ANALYSIS OF THE ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION AS CHINA'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY INSTRUMENT IN INDONESIA (2018-2025)

UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

UNIVERSITAS
ISLAM
INDONESIA

Written by:

FAIROZA JAUHAR AHMAD

21323095

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

FACULTY OF SOCIO-CULTURAL SCIENCES

UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INDONESIA

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Proposed to the Department of International Relations
Faculty of Socio-Cultural Sciences
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As a partial fulfillment of requirement to earn
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13 November 2025

Validated by

Department of International Relations
Faculty of Socio Cultural Sciences
Universitas Islam Indonesia

Head of Department

Karina Utami Dewi, S.I.P., M.A.

	Board of Examiners	Signature
1	Ayu Heryati Naqsabandiyah, S.IP., M.A.	
2	Rizki Dian Nursita, S.IP., M,H.I.	
3	Hasbi Aswar, S.IP., M.A., Ph.D.	

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No other materials are used other than those contained. I have read and understood the university's rules and procedures regarding plagiarism.

Making false statements is considered a violation of academic integrity.

19 November 2025,



Fairoza Jauhar Ahmad

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ABSTRACT

Ecological Civilization (EC) is a concept that forms the basis for ecological and environmental development by the Chinese Government. In the 14th Five Year Plan, its promotion became one of China's main focus to gain trust and acknowledgement of Indonesians to become a green global leader. In this thesis, China's approach is analyzed using Mark Leonard's theory of public diplomacy. There are three dimensions for analysis: news management, strategic communication, and relationship building. The findings of this research indicate that China's approach is imbalanced. In its news management, China is assessed as being quite passive, slow, and ineffective in responding to negative environmental issues. Conversely, its strategic communication is carried out strongly and massively, proactively branding itself through the EC concept, the Green Silk Road, and the slogan "Building a Community with a Shared Future." Similarly, relationship-building efforts are conducted on a large scale, successfully engaging all levels of actors, from the government to the youth, through various platforms such as joint research, forums, and conservation projects. This imbalanced approach potentially undermines public diplomacy outcomes. It turns out that Indonesian people react negatively on news management events and positively on proactive events.

Keywords: Ecological Civilization, Public Diplomacy, China, Indonesia, Green Silk Road

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

China's attention to the environment is increasing. This is due to the experience of the “airpocalypse” since the industrial revolution with very poor air quality (Greenstone et al. 2021), which resulted in an increased percentage of the population dying from respiratory diseases (Xing et al. 2016). On the other hand, China also has a vision to achieve Beautiful China, an initiative to create an environmentally friendly and sustainable nation (Wu 2024), as outlined in the 14th Five Year Plan (FYP) (Xinhua News Agency 2021). This change is based on the ecological civilization ideology, which posits that human life and nature must coexist in harmony and that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable as gold and silver (National High-Level Think Tank of the Xinhua News Agency 2024).

In the book “Toward a More Beautiful China and Cleaner World: Understanding Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization,” ecological civilization serves as the foundation for the development of environment, ecology, and green energy both domestically within China and globally. Internationally, the Chinese government states that their target is no longer to be a participant in the green aspect, but to become a global green leader. One manifestation of this is through the Green Belt and Road Initiative (Green BRI) or Green Silk Road (GSR) (National High-Level Think Tank of the Xinhua News Agency 2024).

Xi endorsed this concept as a state principle for at least three reasons. First, he endorsed it as a response to the high levels of pollution and

environmental damage caused from the industrial revolution up to early 2014. The second reason was for economic interests. China's ambition is to become the world's leading economy, surpassing the United States by 2050. Ramping up production and the development of green technology and infrastructure is crucial to quickly dominate the market. Third, China wishes to gain geopolitical influence by building an image as a green country. The focus of its development is on green soft power, by sharing green technology and providing concrete examples both domestically and globally (Haëntjens 2024).

Indonesia has become one of the target countries for China's green strategy because it is the first maritime BRI partner country (Xinhua 2017) and a top 5 BRI partner in the last five years (Nedopil 2022; 2023; 2024; 2025a; 2025b). As one of the largest BRI partners, Indonesia has experienced many negative environmental impacts, such as deforestation, loss of animal habitat, difficulty finding water and food sources for humans, air pollution causing respiratory illnesses, and many more. Ultimately, these projects weaken public perception of China, as stated by Xiao and Ding (2023), Gu (2024), and Vidal (2022). Therefore, greening the BRI becomes important to reduce carbon emissions (Pristiandaru 2025) and achieve the goals mentioned earlier, especially since both countries share the same Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) target of reaching peak emissions by 2030 and zero emissions by 2060 or sooner (UNFCCC 2021).

In its statement, the Indonesian government targets reducing carbon emissions by 31.89% by 2030 and 43.20% with international assistance. Energy transition to renewable energy and the promotion of Electric Vehicle (EV) use are

the main focuses of its strategy (Kementerian Koordinator Bidang Perekonomian Republik Indonesia 2022). On the other hand, China has been the world's largest country in producing and using renewable energy for a decade (Shepherd and Li 2025). This capability can be used to help accelerate Indonesia's energy transition (Hardick 2024).

In addition, Indonesia is viewed as the de facto leader of ASEAN because of its role in mediating conflicts and initiating the formation of ASEAN (Naqsabandiyah 2023). Consequently, the movements and decisions taken by Indonesia will be observed by at least the Southeast Asian countries. This provides a strategic advantage for China if it can win the hearts of the Indonesian government and people (Lalisang and Candra 2020).

To gain trust from the Indonesian people, fulfill the goals, and gain recognition as a global green leader, China uses public diplomacy as one of its strategies. Public diplomacy is a process of diplomacy involving both government and non-government actors on both sides. It opens an opportunity for individuals or private actors to have a transaction of image and reputation of a country (Leonard et al. 2002).

The goal is stated in Part Eleven of the 14th FYP, which seeks to promote ecological civilization but does not specify the channel through which it will be achieved. However, in Part Ten, the Chinese government aims to enhance cultural soft power and mentions “cultivate and practice the socialist core values concept, and promote the formation of new ideological concepts” (Xinhua News Agency 2021). In the Chinese Constitution, the socialist core is defined as: “under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the guidance of

Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, the Scientific Outlook on Development and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era to (...) promote coordinated material, political, cultural-ethical, social and ecological advancement" (Constitution of the People's Republic of China 2018). Therefore, building ecological civilization (advancement) is a method to gain soft power.

Previous research has mentioned that China's public diplomacy efforts in Indonesia are quite varied, utilizing cultural, media, education, and panda diplomacy; however, the results have worsened the situation. The Indonesian perceptions towards China, the competition with Western countries, and stagnation of Chinese public diplomacy become the most problematic aspects of this strategy. Nevertheless, the presence of the BRI could open opportunities for increased public diplomacy because it involves various actors and is widely implemented (Ho 2018).

