable agricultural developments, is a strong export product. There is successful scientific collaboration and exchange between the Netherlands and China taking place on sustainable agriculture and water management, for example, through the FORWARD project, where scientists from Wageningen, Leiden, and China are working together on local solutions for handling household and livestock wastewater.⁹⁵ Such projects deliver concrete results that can be highlighted in public diplomacy efforts. Survey respondents mentioned Dutch food safety and food quality as a highly regarded quality of Dutch exports, with the example of infant milk powder given multiple times and reinforced by expert interviews.⁹⁶ Additionally, branding products originating from the Netherlands utilising a 'made in the Netherlands' strategy, could make Dutch export products even more appealing.⁹⁷ China is one of the most affected countries by climate change and faces dangerous exposure to sea level rise and flooding, but also droughts and heat waves. Food security, food safety and water management are therefore priorities for China.⁹⁸ The Dutch competitive advantage in these sectors makes the Netherlands an attractive partner for China and should therefore be core to its export strategy to China.

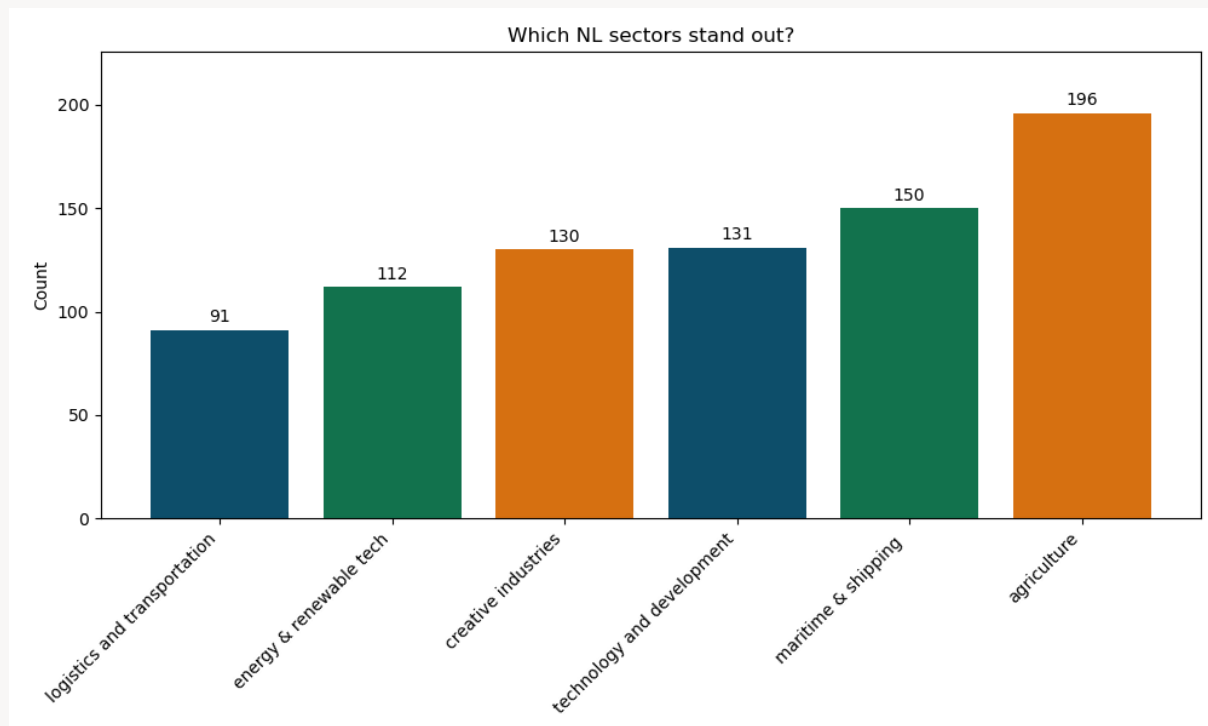


Figure 9: Which industries in the Netherlands excel in exports?

Similar to agriculture and water, renewable energy and circular economy are regarded by our respondents as industries in which the Netherlands excels.⁹⁹ At the same time, collaboration with China is essential for the Netherlands as China is the worldwide leader in 37 out of the 44 most important innovative sectors.¹⁰⁰ Particularly in solar panels, offshore wind, and green hydrogen, Chinese resources are competitive, and these are essential for the Dutch energy transition.¹⁰¹ Some experts argue that the Netherlands should work to be less reliant on China, but for the purpose of public diplomacy, emphasising the mutually beneficial relationship is very valuable. Other experts mention that since China is striving to become more self-sufficient, specific Dutch expertise that can contribute to this goal is especially well-received. A concrete example of this is the innovation mission to China on circular plastics and green chemistry. These events could foster the collaboration between the Netherlands and China and highlight mutual benefits.¹⁰² With Dutch sustainable development sectors able to meet specific Chinese needs and both countries considering sustainable development a strategic priority, this area can be core to a well-received public diplomacy narrative of the Netherlands in China.

In terms of the quality of Dutch products, whether pertaining to agricultural technologies or cultural icons, are very highly regarded by the Chinese according to our survey. Despite this, they are often not recognised as being Dutch. A lot of nation branding opportunities are lost because of this.

5.3 Demographic shifts

Both the Netherlands and China are grappling with the challenges of shifting demographics. Rising life expectancy, driven by improved living standards, has led to ageing societies and a



Figure 10: Innovation Mission China: Green Chemistry and Circular Plastics

host of complex issues. Older populations experience higher rates of comorbidities and age-related diseases, increased social isolation, and growing pressure on healthcare systems.¹⁰³ At the same time, a shrinking workforce and a rising number of retirees place a significant financial strain on workers, who must contribute more to sustain pension systems. Additionally, ageing societies require expanded infrastructure, including specialised housing and comprehensive healthcare services, with much of the cost falling on society.

China faces an accelerated ageing crisis, largely because of the one-child policy. Whilst the policy successfully curbed population growth, it also set the stage for rapid demographic decline. By 2035, an estimated 400 million Chinese citizens—30% of the population—will be over 60. This trend is not unique to China; in the Netherlands, by 2040 a quarter of the population will be aged 65 years or older, underscoring the global nature of ageing demographics.¹⁰⁴ Despite these challenges, demographic change also presents an opportunity for cooperation between the Netherlands and China. By working together to develop sustainable solutions, both countries can build a future that fosters well-being, inclusivity, and innovation.

The Netherlands and China have significant opportunities for collaboration in medical technology, particularly in ageing care, digital health, and biomedical research. Dutch expertise in healthcare innovation—exemplified by Philips' advancements in AI-powered diagnostics



Figure 11: Former Dutch Ministers Adriaansens (Economic Affairs and Climate Policy, left), Dijkgraaf (Education, Culture and Science, center) and the Chinese Minister of Science and Technology, Wang Zhigang, signing a MoU..

and telehealth solutions—complements China’s rapidly expanding medtech sector, now the second-largest globally.¹⁰⁵ An MoU between the Netherlands and China’s Ministry of Science and Technology highlights a shared commitment to tackling healthcare challenges, including ageing populations and medical research.¹⁰⁶ Trade missions between the two countries are regularly organised, specifically regarding the advancement of elderly care.¹⁰⁷

5.4 Urbanisation

Urbanisation is reshaping age demographics and housing markets in both China and the Netherlands. In China, cities like Shanghai and Beijing have rapidly expanded, attracting younger workers whilst leaving rural areas with ageing populations. By 2035, nearly one-third of Beijing’s residents will be over 60.¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile, Dutch cities such as Amsterdam and Rotterdam face similar pressures, with an ageing population projected to reach 26% by 2040.¹⁰⁹ The influx of young professionals to urban centres has driven up housing prices, creating affordability challenges for both young and elderly residents. Cooperation at the local and provincial levels—such as knowledge-sharing between Dutch municipalities and Chinese urban planners—could foster innovative housing solutions. Collaborative efforts, like smart senior housing projects in Shenzhen and The Hague, demonstrate how integrating technology into urban planning can support ageing populations. Strengthening such partnerships could promote sustainable and inclusive urban development.

5.5 Culturally Informed Business Practices

Guānxì (关系)

When engaging in business with China, cultural sensitivity is of utmost importance, as this is very much intertwined when doing business with Chinese partners. One of the key aspects of Chinese business culture is Guānxì, which refers to the system of social networks and influential relationships that facilitate business and other dealings. Building and maintaining Guānxì is essential, as trust and long-term relationships often take precedence over formal contracts. Unlike Western business culture, where direct negotiations and legal agreements dominate, in China, personal connections and mutual obligations play a crucial role in determining business success. Establishing strong Guānxì requires patience, consistent engagement, and respect for hierarchical structures. As such, it is important to go beyond the strict business context and invest in one's personal life through social engagements.¹¹⁰ This creates mutual obligations and ensures equal work to preserve the relationship. Overlooking the significance of Guānxì can lead to barriers in negotiations and effective collaboration.

Trade missions

Trade missions are an important aspect of building strong Dutch-Sino ties. They are aimed at economic collaborations, exchange and market growth. As trade missions play such a crucial role in building strong economic relations, the right way to go about them is essential.

Trade missions should be led by CEOs and former CEOs instead of government officials to ensure more effective deal-making.¹¹¹ This is because often a powerful individual who has decision-making power is more likely to foster effective collaboration. The Netherlands must empower private enterprises to take the lead in these missions, emphasising private-sector cooperation.¹¹² Furthermore, trade missions and investment strategies should align better with technological collaboration and diversification.

Equal Partnership

For the Netherlands to foster a productive and sustainable relationship with China, it must position itself as an equal partner. Establishing a diplomatic level playing field will not only enhance economic and business ties but also strengthen political collaborations. Nation branding and trade go hand in hand, making it essential for the Netherlands to present itself as a strategic and valuable trading partner.¹¹³ By adopting a balanced and mutually respectful stance, the Netherlands can ensure that economic cooperation with China remains beneficial, resilient, and forward-looking.

5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the changing global landscape presents both countries with an opportunity to strengthen their economic relationship by collaborating on sustainability initiatives, ageing population management, and culturally sensitive trade practices. The Netherlands can enhance its position as a valuable and responsible partner by leveraging its expertise to address China's strategic needs in agriculture, water management, medtech, and circular innovation. Public diplomacy plays a key role in framing this cooperation as balanced and future-oriented,

highlighting mutual benefits through trust, cultural understanding, and shared priorities.

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RECOMMENDATIONS



6 Recommendations

6.1 Governance

Prioritise collaboration through strategic public diplomacy

To consolidate its medium- and long-term role in China, the DDNC must strategically prioritise cooperative framing and symbolism in its public diplomacy. The Beijing Embassy must lead the presentation of the Netherlands as a constructive, neutral European partner, according to the EU's 'Open Strategic Autonomy agenda'. High-level Dutch visits by the Prime Minister, King, or government ministers must be spun carefully as activities for mutual interests and global responsibility and not transactional in purpose. All official public appearances by speech, television, and ceremonial usage must be closely scripted and choreographed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to convey a unified message of mutually beneficial cooperation. A good example of an EU member state that portrays a constructive narrative is France.

Noting that much of the programme during state visits is organised by China, to support such a narrative, we recommend the DDNC to host events around official visits which concretely demonstrate cooperation. For instance, the Consulate in Shanghai could produce a co-curated cultural show, for example, 'Van Gogh and Literati Aesthetics,' blending harmoniously Dutch and Chinese cultural heritage. Scheduled to coincide with a royal or ministerial visit, Dutch officials and local Chinese authorities would co-inaugurate, strengthening cross-cultural appreciation and creativity. Furthermore, the Guangzhou Consulate could also organise a Sino-Dutch Green Growth Forum, which would showcase Dutch firms at the forefront of agri-tech, water management, and circular economy. This would demonstrate Dutch innovation as one of China's growing development priorities, offered as a sustainable partnership, not rivalry.

In education, the Dutch Embassy in Beijing ought to organise a 'Future of Higher Education Dialogue,' hosted at a premier university like Tsinghua, or Fudan University, ideally during an official visit. This platform would unite Dutch university rectors, Chinese academic leaders, Nuffic and Ministry of Education, Culture and Science officials. The dialogue could focus on exploring joint degrees, student and staff mobility schemes, and research cooperation arrangements, particularly in fields of great significance such as digitalisation, AI governance, and climate science. These efforts will need to be placed strategically as contributions to international public goods, thus embodying fundamental Dutch values while also appealing to China's priority on cooperative development.