In environmental diplomacy, China is quite ambitious, aiming to become a global leader in the environmental sphere and to shift the world's center from the West to China (Karakır 2018). These diplomacy efforts in the environmental field can be seen through multilateral and bilateral initiatives, with Indonesia being one such case. In Indonesia, the Chinese government, NGOs, and enterprises established relationships with local NGOs for mangrove conservation. However, these efforts did not run smoothly due to competition from Global North countries, which have long-established relationships, and a perceived lack of sincerity from Chinese actors in building partnerships (Rodenbiker 2023). Therefore, this paper aims to fill a research gap by specifically discussing the

topic of China's environmental public diplomacy in Indonesia. It further adds to the field by incorporating the EC concept into public diplomacy, which is not present in previous research.

This research uses theory of Mark Leonard et al.'s (2002) public diplomacy. It emphasizes three dimensions of strategy: news management, strategic communication, and relationship building. The goal is to gain trust from Indonesians and achieve China's objectives.

1.2 Research Question

How does China conduct Mark Leonard's public diplomacy dimensions using the ecological civilization concept in Indonesia?

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are to:

1. Analyze how China uses news management to reactively frame narratives and manage the perception of its ecological civilization concept in Indonesia;
2. Examine China's use of strategic communication, through campaigns and projects like the Green Silk Road, to proactively brand and promote its ecological civilization concept;
3. Investigate China's relationship-building activities (such as training, academic exchanges, and joint projects) to foster long-term trust and acceptance of ecological civilization among the Indonesian public and elites; and

4. Identify the dominant characteristics and patterns of the overall public diplomacy strategy applied by China in promoting the ecological civilization concept in Indonesia.

1.4 Research Scope

This research investigates China's public diplomacy strategy promoting the ecological civilization concept in Indonesia from 2018 to 2025. The year 2018 is chosen due to the incorporation of EC in the Constitution in this year. The study has been specifically guided by Mark Leonard's framework, focusing on his three core dimensions: news management, strategic communication, and relationship building. This research analyzes how China applies these strategies to shape perceptions in Indonesia, with a particular focus on the Green Silk Road and other related green initiatives. The research relies on a qualitative analysis of secondary data, including government documents, news media, and academic reports.

1.5 Literature Review

Public diplomacy (PD) is a type of diplomacy that involves and targets non-state actors. According to Ho (2018), China has long realized the importance of public diplomacy in shaping global perception and gaining soft power. The creation of the Public Diplomacy Office in 2009 was a major initial step. According to Ingrid d' Hooghe, there are seven state actors in Chinese PD: China's leader, the CPC, the CPPCC, the People's Liberation Army, Ministries, the State Council Information Office (SCIO), and Sub-national State Actors. Ministries, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education, are important actors in implementing PD through programs, state visits, and their statements. Meanwhile, the SCIO acts as a censor for news coming out of the

Government. In addition, non-state actors are equally important in the implementation of PD. Hooghe divides them into seven categories: People's Diplomacy Organizations, intellectual elites, academic institutions, volunteers, celebrities, companies, and overseas Chinese (diaspora).

Thus far, China's PD channels in Indonesia have primarily been through cultural, education, media, and panda diplomacy. However, in practice, the perception of the Chinese from Indonesians has been declining from year to year. This is caused by the rigidity and stagnation of China's PD, an internal political situation in Indonesia that is prone to anti-Chinese sentiment, and PD competition with other countries. But Ho argues that with the existence of the BRI, the PD process will become easier because it is already spread across many countries.

To gain public awareness and trust in the environmental aspect, Karakır (2018) argues that China is currently attempting to set an agenda for a shift in the world's focus in handling global climate change and to overcome Western hegemony through its environmental foreign policy. Concrete evidence of this includes its active participation in global forums, its massive investments in green energy, and the establishment of the ecological civilization concept for comprehensive sustainability development at the national and international levels. This significant effort by China is influenced by several factors. First, the increasing awareness among countries regarding environmental conservation, emissions reduction, and the use of green energy. Second, the numerous pressures and criticisms from the world over the pollution and environmental damage China has caused within its own country. Third, the declining participation of the United States in global environmental issues following its withdrawal from the Paris

Agreement. However, China needs to improve domestically for its policies to become morally legitimate and for others to want to follow them. This should be done by granting freedom to NGOs to obtain and report information related to environmental issues, opening up the widest possible opportunities for non-governmental actors to contribute to handling environmental issues, and increasing public awareness of these issues.

In other literature, Rodenbiker (2023) mentioned that to gain soft power in the environmental field, China has made various efforts, such as working through multilateral institutions and engaging directly with communities. In Indonesia, the relationship between the two countries was forged through mangrove conservation projects carried out by NGOs, state representatives, and enterprises, primarily to gain public awareness. China assisted with capacity building for Indonesian citizens and provided financial assistance. This cooperation only lasted for three years for a few reasons. First, there was competition from Global North countries, which had long-standing programs, as well as competition among actors within China itself. Second, the rushed and profit-oriented nature of the Chinese approach made the Indonesian public uncomfortable working with them.

In this research, the author will fill the research gap regarding public diplomacy in the environmental field conducted by China in Indonesia. Although this was touched upon by Rodenbiker (2023), the focus of his writing was not on public diplomacy, but rather on soft power. Furthermore, the use of the EC concept as an instrument of public diplomacy has not been previously studied.

1.6 Research Framework

This thesis utilizes Mark Leonard et al.'s (2002) understanding of public diplomacy as its guiding theoretical concept. Public diplomacy is a public version of traditional diplomacy and is implemented to build people's trust and achieve the country's objectives. Traditional diplomacy only involves governments as actors, but public diplomacy involves broader actors, for example but not limited to governments, NGOs, brands and businesses, diaspora communities, and other actors from both sides. Notably, the actor responsible for public diplomacy is the government which is achieved by officially delegating other actors, such as the foreign ministry, cultural relations organizations (ex: British Council), international broadcasters (ex: BBC World Service, CNN, & Al-Jazeera), and economic and trade bodies (ex: Trade Partners UK & Invest UK).

Public diplomacy comes from the premise of the public goods of a country's image and reputation that impact on enabling the environment for individuals and private actors to engage in transactions. It can have several hierarchical impacts: increasing people's familiarity with the country, increasing appreciation of the country, engaging people with the country, and influencing people to achieve the country's objectives. In order for a country to achieve these goals, it needs to fulfill three dimensions of public diplomacy: news management, strategic communication, and relationship building.

News management refers to reactive responses to events that happen both domestically or globally related to the country. Response time is within hours or days. Therefore it is called a short-term approach. There are five types of audience are targeted, as stated by Leonard:

> "Remember, when we are out there on television, communicating instantaneously around the world, we're talking to five audiences. One, the reporters who ask the question–important audience. Second audience, the American people who are watching. The third audience, 170 capitals who may have an interest in what the subject is. Fourth, you are talking to your enemy. It is a unique situation to know that your enemy is getting the clearest indication of your intentions by watching you on television at the same time you are giving that message. And fifth, you are talking to the troops. Their lives are on the line." (Leonard et al. 2002).

Strategic communication or proactive communication is a set campaign agenda to highlight a country's branding through strategic messages. It is included as a middle-term approach. This dimension requires a clear and consistent branding objective from all promoters so that the message can be well-received by the audience. It may seem like propaganda but comes across softer. Strategic communication can be in the form of a slogan, tagline, branding, or similar. Once it has been made public, the government will hold follow-up efforts to strengthen it, such as report-making, press conference, and thought collection.

Finally, relationship building is an effort to build long-term relationships with audiences to get a positive experiential response and ensure there is follow-up action afterward. This dimension requires years for the results to become visible. Efforts that fall into this dimension include scholarships, exchanges, training, conferences, seminars, real and virtual networks, and opening up media access to people. The first two dimensions are considered one-way communication, while the last is two-way communication. Although all are important, the final dimension is the one most recommended by Leonard.

1.7 Provisional Argument

The author argues that China's public diplomacy strategy in regards to promoting ecological civilization in Indonesia has exhibited an imbalanced

pattern. China has been highly successful and proactive in the dimensions of strategic communication and relationship building, as seen through large-scale green infrastructure projects and institutional collaborations, to create a positive image. However, in news management dimension, China tends to be slow and less effective in responding to negative press regarding the environmental impacts of its other industrial projects and other sensitive issues. This could weaken the impact of public diplomacy

1.8 Research Method

1.8.1 Type of the Research

This research employs a qualitative method, studying phenomena through non-numerical data. It aims to understand social phenomena in their natural contexts, focusing on the "why" and "how" (Ugwu and Eze 2023) of the ecological civilization functioning as a public diplomacy instrument in Indonesia.

1.8.2 Subject and Object of the Research

The subject of this research is the Chinese government (2018-2025), while the object is China’s public diplomacy strategy via ecological civilization concept.

1.8.3 Method of Data Collection

Data collection relied on secondary research. Sources included government documents, news, and academic journals on the ecological civilization and China's green projects.

1.8.4 Process of the Research

The process involved collecting and analyzing secondary data, guided by the theoretical framework. Analysis focused on how China designs and

implements ecological civilization as a public diplomacy instrument, and the data obtained articulates strategic intent and operational mechanisms.

1.9 Thesis Outline

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

This chapter consists of the background, research question, objectives, significance, scope, literature review, and theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 2: ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

In this chapter, the author discusses an overview of China's ecological civilization and its development, ecological civilization in Indonesia, and actor of public diplomacy through ecological civilization.

CHAPTER 3: DIMENSIONS OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

This chapter analyses China’s utilization of ecological civilization as a public diplomacy instrument based on Mark Leonard’s theory: news management, strategic communication, and relationship building.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter contains the author’s brief response to the research question as the core of the research report conducted and some suggestions for better future research.

CHAPTER 2

ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

2.1 Ecological Civilization Development

China's commitment to protecting the environment, developing green energy, and becoming a global leader in green development is increasing. This commitment is enshrined in the ideology, philosophy, and concept of ecological civilization. In the official document "Toward a More Beautiful China and Cleaner World: Understanding Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization," ecological civilization is defined as "a crystallization of the in-depth pondering on the development of human civilization and the construction of a clean and beautiful world, providing a powerful ideological tool for building a beautiful China and a modernization which allows harmonious symbiosis between humanity and nature and the joint construction of a community of life for them." This highlights its dual role as the basis for developing green aspects both domestically and internationally (National High-Level Think Tank of the Xinhua News Agency 2024). The concept is based on Chinese philosophy incorporating various ideologies and implemented with technological, judicial, and political values. It is called *shengtai wenming* in Chinese, which can be translated as ecological progress or ecological civilization (Hansen et al. 2018).

The progress of this concept rocketed under Xi Jinping's leadership. The culmination was the inclusion of this concept in the preamble of the 2018 amendment to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China on 11 March 2018, with the term ecological advancement as ideological framework on

environmental policies, laws, and education. This culmination means EC become one with China socialist ideology.

Two days later, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE) was established as the result of the 13th National People Congress (NPC). It is a significant step to integrate and simplify most of the responsibilities of many ministries, such as Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP), National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), Ministry and Water Resources (MWR), Ministry of Land and Resources (MLR), Ministry of Agriculture, and State Oceanic Administration (SOA). With the presence of the MEE, the entire process of administration, monitoring, evaluation, and program development to achieve ecological civilization becomes simpler, more focused, systematic, and comprehensive, like Xi Jinping's thoughts on EC (Jinpeng 2018).

Then, the Research Center for Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization, a brand new think tank under the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, was established in 2021 and it published a report in 2024 entitled "Toward a More Beautiful China and Cleaner World: Understanding Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization; Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization in Chinese Practice and Its Contribution to the World (Summary)" to ease people into the topic (Hansen et al. 2018; Yan and Bocharnikov 2022).

This concept has been integrated into the 14th FYP (2021-2025) as a guiding ideology in Article II, which states: "(...) use comprehensive planning to advance the overall layout of (…) ecological civilization construction." It is also a goal to be achieved in Part Eleven: "(...) improve overall coordination mechanisms in the field of ecological civilization, build an ecological civilization

system, promote a comprehensive green transformation of economic and social development, and build a beautiful China" (Xinhua News Agency 2021).

Although in this document EC is used only for domestic development and was initially intended for a domestic audience, for cadres, entrepreneurs, and the people of China (Wang-Kaeding 2018). In other documents, EC is also used for China's green policies abroad, such as in the China SDGs Report 2021 SDG 15, which states: "Joint efforts must be made with other countries in building a global ecological civilization and creating solutions for environmental protection and sustainable development around the world" and "China has actively conducted international cooperation and promoted the development of a global ecological civilization" (Center for International Knowledge on Development 2021).

In the Position Paper of China at CBD COP15, China deliberately developed EC domestically so that it could share it with the global community. The opening section states: "China attaches great importance to biodiversity, adheres to the philosophy of ecological civilization" and "China is ready to share its experience in advancing ecological civilization with all parties and step up cooperation on biodiversity in order to move the world toward the 2050 Vision of 'Living in harmony with nature.'" Therefore, the domestic implementation of EC also influences China's branding and role in advancing ecology globally (MEE 2021).