Apply Sino-Dutch subnational diplomacy even more

Furthermore, we recommend the Embassy to enhance collaboration with the Consulates-General in Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Hong Kong-Macau to systematically map and revive Dutch-Chinese sister city relations. The missions should contact local Chinese foreign affairs offices to obtain the status of existing partnerships and whether they are active, dormant, or underutilised. Meanwhile, we advise the Embassy to cooperate with the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) and the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations to obtain a centralised, overall overview of such municipal relations. These collaborations offer valuable routes for knowledge exchange and collaborative efforts on city development, water resilience, circular economy, and educational exchange programmes. We recommend support for Dutch local au-

thorities to be present at significant events in China, like the China International Import Expo or regional summits, where municipal interests can be represented, new contacts can be made, and cooperation agreements can be signed.

To underpin this subnational approach, Dutch missions to China, particularly those visiting priority economic regions such as the Yangtze River Delta or Greater Bay Area, should include a mayor or alderman with the appropriate specialisation on a regular basis. This tactical inclusion aligns with Chinese expectations for foreign visiting officials to be of equivalent seniority to their local counterparts. The Embassy's protocol department, in consultation with the Royal Household and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, should ensure that such municipal representation is included in delegation planning of formal state visits. We advise consulates to take a supportive role in identifying suitable Chinese municipal counterparts and in providing any required diplomatic and cultural briefings. The establishment of an earmarked travel fund, to be managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, would stimulate continued Dutch municipal participation in Chinese subnational forums. This grassroots diplomacy is essential in underpinning bilateral relations by grounding them in concrete local cooperation and reciprocity.

6.2 Social media

Take Chinese social media seriously

Create a more substantive online presence. Chinese social media must be taken seriously. It is not enough to monitor traditional news or rely on formal diplomatic channels; public opinion is often reflected and shaped through social media platforms. Be more visible on WeChat, Weibo and Douyin, optionally also RedNote, and post frequently.

- Use short captions, since content/posts with too much text are frequently ignored. Use engaging visuals such as infographics, photos that capture attention, and short videos.
- Prioritise direct, apolitical and positive engagement. We recommend a focus on light-hearted, ‘cute’, funny, and/or relatable content.
- Different demographics and user experiences of each platform can be expected to influence the impact of content. Business topics will do better on Weibo, travel content on RedNote, and culture and sports on Douyin.

Increase Dutch visibility on social media

Interviewees describe a lack of visibility of characteristics of the Netherlands. This lack can lead to a limited awareness of Dutch business and cultural strengths, with the Netherlands only gaining negative attention through major news stories, such as the ASML export restrictions. Therefore, increase the visibility of Dutch national symbols in the Chinese digital discourse with a proactive and culturally attuned branding strategy. Make sure that their Dutch origin is firmly asserted. References to historical Sino-Dutch relations and to the Dutch maritime heritage can be impactful and help Chinese netizens distinguish the Netherlands from other European countries. Many Dutch brands and symbols have a strong international recognition, yet their Dutch origins remain underexposed. Launch a targeted online campaign that spotlights such icons, such as:

- Miffy/Nijntje;
- Cycling culture;
- Tulips;
- Windmills;
- Iconic Dutch brands like Heineken;
- Sports, such as soccer, F1 and speed skating;
- Famous Dutch artworks such as ‘The Girl with the Pearl Earring’, ‘The Night Watch’, and ‘Starry Night’.

Use social media as a tool to promote the DDNC

Use social media presence to increase awareness of the DDNC, particularly its cultural and business promotion role, and its network of people involved in Sino-Dutch relations. A culturally attractive way of doing this is by drawing more parallels between Dutch and Chinese culture. Mutual challenges and solutions should be highlighted, such as ageing populations, urbanisation, sustainable development, and water management. Suggestions for engagement can be found in the other categories of this recommendations section. When events around these topics are being organised or other services provided by the DDNC, social media should

be used to promote and expand their reach. Other campaigns to promote the DDNC could include:

- A ‘Day in the Life’ of a Dutch company or knowledge institute on social media. This could attain more connection between the Chinese consumers and Dutch businesses. Particularly a company or organisation working on contemporary challenges faced by both the Netherlands and China such as Deltares for water management.
- Collaborating with Chinese students or young professionals in the Netherlands, for example through the Chinese Student Association in the Netherlands, who are involved in a sector of interest to China. Or the reverse, Dutch students or young professionals focusing on a relevant sector in China. Having them share their positive experiences in short video content.
- A ‘street interview’-style video asking passerbys about their perception, or having them guess the origin, of Dutch cultural icons from the list above such as Miffy or Van Gogh. Then referring them to a related upcoming event by the DDNC such as an art exhibition.

6.3 Culture & tourism

To remain visible and relevant in an increasingly crowded field of international cultural engagement, it is important to build on existing Dutch public diplomacy efforts in China through recurring and adaptable events. Proven concepts such as Dutch Days, niche tourism campaigns, and the use of recognisable cultural icons like Miffy illustrate the potential for sustained visibility.

Drawing on our findings, we recommend focusing future programming on themes and formats that resonate with specific societal groups in China:

- *Youth and students* represent a forward-looking audience that actively shapes trends, consumes international culture, and engages online. They are also the primary participants in educational exchange, making them a key group for long-term cultural and diplomatic engagement. Focus on interactive and trend-driven programming, such as music performances by Dutch DJs, design, and innovation exhibitions, bike culture activities, or social media-viral events like stroopwafel workshops or Rembrandt-inspired art pop-ups. These can also be integrated into study-related events that engage with a younger audience.
- *Women*, particularly in urban areas, are gaining economic influence and are key decision-makers in sectors like fashion, lifestyle, and food. Focus on sustainability, fashion or entrepreneurship. Events should include panels with successful Dutch and Chinese women, creative workshops (e.g. Dutch flower arranging or design), or culinary experiences featuring Dutch products.
- *Family and children* are crucial for building early-stage cultural familiarity and affection. Focus on educational and playful elements like Mini-Holland pop-ups with canals and tulips, Dutch storybook characters like Miffy, and interactive cultural exhibits that will appeal to younger audiences and their parents.

Strengthen local partnerships through shared priorities

Emphasising shared cultural characteristics and priorities creates a more sustainable foundation for bilateral relations than emphasis on differences. One effective way to operationalise this is through long-term, city-to-city partnerships that integrate cultural, economic, and educational cooperation. The Rotterdam - Shanghai sister city partnership in particular, is repeatedly cited as a best practice, as it involves both cultural exchange and deep business, academic, and governmental ties developed over decades. The Netherlands should invest in existing sister city initiatives and other equal-level partnerships for cultural exchange and long-lasting connections. The DDNC can contribute to this through organising events and acting as a conduit for relations.