Furthermore, the implementation of the Green BRI or Green Silk Road (GSR) is also based on ecological civilization as a guiding principle. GSR is Xi Jinping's foreign policy on infrastructure that incorporates environmental

considerations. Its implementation is mostly in Southern countries, with the aim of developing green energy there (CCICED 2018).

Regarding its relationship with the UN SDGs, EC has similarities and differences. The similarity is that both support sustainable development; EC is even recognized as one of the accelerators in achieving the UN SDGs globally through GSR (MEE 2021). Moreover, in developing green, sustainability, and ecological protection aspects, Xi Jinping often uses the term UN SDGs because it is more familiar to both domestic and global communities (University of Helsinki Chinese Studies 2021). The difference lies in the fundamental political and cultural aspects that define the relationship between humans and nature, where in EC, both live as equals on one planet (Hanson 2019).

Domestically, Xi not only focused on environmental protection practices but also created a holistic system to realize them. There are four supporting systems: rule of law, market, science and technology, and policy (International Department of the CPC Central Committee 2023). Some of his policies include the War on Pollution, which combines environmental protection law, mobilizes the carbon market, and uses green technology and real-time environmental detection domestically. Xi not only focused on environmental protection practices but also created a holistic system to realize them. There are four supporting systems: rule of law, market, science and technology, and policy (Xinhua News Agency 2021).

In external implementation, China uses several channels to disseminate the EC concept, such as the G20 and UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD), and regional forums and projects, such as South-South Cooperation (SSC),

North-South Cooperation (NSC), and the Belt and Road Initiative foreign policy, with the BRI being the largest and most massive channel (MEE 2017). In this project, China successfully built the 100 MW Zhanata wind farm in Kazakhstan (China Daily 2024), the 310 MW Turkana wind farm in Kenya (Omolere 2023), the 192 MW Cirata floating solar plant in Indonesia (People's Daily 2024), and many more. In addition, through NSC, Chinese company Huasun cooperates with the Italian company New Time to produce an IGW tandem solar line in Italy (Shaw 2025). China also helps European countries to accelerate energy transition. 95% of Europe's solar panels are made in China (Abnett 2024).

2.2 Ecological Civilization in Indonesia

China's ecological civilization practices in Indonesia are dominated by infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), called the Green BRI or GSR. First established by President Xi Jinping in 2017, it matured in 2019 after the creation of the Green Investment Principles (GIP), whose members include banks and financial institutions from several countries that focus on regulating BRI funding to align with green principles (GIP, n.d.). Another initiative is BRI International Green Development Coalition (BRIGC), a coalition of various actors including Chinese ministries, Chinese entrepreneurs, Chinese and global NGOs, and INGOs that focuses on regulating the principles of projects that are being implemented, labeling and evaluating ongoing projects, and making general or specific policy recommendations (BRIGC, n.d.). One example is the creation of a policy recommendation in 2024 titled "Critical Role of China on Accelerating Indonesia's Energy Transition". This is a collaboration between the

BRIGC, ClientEarth, and an Indonesian NGO think tank, the Institute for Essential Services Reform (IESR) (BRIGC 2024b).

Indonesia is among the top five countries receiving BRI funding and cooperation. In its implementation, the BRI has had many negative impacts on the environment and the lives of surrounding communities, drawing criticism from scientists, activists, and the public, including in Indonesia. Therefore, China introduced the GSR as a solution to reduce the negative impacts of development on nature and people and to establish a new type of environmentally friendly investment. Additionally, China also intends to create a green image for its country and reduce negative sentiment from the international community, particularly the West and Indonesian citizens (Xiao and Ding 2023; Haëntjens 2024; Yan and Bocharnikov 2022).

China has undergone an investment evolution from the pre-BRI era to during the BRI and when the GSR began to be implemented in Indonesia. There has been a surge in investment since the BRI was implemented, as reported by the Ministry of Investment and Downstreaming/BKPM (2024; 2025a; 2025b). Before the BRI was implemented, Beijing only ranked in the teens among investors in Indonesia. However, since 2016, China has become one of the top three investors in Indonesia, showing its seriousness in increasing regional influence.

The next evolution was the massive application of green values in China's overseas projects after 2018. Initially, the BRI focused only on economic development without regard for the safety of nature and people, by building coal-fired power plants (CFPP) and coal mining projects (Gu 2024). However, since 2018, China has slowly shifted to building only green projects, especially in

the energy sector, such as solar power plants, hydropower plants, and mining for 'green' minerals—minerals that are raw materials for the green energy transition, like nickel and bauxite (Sustainability Directory 2025). Ultimately though, China has not yet been able to fully commit to abandoning coal projects.

According to Global Energy Monitor (2025b; 2025a), China plays a very massive role in the development of CFPP but only a minor role in coal mining, which is predominantly controlled by Indonesian companies. The majority of these coal-fired power plants are used to supply industries. The largest among them are the Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park (IMIP) with a production of 2070 MW, the Sulawesi Labota power station with a production of 3360 MW, the Indonesia Weda Bay Industrial Park (IWIP) with a production of 4540 MW, and Delong Nickel Phase I-IV, which reaches up to 5325 MW. The number of coal-fired power plants being built has not decreased. New CFPPs are also being established even after Xi made a commitment in 2021 to stop building them abroad entirely (WEC 2023). This is a note for the Chinese government to have a stronger commitment to the environment.

China is quite active in developing the renewable energy industry in Indonesia, as part of GSR. This trend is increasing year by year. China's roles include being an investor, contractor, and lender for hydropower and solar power plants, the nickel processing industry, and solar panel manufacturing. The most famous renewable industry complexes are the Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park (IMIP) and the Indonesia Weda Bay Industrial Park (IWIP), which handle nickel from upstream to downstream such as mining, smelter, and production of EV batteries and stainless steel. The Kayan Cascade mega-project, with a production

of 9000 MWp, will also be undertaken by China in stages and is set to become the largest hydropower plant in Indonesia. Building solar panel manufacturing in Deltamas, West Java with 1.6 GWp solar panel production capacity between Pertamina NRE (Indonesia) and LONGi. Also, construction of a solar panel factory in Kendal, Central Java by Trina Solar China and Sinarmas Indonesia (DSS 2025).