Capitalise on Dutch sports performances

Build enduring ties between the Dutch and Chinese populations, organise joint exhibitions and sporting partnerships. According to our survey, Dutch football is the first thing Chinese people associate with the Netherlands. Sports offer a powerful and apolitical way of enhancing visibility. Interacting with and creating sports content such as:

- Reposting football performances from prominent teams, such as Ajax, Feyenoord and the Dutch national team. Adding things like short videos or behind-the-scenes interviews would be more likely to connect with Chinese viewers.
- Try to build bridges between the Dutch and Chinese sector by organising (local) sports events, such as collaborations in coach development and youth training.
- Establish continuity and increase impact by framing such events as a part of a larger, continuous Dutch involvement in international sports. For example, using a long-term social media campaign for sports content would help in this regard.

6.4 Education

Organise an annual Innovation and Leadership Programme by the DDNC

The Netherlands could build on its positive perceptions in sustainability, innovation, and education by strengthening its cultural and economic ties with China through the initiation of a prestigious Dutch innovation and leadership program. This would be a yearly program hosted by the DDNC, focussing on themes such as; circular economy, agri-tech, and water.

The leadership program would focus on attracting the best Chinese students in relevant disciplines, creating prestige and appeal. The program would invite prominent Dutch CEO's, diplomats, entrepreneurs and Dutch students. Content of the program could be a week filled with a hackaton or startup competition, workshops and lectures that could highlight technological synergies benefitting both the Netherlands and China.

By combining educational and cultural diplomacy in this fashion, the Netherlands could connect the program to its strategic priorities; economic interest and an increased public perception. A selective program could play into Chinese values regarding meritocracy and its high-level education. In addition, this program would also align well with the Netherlands' desire to be seen as a innovation-driven partner.

Once this program has build reputation and trackrecord, it could serve as a pipeline for talent-development, business collaboration and an extensive alumni network of China's future leaders. In addition, it could complement trade missions and technological cooperation between the two countries.

In a context where mutual understanding is crucial for relationship building, such people-to-people initiatives could serve as a bridge between the Netherlands and China and foster long term relationships. The leadership program could offer the DDNC an apolitical platform to combine its cultural, economic and educational diplomacy.

A similar initiative has been successfully implemented by Ireland.

Stimulate Dutch universities to strengthen partnerships and educational exchanges

Examples include exchange programmes, summer schools, academic conferences, and workshops with Chinese universities. To truly resonate with Chinese counterparts and enhance public diplomacy, Dutch universities must frame partnerships around mutual gain, long-term trust, and practical outcomes aligned with mutual development goals. To achieve this, we suggest coordination with institutions such as Nuffic, and Chinese education authorities to build legitimacy and visibility for programs.

Invest in offering internship opportunities to (Chinese) students at Dutch companies

Young professionals are the basis for future economic collaboration. It is important to support this specific demographic in terms of public diplomacy enhancement for two main reasons:

- Informal ambassadors: Internships give Chinese students firsthand experience with Dutch work culture, innovation, and values (e.g., sustainability, openness, and collaboration). These students often become informal ambassadors for the Netherlands when they re-

turn home, influencing future business, academic, and even policy decisions in favor of Dutch interests.

- Strengthens people-to-people ties: Public diplomacy is not only government-to-government, it's also citizen-to-citizen. Providing internships helps nurture a generation of Chinese professionals with personal and professional ties to the Netherlands, leading to trust, familiarity, and long-lasting networks between the two countries.

Concrete action points:

- Create a matchmaking portal or programme (in collaboration with Nuffic and Dutch universities) that connects Chinese students with Dutch companies offering internships.
- Provide information such as listings, visa information, company profiles, and testimonials from past interns.
- Co-organise roundtables or networking events in cities like Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou to encourage Dutch multinationals and SMEs in China to host Chinese interns or support internship pathways to headquarters in the Netherlands. Such events could be organised in collaboration with, for example, the DDNC, Benelux Chamber of Commerce, Netherlands Business Support Offices, or the Netherlands Foreign Investment Agency.
- Initiate an 'Interns as Ambassadors' alumni network of Chinese students who have interned or studied in the Netherlands.
- Offer clear guidance to Chinese universities on how students can legally intern in the Netherlands. Another way could be to collaborate with the Chinese student association in the Netherlands to promote career guidance and opportunities in the Netherlands.

Foster academic and research collaboration in mutual fields of interest

Prioritise collaborative research in non-sensitive domains, such as climate, agriculture, and water management. Examples of such sectors are: climate change research, food security, water management, infrastructure and - to some extent - technological innovation. Some concrete examples of research collaboration may include:

- Robotics in elderly care: As both the Netherlands and China face aging populations, and with the Netherlands recognised in China for its healthcare innovation, there is strong potential for collaboration. By exchanging Dutch healthcare expertise for China's advanced robotics capabilities, the two countries can jointly develop innovative elder care solutions, fostering mutual growth, and future economic cooperation. Leading technical universities in the Netherlands and China, such as the Technical University of Delft, Eindhoven Technical University, University of Twente, along with Tsinghua University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, and Harbin Institute of Technology in China, can establish joint research initiatives to tackle the challenges of aging populations. Concrete opportunities include:
 - Setting up Sino-Dutch joint research labs on healthcare robotics.
 - Applying for EU-Horizon or NSFC co-funded research grants.
 - Launching pilot programmes to test care robots in nursing homes in both countries.

Furthermore, the exchange of PhD students and researchers focused on AI and human-

robot interaction would strengthen academic ties and accelerate innovation in this critical domain.

- Innovative greenhouses: Dutch greenhouse innovation is well-regarded in China, especially in the context of sustainable agriculture, smart farming, and food security. Besides the Sino-Dutch Joint Research Center for Greenhouse Horticulture, established by Wageningen University Research and the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, there can be more focus on:
 - Joint PhD programmes on Smart Greenhouse Systems
 - Climate-Resilient Greenhouse Research Consortium

Enhance the accessibility of education exchanges

Financial accessibility can be enhanced, for instance, by providing scholarships or research grants. Information provision also greatly improves accessibility and can be realised at a lower cost to the Dutch government. Regarding the latter, we propose three initiatives:

- Inviting Chinese alumni to share their experiences about studying in the Netherlands, providing a platform for a positive narrative instead of possible concerns about discrimination. For instance, through a more informal ‘Annual Alumni Drinks’ event for Chinese students who have studied in the Netherlands, or a more formal experience-sharing (online) session where alumni can meet Chinese students interested in studying abroad.
- Inviting professors (online) to explain the nature and specifics of Dutch education. Specifically, international professors teaching in the Netherlands can both give insight into the experience of foreigners in the Netherlands and highlight the international nature of Dutch higher education.
- Providing information via fairs and cultural festivals about exchange opportunities and the Netherlands in general. It could be very fruitful to collaborate with other European countries and, in this way, attract the attention of potential students who may not yet have the Netherlands on their radar.

Promote Dutch universities via social media

Specifically promoting Dutch universities online is an important avenue for outreach, as many young Chinese want to study overseas and are avid social media users, but sometimes lack the information required to apply. Working together with universities and creating content on university life in the Netherlands, sharing testimonials from alumni, and useful tips on applications or scholarships, or even posting about the online information days, could be both informative and appealing to prospective students. Some more concrete suggestions:

- Make sure to time the videos according to the Chinese university application deadlines and high school graduation periods.
- Utilise and engage frequently on popular Chinese (social) media channels for a greater reach, such as Weibo or Xiaohongshu. Include interactive videos of past experiences of students and promotional videos of Dutch student cities. When such videos reach certain algorithms, they can generate a large wave of positive online interactions about the Netherlands.

- Furthermore, involving current Chinese students in the Netherlands, for example, through the Chinese Student Association in Rotterdam, could help make the content more relatable and authentic.

Promote Dutch universities in China

Together with relevant institutions and organisations, the DDNC can highlight Dutch education in China. For example, by co-organising Dutch Education Days or Innovation Weeks in partnership with: Nuffic, Holland Alumni Network, Chinese Ministry of Education, prestigious universities in China such as Peking, Fudan, and Tongji.

6.5 Economy

Made in the Netherlands

We recommend the DDNC to encourage Dutch companies to launch a collective ‘Made in the Netherlands’ campaign to strengthen its global recognition and visibility. The survey has shown that Dutch products are often seen as high quality, however, the fact that products stem from the Netherlands is seldom recognised. To counter this we recommend a national branding campaign, including a recognisable label, targeted towards Chinese audiences. External partners involved could include Netherlands Foreign Investment Agency, NL in Business as well as sector specific associations. It is advised to increase the outreach of this campaign by using platforms such as Douyin and Wechat to promote this recognisable label. In addition, create a QR code, attached to Dutch products that showcase the Netherlands or the engineering of the product.

Apply Mutual Respect and Common Ground

We recommend altering the strategy regarding trade missions. The mission to China should be led by CEO’s and COO’s for effective dealmaking and should focus on shared sustainable development goals, revolve around the Chinese perspective and aim to create an equitable partnership. Priority sectors include healthcare, agri-tech and water management. Relevant partners in this could be the Dutch top sectors (e.g. Life Sciences & Health and Agri & Food), universities like Wageningen University & Research and major companies such as Philips. Chinese counterparts in these missions could be Tsinghua University and Alibaba Health. We recommend hosting these missions at the Dutch Embassy in Beijing as well as the consulates-general. The aimed impact of this recommendation is to increase mutual trust, increased partnerships and shared R&D between the two countries.

Work together on changing demographics

Since the Netherlands and China both face significant challenges from changing demographics we advise China and the Netherlands to expand collaboration in sectors such as elderly care, digital health and biomedical research. China’s medtech sector is rapidly growing and The Netherlands holds significant expertise in healthcare innovation, shown by for instance Philips and Erasmus Medical Centre. Collaborations could include joint programs focused on AI-driven elderly care, formalised in an MoU as the one signed on April first this year between the Chinese Ministry of Technology and Science and the Netherlands. Key partners in this collaboration could include the Ministry of Health and the public and private sector actors in both countries. These efforts would not only promote people-to-people collaborations but also contribute to inclusive and sustainable societies in both countries.

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CONCLUSION



7 Conclusion

To end this report, we circle back to the research question that we began with:

What causes the declining perception of the Netherlands in China, between 2022 and 2023 and what type of public diplomacy measures can the Dutch diplomatic network in China undertake to reverse this trend?

The main causes that we have identified to be responsible for the falling perception as observed in the NBI can be attributed to a broad range of factors. The general attitude of the West and the EU towards China, of which the Netherlands is often considered to be a subservient part, is laced with a constant negativity; this negativity and perceived hostility is duplicated by some Chinese. Additionally, broader EU-level efforts to reduce strategic dependencies or improve economic security by, for example, limiting exports of certain products, further exacerbate this issue. The Netherlands' lack of independent recognition apart from a broader 'Western world' is responsible for more issues, as it reduces Dutch visibility on social media as well, which increases the influence news articles have on the Dutch reputation. This is especially true today, as social media algorithms tend to favour negative news. Another factor that negatively impacts the Chinese perception of the Netherlands is the decline in cultural exchanges and tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic. This, combined with the reduction of Chinese students visiting the Netherlands due to geopolitical tensions, visa restrictions and (perceived) discrimination, means the people-to-people contact is weakening.

Our overall point to combat these factors can be summarised as the need for a comprehensive, apolitical narrative and effort to connect with the Chinese. This is a tall task. The almost endless factors that influence the reputation of the Netherlands make this more complicated. If the Dutch narrative is stronger, we can expect a rise or, at the very least, a much smaller fall in perception. Our main recommended guidelines for Dutch public diplomacy efforts, which can help build such a narrative, are to focus on apolitical messaging, further utilise Dutch strengths, and commit to communicating with the Chinese people, instead of talking at them.

This way, the generally positive image of the Netherlands in China can be rebuilt and maintained. It can help in maintaining the strong bond between the two countries, lest the cracks in it grow until it breaks. The PRC might lack direct electoral accountability, but its population does affect (foreign) policy decisions and must be accounted for by the CCP. Therefore, public diplomacy in China matters. The Dutch government and the DDNC should not take for granted our (still) positive reputation in China and take the decline that the NBI showed as a warning: A stronger bond is needed between the two countries, lest the cracks in it grow until it breaks.