2.3 Actors of China's Public Diplomacy

China conducts public diplomacy through two types of actors: governmental and non-governmental. According to Ingrid d' Hooghe, at least there are seven state actors in Chinese PD: China's leader, the Communist Party of China (CPC), the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the People's Liberation Army, Ministries, the State Council Information Office (SCIO), and Sub-national State Actors. The SCIO is tasked with regulating news entering and exiting the country to align with existing guidelines for both national and foreign media. Meanwhile, ministries are the spearhead of the public diplomacy process due to their frequent direct interaction with receiving parties, such such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Ministry of Education (MOE), and Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE) (Hooghe 2015).

In addition, non-governmental actors also play a crucial role in the execution of public diplomacy. According to Hooghe, there are at least seven category actors: People's Diplomacy Organizations, intellectual elites, academic institutions, volunteers, celebrities, companies, and overseas Chinese (diaspora). Currently, the Chinese government expects an active role from companies in

carrying out good branding and public diplomacy by organizing training (Hooghe 2015).

In conducting public diplomacy using EC, the author found several governmental and non-governmental actors actively involved. First, China's leader, namely Xi Jinping. Xi is very active in diplomacy and branding through several international forums, such as the establishment of the Green Silk Road at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation 2017 (Xinhua 2017) and the cessation of overseas coal-fired power plant construction at the UN General Assembly 2021 (MFA 2021).

Second, the CPC, which creates various policies and regulations related to diplomacy, promotion, and the like. One of the main efforts is the publication of the book "Special Issue on Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization" in 2023, which contains the underlying thought, strategy, and goals of EC implementation (International Department of the CPC Central Committee 2023). This also relates to its active role in regulating the management of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) of companies abroad, especially state-owned enterprises (SOEs) (Liu 2019).

Third, ministries, especially the Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE), along with its subordinate institutions such as the think tank Research Center for Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization (Yan and Bocharnikov 2022) and the BRI International Green Development Coalition (BRIGC), which is an initiative between the MEE and international partners (BRIGC, n.d.). Additionally, there is the Ministry of Natural Resources which established relations with Indonesian actors such as the National Research and Innovation

Agency (BRIN) of Indonesia and Jenderal Soedirman University (China-Southeast Asian Countries Marine Cooperation Forum 2024).

Fourth, the SCIO as the censor of news exiting China, including environmental news. Examples include Xinhua News Agency, which states that it is a Chinese website with global influence (Xinhua 2023), and China Global Television Network (CGTN), which claims to promote communication and understanding of China to the world and enhance trust between China and other countries (CGTN, n.d.).

Fifth, academic institutions such as universities, colleges, and academies. One of the main actors is Tsinghua University, a university under the Ministry of Education (Great Wall, n.d.). It opened a branch in Southeast Asia called the Tsinghua Southeast Asia Center, which is part of Tsinghua University's global strategy. It collaborates with the United In Diversity Foundation with one of its goals being to foster harmonious and inclusive global community, a similar theme to the principles of EC, and to realize the UN SDGs (TSEA, n.d.-a).

Sixth, enterprise actors, especially SOEs. According to Liu, the Chinese government, through the CCP, intervenes in the CSR disbursement process through mandates, facilitating, and supporting these companies' CSR. This activity is driven by the CCP's broader role "as intermediary, as sponsor or patron of civil society and business organizations, and as controlling shareholder of state enterprise." CSR itself is a form of responsibility of companies towards the surrounding society and environment. By participating in regulating and developing corporate CSR, China can gain soft power, as well as political and economic influence in recipient countries (Liu 2019).

CHAPTER 3

DIMENSIONS OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Public diplomacy, according to Mark Leonard, is the public form of traditional diplomacy which aims to cultivate trust and achieve a state's objectives by involving governmental and non-governmental actors who are mandated by the government, targeting both governmental and non-governmental entities. China's objectives in this context are to become the leading country and shift the Western hegemony to China in regards to environmental topics. It is important for the sender of a message to choose the right message and positioning. A good message should be specific and use the local language of the targeted country, which in this research is Bahasa Indonesia. However, a message can still be well-received even if it is general in form and uses an international language (English) (Leonard et al. 2002).

Essentially, public diplomacy is about building relationships: understanding the needs of other countries, cultures and peoples; communicating our points of view; correcting misperceptions; and looking for areas where we can find common cause. It can have several hierarchial impacts: increasing people's familiarity with the country, increasing appreciation, engaging people with the country, and influencing people to achieve the country's objectives. To achieve a complete and comprehensive objective, a three-dimensional approach is needed; this incorporates news management, strategic communications, and relationship building (Leonard et al. 2002).

3.1 News Management

In this context, news management is a reactive response to issues affecting the Chinese actors and an effort to evaluate the existing green projects or values to the audience. There are five target audiences: inquirers (journalists), the targeted audience, foreign audiences who might be interested in the issue, enemies/opponents, and finally, military forces (Leonard et al. 2002). Indonesians can generally be categorized into three of the audience types: inquirers, targeted audience, and foreign audience. First, Indonesians become inquirers if they collect data directly through interviews with Chinese actors. Second, they can be considered a targeted audience if the news is aimed at the Indonesian public using local (Indonesian) or international (English) language. Third, they can be considered a foreign audience to China's responses to domestic, other country, or global issues reported in an international language.

In the dimension of (reactive) news management, China is a country that very rarely responds directly to a specific issue, making it very difficult to find news containing China's response. This is because, fundamentally, the Chinese government intends to address environmental issues proactively rather than reactively (National High-Level Think Tank of the Xinhua News Agency 2024). Some responses include the establishment of the GSR, which is based on the EC, as a solution to reduce the negative environmental and social impacts of the BRI. This is based on an official statement from Xi Jinping at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation.

> "We should pursue the new vision of green development and a way of life and work that is green, low-carbon, circular and sustainable. Efforts should be made to strengthen cooperation in ecological and environmental protection and build a sound ecosystem so as to realize the goals set by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. (...) We propose the establishment of an international coalition for

> green development on the Belt and Road, and we will provide support to related countries in adapting to climate change." (Xinhua 2017).

The GSR, launched by Xi, is not operating optimally because its implementation lacks government oversight in industrial management and the use of clean energy (Coenen et al. 2021; Cao et al. 2021). Xi finally intervened and responded to these concerns by announcing the cessation of overseas coal-fired power plant construction in the UN General Assembly 2021.

> "Staying committed to harmony between man and nature, we need to improve global environmental governance, actively respond to climate change and create a community of life for man and nature. We need to accelerate transition to a green and low-carbon economy and achieve green recovery and development. China will strive to peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060. This requires tremendous hard work, and we will make every effort to meet these goals. China will step up support for other developing countries in developing green and low-carbon energy, and will not build new coal-fired power projects abroad." (MFA 2021).

This decision received a positive response and support from partner countries and local institutions. The U.S. envoy for combating climate change welcomed and acknowledged that this decision would accelerate the achievement of success at COP26 (Pristiandaru 2021). In addition, China's national financial institutions also support the efforts of President Xi Jinping. The Bank of China and China Exim Bank stated they would no longer finance the construction of coal-fired power plants abroad (Xie 2021; Liang 2022).

In Indonesia, the first issue relates to the construction of the Batang Toru hydropower plant, funded by the Bank of China. Bank of China is a state-owned bank that in 14th FYP they focused on green investment and green energy. It also become a media for Chinese government to disseminate their thought as the statement, "As a large state-owned commercial bank on a new journey towards

fully building a modern socialist country, the Bank, under the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" (BoC 2022) Researchers and activists found that the project's existence would disrupt the habitats and distribution of fauna, especially endemic fish and the Tapanuli orangutan. This will also affect the community's livelihood and economy (Harahap 2018). The Chinese government, represented by the Bank of China (BoC), responded seriously as it is stated on its website.

> "Bank of China took note of the concerns expressed by some environmental organisations about the hydroelectric dam project in Batang Toru of Indonesia recently. We attach great importance to corporate social responsibility in our global operations and ensure that our business activities abide by local laws and regulations. We are committed to supporting environmental protection globally and upholding the principles of green finance. Bank of China will evaluate the project very carefully and make prudent decisions by duly considering the promotion of green finance, the fulfilment of social responsibility as well as the adherence to commercial principles. We appreciate your kind attention to Bank of China." (BoC 2019).

However, the response from the Indonesian community was quite strong because the construction continued. The community of Pulu Payung Village, as the local residents where the project was to be built and would suffer negative impacts, was the strongest in its rejection. They held demonstrations and protests around the construction area. The Centre for Orangutan Protection (COP), an NGO, researched the negative impacts and advocated for the residents to the authorities (Andriansyah 2019).

The second issue relates to the environmental case involving PT Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park (IMIP). PT IMIP is a flagship project of Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. Run by various private companies especially Tshingshan Group but backed by state-owned banks financier such as China Development Bank, Export–Import Bank of China, Bank of China, and Industrial and

Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) (Ginting and Moore 2021). In an audit conducted by Indonesia's Ministry of Environment, PT IMIP was found to have conducted illegal activities by building plants and related facilities on 1,800 hectares of land that had not undergone an environmental assessment. Furthermore, there were also 12 million metric tons of illegal tailings deposits and air pollution levels that exceeded the parameters. Dedi Kurniawan, a spokesperson for PT IMIP, delivered a response.

> "The company submitted its environmental impact assessment report for an additional 1,800-hectare area in 2023 to the ministry that oversees environment and forestry under the previous administration and is now waiting for the new Environment Ministry to sign off on the document. (...) The company and its tenants monitor air quality both in real time and periodically through various methods, and ensure the proper technology is installed to reduce emissions from smelting activities. (...) We will maximise coordination and supervision of the operations of all tenants in order to carry out all forms of improvement in accordance with the direction of the Indonesian Ministry of Environment." (Reuters 2025).

There has been no response given by the general public regarding this matter. However, if referencing the Indonesian government's response, the Ministry of Environment would impose strict sanctions and could take the issue to court. On the other hand, PT IMIP claims to have renewed the permits in 2020, which creates a contradiction between the two statements (Prihatini and Utomo 2025).

The third regards the tailings incident on 21 March 2025, at PT IMIP. Heavy rain, coupled with poor management of the waste disposal system, caused major flooding and a landslide which resulted in three workers being buried, with two people safe and one person missing. In this case, two companies, PT QMB New Energy Material and Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt, provided a response.

> “(...) Together with the IMIP park, we express our understanding and support for the bereaved families, providing emotional support and assistance. (...) We immediately set up monitoring stations at environmentally sensitive locations, such as surrounding bodies of water and soil areas, using a combination of online monitoring equipment and manual sampling. Continuous monitoring of water, soil, and air quality indicators has been conducted, with real-time data reporting to the Health, Safety and Environment Department and notification to the relevant government authorities. To date, no information regarding environmental hazards affecting the community has been received. We pledge to continue monitoring environmental data to ensure the safety of the surrounding environment. (...)” (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre 2025a).
>
> “It has been verified that the tailings incident that occurred within IMIP on March 21, 2025, was not associated with the Huayue project, but another HPAL company operating in the industrial park. The Huayue tailings storage facility is independently managed and operates separately from other entities. (...) Huayue strictly adheres to all applicable Indonesian regulations concerning tailings disposal. The company has established a comprehensive management framework covering the design, construction, operation, and emergency response of its tailings storage facility. This includes a full suite of evaluation, review, approval, and documentation procedures to ensure standardized, lifecycle-based oversight. (...)” (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre 2025b).

This incident actually worsens the Indonesian public's perception of the mining activities at PT IMIP. Walhi Central Sulawesi stated that the toxic tailing waste is highly vulnerable to spillage during the rainy season, thus requiring a comprehensive evaluation by the Indonesian Government. Ariyanto Sangadji, a researcher from the Institute for Ecological Action and People's Emancipation (AEER), suggested that this situation will only stop worsening when the government stops aggressively boosting nickel production (Salman 2025).

The last was the issue of flooding in Bandung, which was said to be caused by the construction of the high-speed rail Kereta Cepat Indonesia China (KCIC). KCIC is a flagship program under Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (Xinhua 2025c). The President Director of PT KCIC, Chandra Dwiputra, provided a response, as follows:

> "(Regarding the high-speed rail project being the cause of the floods), it's not like that. We're often made the scapegoat, which I find strange. We have our Amdal

(Environmental Impact Assessment). We also use experts for the technical aspects. We follow the guidelines." (Indraini 2020).

There has been no direct response from the general public regarding this issue. However, there was a response from a researcher stating that the KCIC AMDAL (Environmental Impact Assessment) was very poor because it blocked drainage and caused flooding to spread to the toll road and Halim. He suggested several mitigation steps such as river dredging, river normalization, reducing the spread of flood points, and maximizing water pumps (CNN Indonesia 2020).

In addition, there are still many environmental issues that China has not yet addressed, such as Delong Nickel Power Station (GEM Wiki 2025b), Bangko Tengah Power Station (GEM Wiki 2025a), Indonesia Weda Industrial Park (GEM Wiki 2025c), and many more. This shows the weakness of China's approach to the news management dimension as well as follow up actions to overcome it. Yet, this dimension is also important for correcting misperceptions about issues.