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Appendix II: Quantitative Country Comparison

7.1 Quantitative country comparison: Clustering analysis to inform public diplomacy strategy

A quantitative approach was employed to identify countries that exhibit structural similarities to the Netherlands across twelve key socio-economic and governance indicators. The methodological choice was aimed at informing comparative public diplomacy strategies vis-à-vis China by identifying countries that are most similar to the Netherlands in terms of their global economic, political, and digital profiles.

Methodology

The following indicators were used: GDP, Gini coefficient, export and import values, unemployment rate, number of international tourist arrivals and expenditures, control of corruption, government effectiveness, political stability, harmonised education test scores, and percentage of internet users. Data was sourced from the World Bank, covering the period 2013-2023 (or the most recent available year).¹¹⁴ Data on the percentage of internet users covers the period from 2010 to 2020; harmonised education test scores are based on data from 2017. Countries that were not present in a dataset and countries with more than 25% missing values across indicators were excluded. For other countries with less than 25% of missing values, missing values were imputed using the median of each indicator. The median is used to reduce the influence of outliers.

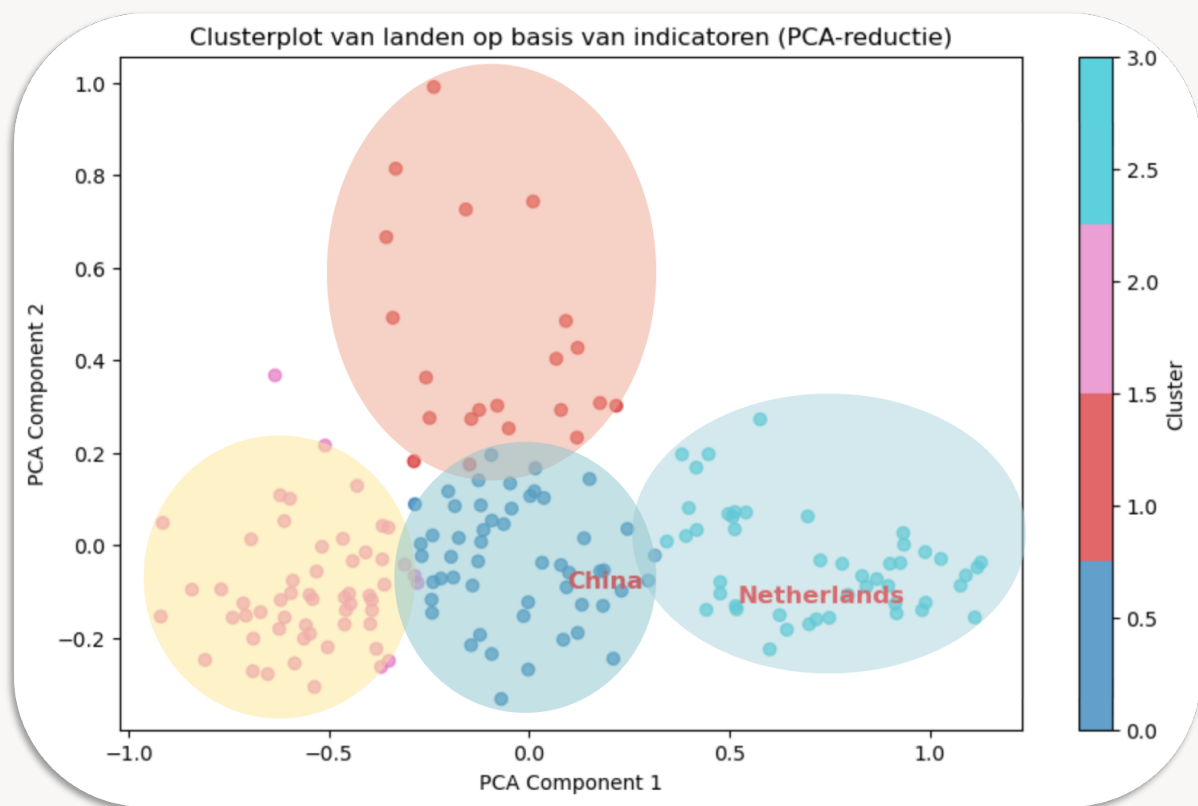


Figure 12: Clusterplot of the countries

The scales of the datasets were normalised and subjected to K-means clustering to facilitate

pattern recognition in this high-dimensional dataset. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was subsequently applied to reduce the twelve-dimensional dataset to two principal components for visualisation. The silhouette score was used to assess the optimal number of clusters. Although a two-cluster model achieved the highest silhouette score (0.40), a four-cluster model was ultimately chosen to strike a balance between analytical precision and policy relevance.

Results and Implications

The five countries most proximate to the Netherlands, based on Euclidean distance in the PCA-reduced space, are Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Austria, and Belgium. The broader cluster to which the Netherlands belongs includes a diverse group of 30+ countries with advanced economies and high governance indicators, such as Australia, Canada, Japan, and Switzerland. China's PCA coordinates ([0.0535, -0.0901]) place it distinctly outside of this cluster, reflecting considerable structural divergence across the indicators assessed.

7.2 Comparative analysis of public diplomacy strategies

Denmark

Denmark's public diplomacy with China has traditionally emphasised economic collaboration, in particular in renewable energy sectors. The Sino-Danish Wind Energy Development Programme exemplifies this focus, facilitating knowledge exchange in wind technology.¹¹⁵ However, Denmark has also navigated challenges, such as tensions following meetings with the Dalai Lama, which led to diplomatic strains with China. In 2020, Denmark openly opposed the Hong Kong national security law.¹¹⁶ In 2022, Denmark announced a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Winter Olympics due to concerns about human rights abuses of Uyghurs.¹¹⁷ In response to evolving geopolitical dynamics, Denmark has aligned more closely with the European Union's 'de-risking' approach, aiming to mitigate dependencies whilst maintaining pragmatic engagement with China.

Sweden

Sweden's relationship with China has experienced significant shifts. Historically focused on trade and investment, recent years have seen increased tensions, particularly concerning human rights issues,¹¹⁸ the detention of Swedish citizens in China,¹¹⁹ and accusations of violations towards Chinese tourists in Sweden.¹²⁰ The Swedish government has been revising its China strategy to balance economic interests with the promotion of democratic values and human rights. This recalibration reflects a broader European reassessment of relations with China.