3.2 Strategic Communication

Strategic communication is a proactive form of communication undertaken by the Chinese government to ensure that its planned programs stick in the minds of audiences/recipients and stay at the top of people’s minds. It is like a softer form of propaganda that brands the country with the specific identity it wants to highlight. It can take the shape of a slogan or an easily remembered image. This dimension is one-way and aims for national promotion. The resulting perception will influence the diplomatic environment. Subsequently, the government is also obliged to prepare a series of activities to strengthen that branding (Leonard et al. 2002).

In the context of promoting ecological civilization to the international world, China has some brandings. First, the term ecological civilization itself. Although it initially targeted only the domestic Chinese public, the Chinese government eventually also targeted other countries and even wants to become a global leader in the environmental field (National High-Level Think Tank of the Xinhua News Agency 2024).

The global community can read a lot of literature about EC that has been purposefully prepared by the Chinese government, especially after the establishment of the Research Center for Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization, a new think tank under the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, in 2021. One of its main works is "Toward a More Beautiful China and Cleaner World: Understanding Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization; Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization in Chinese Practice and Its Contribution to the World (Summary)" in 2024 (National High-Level Think Tank of the Xinhua News Agency 2024). The term ecological civilization is now not unfamiliar and is often included in contemporary plans and the latest reports, such as in the 14th Five Year Plan (Xinhua News Agency 2021), China's Progress Report on Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2021) (Center for International Knowledge on Development 2021), and China's Progress Report on Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2023) (Center for International Knowledge on Development 2023).

Second is the tagline "Building A Community with A Shared Future for All Life on Earth." It emerged as the main theme of the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) in Kunming in October 2021. China's action on this theme

has been included in Position Paper “Building a Shared Future for All Life on Earth: China in Action” by MEE (MEE 2021).

This tagline is an evolution of Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy: “Building A Community with A Shared Future for Mankind.” The fundamental difference lies in the focus of the approach. The phrase “for mankind” is people-centered, with a focus on social development, social justice, security, peace, cooperation, equality, and unity. Meanwhile, the phrase “for all life on earth” more specifically discusses nature conservation, the development of green cities, the green energy transition, and environmentally friendly projects so that nature can be preserved. Although the phrase “for mankind” still contains green economic development as a form of commitment to the future of humanity, the phrase “for all life on earth” also intends to protect human life so that it is preserved for the future. The similarity is that the Chinese government encourages the countries of the world to help each other, regardless of race, nation, or economic power. The world today needs global win-win cooperation and multilateralism (MFA 2024a; 2024b; 2023; MEE 2021). This tagline is also being used more frequently by China, such as being used at the Osaka Expo, namely, "Building a Community of Life for Man and Nature - Future Society of Green Development." The country also won gold in the exhibition design category for the alignment between the theme and the building design (Xinhua 2025b).

Third is the Green Silk Road (GSR), a fusion of EC and the BRI, a Xi Jinping foreign policy focused on infrastructure development. The GSR exists to brand the BRI as green and to portray China as a leading country in the environment by promoting investment in green energy, green technology, and

green minerals, as has been announced since 2017 (CCICED 2018). As proof of its seriousness, China immediately created the Green Investment Principles (GIP) in 2018 and BRI International Green Development Coalition (BRIGC) in 2019. This commitment was emphasized by Xi Jinping's decision to stop the construction of overseas coal-fired power plants in 2021.

The implementation of the GSR is based on joint consultation, joint construction, shared benefits, and the values of the UN SDGs. Currently, the GSR has received recognition from the UN as one of the examples of implementing the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Thus, China's role in practical green development through the BRI can take the form of green technology, green investment and financing, low-carbon policies, and capacity building under the BRI framework (BRIGC 2024a).

The GSR is also branded as a helper for developing countries to achieve a clean energy transition through SSC. In addition, China has also expanded its reach to establish NSC. Globally, China has successfully increased the acceleration of the renewable energy transition. As much as 70% of components for solar power plants and 40% of components for wind power plants are supplied by China. A total of 94.4 GW of solar panels were exported to Europe in 2024. In Indonesia, the implementation of the GSR has been quite good and has taken the form of increased investment and joint development of several energy infrastructures, such as the Cirata floating photovoltaic energy, the Kayan Cascade project, the establishment of a nickel processing industrial complex, and the first solar panel manufacturing plant in Indonesia (BRIGC 2024b; Asaolu 2025).

In addition, one of the methods China massively applies to forge its green reputation is by creating news with a positive narrative on all official platforms. China prefers to highlight the positive side of its projects rather than directly answer the environmental criticisms leveled against it. For example, Beijing received criticism for the operations of the Indonesia Weda Bay Industrial Park (IWIP), Halmahera Islands, which were deemed environmentally destructive (Belseran 2022). The Chinese government did not respond to this issue directly but provided comparative data. IWIP has brought economic, technological, social, and environmental progress. With abundant natural resources, China has succeeded in boosting the economy of Indonesia and the surrounding communities, introducing advanced technology, and transferring knowledge and skills to local people. Additionally, China has successfully increased the population of coral reefs and tropical marine biota by carrying out mangrove and coral reef conservation, and by using advanced technology to process waste and reduce pollution (Ramadhani and Ao'na 2022).

Additionally, the Chinese government also engages in cooperation with Indonesian media and think tanks. An example is the collaboration between Xinhua and Antara News, which aims to deliver news directly from China instead of having to go through Western media. This cooperation also intends for the Indonesian public to be able to learn about developments in China more quickly (Wahyudi 2019). For instance, in the news article titled "Report says China speeds up efforts to build ecological economic system," the news was produced and translated by Xinhua, a Chinese state-run media outlet. Antara News only functions as a conduit and extension of Xinhua (Xinhua 2025a). This cooperation

allows China to directly export the progress of its domestic ecological civilization to the outside world in an easily accessible manner, while also being able to correct any incorrect perceptions about China (Natalia 2024).

These positive narratives also continue in the IESR-BRIGC relationship. IESR is an Indonesian think tank focusing on green energy and related fields. IESR officially became a member of BRIGC in 2024 and produced a publication titled “Critical Role of China on Accelerating Indonesia’s Energy Transition,” which demonstrates China's important role in Indonesia while simultaneously branding China's strengths in the green energy sector (Simanjuntak 2024). China's importance in green energy development is also continually reiterated, such as in the news article titled "China as a Strategic Partner for Indonesia's Renewable Energy," especially in the fields of investment, infrastructure capacity development, and renewable energy technology (Hasjanah 2025).