Finland

Finland has pursued a balanced approach in its public diplomacy with China, fostering economic ties whilst addressing security concerns. The 2021 Government Action Plan on China outlines Finland's commitment to cooperation in areas like sustainable development and education. High-level visits, such as President Alexander Stubb's meeting with Xi Jinping in October 2024, have focused on bilateral relations and global security issues, including the war in Ukraine.

Austria

Austria's public diplomacy strategy towards China is closely aligned with the European Union's multifaceted approach, viewing China as a partner for cooperation, an economic competitor, and a systemic rival. Austria has engaged in cultural diplomacy and economic collaborations, particularly under the BRI, whilst remaining cognisant of broader EU-China dynamics. Austrian officials have repeatedly criticised China for its violation of human rights, and in 2021, a parliamentary resolution supported by all parties condemned human rights violations against minorities and demanded EU sanctions against the Chinese government.¹²¹

Belgium

Belgium maintains a multi-layered China policy that balances economic pragmatism with a commitment to liberal political values. The federal government seeks to engage China through multilateral frameworks, reflecting Belgium's broader foreign policy emphasis on multilateralism and European integration. This approach aims to foster economic cooperation whilst upholding democratic principles.

7.3 Comparison with the Netherlands

Sustainable Development Performance

Across the past three years, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Austria have consistently outperformed the Netherlands in the SDG Index. In 2024, Finland ranked first, Sweden second, Denmark third, and Austria sixth, whilst the Netherlands dropped to 24th. In 2023, the Netherlands ranked 20th, and in 2022, it ranked 17th, indicating a gradual decline relative to its peers. This gap suggests that its relative position has weakened compared to the Nordic countries and Austria.

Press Freedom

In 2024, Denmark (second), Sweden (third), and the Netherlands (fourth) were global leaders. However, in 2022, the Netherlands experienced a sharp decline to 28th position.

Nation Brands Index (NBI)

In 2023, the Netherlands ranked 13th, ahead of Finland (15th) and Austria (17th), but behind Sweden (10th). In 2022, the Netherlands was ranked 22nd. However, Finland (24th) and Austria (27th) also declined in their NBI score, whilst Sweden (9th) remained stable.

7.4 Lessons from Other Countries

In addition to countries structurally similar to the Netherlands as identified with the PCA, several other countries offer valuable strategic lessons that could inform improvements in Dutch public diplomacy toward China.

South Korea

South Korea offers an example of cultural soft power. South Korea has maintained strong public engagement through its global cultural exports. The international popularity of the Korean Wave (Hallyu), including K-pop, K-dramas, and cuisine, has built a passionate Chinese fan base, fostering a favourable image of South Korea, especially among younger generations.¹²² Whilst

the Netherlands may not have a comparable global cultural export, it can increase investment in creative industries and promote Dutch art, festivals, and museums through curated digital platforms and cultural institutes in China.

Serbia

Serbia, though not an EU member, has cultivated a close partnership with China, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Serbian government framed Chinese medical support as emblematic of a “steel friendship,” earning widespread public approval.¹²³ This example highlights the importance of public messaging and the visibility of cooperative outcomes.

The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom (UK) utilises the BBC World Service to broadcast news and cultural programs to promote British values. Furthermore, British Council programs in China support English language learning and cultural understanding.¹²⁴ Next to this, despite diplomatic friction over human rights and Hong Kong, British universities remain highly attractive to Chinese students, and UK institutions frequently host joint research initiatives with Chinese counterparts. The Netherlands could follow the UK’s example by strengthening institutional support for Dutch language and culture programs in China, expanding university cooperation, and ensuring continuity in academic exchanges even during political tensions.

Germany

Germany has prioritised educational and vocational training partnerships as part of its China diplomacy. The Goethe-Institut plays a central role in cultural exchange, offering German language education and promoting bilateral artistic collaborations.¹²⁵ Additionally, DAAD (the German Academic Exchange Service) supports numerous scholarships and academic projects that link German and Chinese institutions.¹²⁶

Switzerland

Switzerland has established effective educational and cultural diplomacy. The Swiss Chinese University Network and partnerships in design and environmental sciences show that smaller countries can maintain visibility by investing in niche academic and cultural excellence.¹²⁷ This offers a clear lesson for the Netherlands: to lean into its strengths, such as water management, and frame these as areas of shared learning and mutual benefit.

Appendix III: Survey

7.5 General justification

This survey was published from the 13th of February 2025 until the 5th of March 2025. Respondents were able to fill out the survey in either English or in Chinese. The survey, published using Qualtrics, was posted on the Weibo and WeChat accounts of the Dutch Embassy in Beijing, China. Besides this, the links to the survey were sent in informal networks consisting of Chinese communities.

The purpose of this survey was to gather data on the perception of Chinese people in the Netherlands. As to not discern generalised statements on the entire Chinese population, the survey asks a range of general questions to better understand the nature of respondents with respect to age, educational background, etc.

This appendix first shows the survey text and questions that were included in the questionnaire. Secondly, a number of basic statistics on the nature of the questionnaire and respondents are included below.

7.6 Survey

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey. This survey aims to better understand the Chinese perception of the Netherlands. The results will be combined in a report written by The West Wing, a youth-think tank affiliated to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Filling in this survey is voluntary. Responding to this survey will take 10 to 15 minutes. Your response will be processed anonymously and used solely for this particular research. The data will be stored for a period of up to 6 months. After this, the data will be deleted. By clicking yes below, you agree to participate and allow for your data to be used accordingly.

General

1. What is your age?
2. Could you highlight the Netherlands on the map?
3. Have you ever visited the Netherlands?
 - If yes, how long did you stay in the Netherlands?
4. How often do you interact with Dutch people?
5. What's your gender?
6. What's your highest achieved educational level?
7. In what field did you study?
8. What is your occupation?
9. Which province or region in China do you live in?

Governance

10. How would you rate the governance of the Netherlands (fair, transparent, and competent)?

11. To what extent do you think the Dutch government, in the Netherlands, respects human rights and treats its citizens fairly?
12. How responsible do you find the Netherlands' actions in international peace and security matters?
13. Do you think immigrants find equal opportunities in the Netherlands?
14. How would you assess the Netherlands' behaviour regarding international environmental concerns?

Education

15. Have you studied in the Netherlands?
16. How do you view the accessibility of education in the Netherlands for international students?
17. How would you rate the quality of education in the Netherlands?
18. How well does the Dutch education system prepare students for the job market?

Culture & Tourism

19. How would you rate the Netherlands in terms of sports achievements?
20. Which sports do you associate with the Netherlands?
21. To what extent do you associate the Netherlands with a rich cultural heritage (e.g., art, architecture, history)?
22. How interesting do you find contemporary Dutch culture, such as music, films, art, and literature?
23. How welcome do you (think you would) feel as a visitor in the Netherlands?
24. How attractive do you find the Netherlands as a holiday destination?
25. How would you rate the hospitality of the Netherlands towards Chinese tourists?
26. How well do you think the Netherlands is prepared for Chinese tourists?
27. Which of the following Dutch attractions appeals to you the most? (multiple answers possible)
 - The canals of Amsterdam, the tulip fields, Rijksmuseum and van Gogh Museum, Windmills and traditional villages, cycling tourism and nature
 - Other ...
28. To what extent do you think the Netherlands is a good destination for a cultural holiday?
29. How important is it for you that a destination like the Netherlands offers Chinese restaurants and shops?
30. What cities in the Netherlands are you familiar with?

Economy

31. Do you believe Dutch products have a good reputation in China?
32. What do you think the Netherlands could do better to make their exports more appealing in the Chinese market?
33. Which industries in the Netherlands stand out in terms of exports?
34. What is your impression of the Netherlands as a destination for foreign investment?

35. Do you believe the Netherlands has a strong strategy for attracting Chinese investors?
36. How do you see the Netherlands competing with other European countries for global investment?
37. How likely are you to hire a Dutch professional if given the chance?
38. How likely are you to work at a Dutch company if given the chance?

Social media

39. What do you like about the Netherlands?
40. What do you dislike about the Netherlands?

7.7 Results

Category	Number of respondents	As a percentage (%)
Total responses	524	100.0
Omitted cases	24	4.6
Responses used (N)	500	95.4

Table 7.1: Number of respondents

Category	Number of respondents	As a percentage (%)
Total (n)	24	4.6
Did not give consent	8	1.5
Other reasons	16	3.1

Table 7.2: Omitted cases

Category	Number of respondents (N)	As a percentage (%)
Fully finished survey	297	59.4
Partially finished survey	203	40.6
Other reasons	16	3.1

Table 7.3: Completion

Ages	Number of respondents (N)	As a percentage (%)
<18	11	2.2
18-24	43	8.6
25-34	102	20.4
35-44	93	18.6
45-54	60	12.0
55+	58	11.6

Table 7.4: Age of survey population

Gender	Number of respondents (N)	As a percentage (%)
Male	200	40.0
Female	164	32.8
Other (x)	3	0.6
Left blank	133	26.6

Table 7.5: Gender of survey population

Education	Number of respondents (N)	As a percentage (%)
Primary school	2	0.4
Middle school	4	0.8
High school	22	4.0
Bachelor	149	29.8
Master	137	27.4
PhD	36	7.2
Other	16	3.2
Blank	134	26.8

Table 7.6: Education of survey population

Visited NL?	Number of respondents (N)	As a percentage (%)
Yes	234	46.8
No	136	27.2
Left blank	130	26.0

Table 7.7: Visits to the Netherlands of the survey population

Country	Number of respondents (N)	As a percentage (%)
Australia	1	0.2
Canada	1	0.2
China	340	68.0
The Netherlands	6	1.2
Left blank	152	30.4

Table 7.8: Residency of the survey population

Country	Number of respondents (N)	As a percentage (%)
Anhui	6	1.7
Beijing	93	26.6
Chongqing	3	0.9
Fujian	5	1.4
Gansu	5	1.4
Guandong	37	10.6
Guangxi	2	0.6
Guizhou	3	0.9
Hebei	9	2.6
Heilongjiang	2	0.6
Henan	7	2.0
Hongkong	1	0.3
Hubei	6	1.7
Hunan	4	1.1
Inner Mongolia	3	0.9
Jiangsu	14	4.0
Jiangxi	3	0.9
Jilin	6	1.7
Liaoning	9	2.6
Shaanxi	10	2.9
Shandong	18	5.2
Shanghai	52	14.9
Shanxi	6	1.7
Sichuan	9	2.6
Tianjin	9	2.6
Xinjiang	1	0.3
Yunnan	3	0.9
Zhejiang	13	3.7
Unknown	1	0.3

Table 7.9: Residency of the Chinese survey population

Survey question 1	Survey question 2	Pearson's R*
11	12	0.58
11	25	0.53
12	13	0.65
23	25	0.65
24	25	0.52
24	28	0.69
25	26	0.52
37	38	0.50

Table 7.10: Significant correlations

Appendix IV: List of Interviewees

Name	Date	Organisation/title	Expertise
Tom Bakker	2 Dec 2024	Hong Kong Chamber of Commerce, General Manager	Trade and culture between China and the Netherlands
Vincent Chang	8 Apr 2025	Leiden University, Professor of Modern Chinese History	Modern Chinese History
Yu Chen	18 Feb 2025	Chinese Student Association in the Netherlands, Chairman	Student interests China–NL
Calvin Curry	6 Dec 2024	NL Branding, Communications Advisor	Communication and positioning of the Netherlands in China
Floriske Deutman	12 Mar 2025	Sinologist	Sino-Dutch trade relations
Ingrid d'Hooghe	9 Dec 2024	Clingendael Institute, Senior Research Associate & former Head of the Clingendael China Centre	Foreign policy, diplomacy, China–EU relations
Valérie Hoeks	29 Jan 2025	China Inroads, Managing Partner	Business relations China–Netherlands
Monique Knapen	5 Dec 2024	Netherlands–China Association, Chairman	Cultural and economic relations NL–China
Michael Yiqiang Liu	12 Dec 2024	Researcher in international law and democracy	International law, democracy and China
Jan Melissen	28 Feb 2025	Leiden University, Professor of Public Diplomacy	Public diplomacy
Boudewijn Poldermans	28 Jan 2025	Netherlands China Business Council, Vice Chairman	Sinologist
Xiaoyong Zhang	23 Feb 2025	Wageningen University & Research, China Coordinator	International cooperation with China
Bei Wang	25 Feb 2025	Independent expert on Cultural and Digital China	Digital and cultural developments in China

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