Furthermore, these positive narratives are reinforced by socio-environmental aid provided by state-owned enterprises in Indonesia, such as PT IMIP and PT KCIC. According to (Liu 2019), the CCP is involved in intervening in the process of SOEs providing CSR to local communities. Therefore, all types of CSR from companies or projects affiliated with the Chinese government fall into this category. PT IMIP is an example. It received 3 types of CSR awards in 2025, namely the Community Recycling Empowerment Award, the Quality Education Award, and the Marine Ecosystem Award. They have built waste banks, literacy houses, and conserved coral reefs (Silfia 2025). Additionally, PT KCIC also disbursed Rp278,665,000 in 2024 to provide teaching

and sports facilities in 40 surrounding schools, empower 1500 MSMEs, and provide cleaning equipment for residents along the railway line (KCIC 2024).

As for the response of the general public to this strategy, it cannot be provided on a case-by-case basis due to a lack of available data. However, the general view of the Indonesian public on environmental issues related to China is documented in the "China-Indonesia Survey 2024: Insights into Indonesian Public Perceptions of China" report by CELIOS. As many as 44% of Indonesians believe that Chinese infrastructure development in Indonesia leads to an increase in negative perceptions. The main concern is that it causes environmental damage. In another question, 43% of Indonesians opined that the BRI causes significant environmental damage. On the other hand, 47% are confident that China can help Indonesia accelerate its energy transition, and 46% believe this can be achieved through funding (Rakhmat et al. 2024).

There is also a response from the Indonesian academic, Arif Darmawan, who mentioned that Indonesia can take advantage of the moment when China is developing an ecological civilization. China itself has undertaken a massive green transition by producing and using green energy for domestic consumption, although CFPPs (Coal-Fired Power Plants) still dominate all these activities. Furthermore, China's efforts in restoring and conserving nature are quite massive in several regions of the country. Therefore, Indonesia needs to take advantage of this by collaborating on the energy transition and also localizing the concept of China's ecological civilization. The purpose is to reconstruct the relationship between humans and nature and apply its development locally in Indonesia (Darmawan 2024).

In essence, China's efforts in strategic communication have been extensive and cover many platforms. Especially the positive narrative through local media. These efforts intend to increase China's opportunities to enhance familiarity, gain appreciation from other countries, and can even influence the perceptions of nations to help achieve China's objectives.

3.3 Relationship Building

Relationship building is the third dimension of Leonard et al.'s (2002) public diplomacy theory. It involves long-term programs that take years to yield tangible results, such as scholarships, exchanges, workshops, dialogues, seminars, conferences, research collaborations and volunteering, building real or virtual relationships, and giving people access to media. The main goal is to leave a positive impression on the participants. This dimension is the most important to gain the objectives of public diplomacy according to Leonard.

In building a relationship with Indonesia, the EC involved abroad is inseparable from the Green Silk Road. As explained above, there is currently one institution actively managing the GSR, namely the BRI International Green Development Coalition (BRIGC), and one crucial supporting platform, the Green Investment Principles (GIP). The BRIGC is an initiative of the Ministry of Ecology and Environment of the PRC with its international partners. It currently has 51 members from China and around the world, including Indonesia which is represented by a think tank the Institute for Essential Services Reform (IESR), and 130 partners, comprising 26 environment ministries from BRI partner countries, 33 Chinese and global businesses, 9 IGOs, and 62 NGOs and think tanks (BRIGC, n.d.).

Meanwhile, the GIP is a collaborative platform between the China Green Finance Committee and the City of London Corporation, with international organizations such as the IFC, PRI, the World Economic Forum, and the Paulson Institute. GIP aims to promote the implementation of sustainable investment in the BRI by considering environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors. GIP has 52 global institutional members in 19 countries with total assets of over $42 trillion (GIP, n.d.).

The development of relations between Indonesia and China can be seen in the relationship between IESR and BRIGC. In 2023, IESR, BRIGC, and ClientEarth initiated a joint research project to produce a policy assessment and recommendation publication titled “Critical Role of China on Accelerating Indonesia’s Energy Transition,” which was published in December 2024. IESR also officially became a member of BRIGC at the same time. Through this MoU, IESR is active in conducting research, analyzing, and providing policy advice to both parties to accelerate the green energy transition. IESR believes that China is a very important partner in realizing this vision (Simanjuntak 2024).

Cooperation through GIP is also growing. Although no Indonesian banks or financial institutions have become members, supporters, or observers to date, GIP has opened its third branch in Jakarta, representing the Southeast Asia region. This demonstrates China's trust in Indonesia and vice versa. Moreover, the chair and vice-chair of this branch are Indonesians Mari Elka Pangestu and Rino Donosepoetro. This branch will actively conduct the dissemination of sustainable finance and capacity building, which is expected to be adopted by financial institutions in Southeast Asia (GIP 2023).

In addition, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies Chapter Indonesia (CSIS Indonesia), an Indonesian think tank, in collaboration with GIP and several other institutions, has been active in making assessments and recommending policies by producing a report titled “Green Finance Landscape in ASEAN: Trends, Challenges, and Opportunities.” CSIS Indonesia highlights the important role of GIP in accelerating the transition from traditional to green finance and investment. GIP plays a role in enhancing data consistency and transparency. Regionally, the branches opened by GIP will assist financial institutions in building institutional capacity, encouraging sustainable investment practices, and aligning the region's financial flows with global sustainability goals (CSIS Indonesia et al. 2025).

The cooperation between the two countries does not stop there. With its grand ambition to build a maritime silk road, commonly known as the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, China is active in the improvement of the quality and conservation of the marine environments of partner countries in the Southeast Asian region. On 28-29 November 2024, China held the 8th China-Southeast Asian Countries Marine Cooperation Forum in Indonesia. The event was organized by the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) of China and the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN) of Indonesia. The organizers were not only from BRIN but also involved the Indonesian government, the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, and an educational institution, Jenderal Soedirman University. The main topics of this forum were strengthening cooperation in marine ecosystem restoration and conservation, marine disaster mitigation and prevention, marine technology development, and marine policy and management

between Southeast Asia and China (China-Southeast Asian Countries Marine Cooperation Forum 2024).

The relationship between the two countries continued with a Memorandum of Understanding for the establishment of the Indonesia-China Center for Ocean and Climate (ICCOC). This cooperation aims to enhance research and technological capacity. Research will focus on marine ecosystem conservation, capacity building by training the younger generation about the ocean, screening of marine resource utilization, development of environmentally friendly technology for marine utilization, and global collaboration on marine waste management. BRIN Indonesia stated that ICCOC will be an open platform involving various layers of stakeholders, from universities, relevant ministries, and other stakeholders in both Indonesia and neighboring countries (BRIN 2024).

China is also actively cooperating in mangrove conservation in Indonesia. In May 2025, China held the “Dialog Revitalization of Mangrove” conference, involving government representatives, experts, scientists, and business people from Indonesia and other countries. This conference emphasized the importance of mangrove conservation for a better life for local communities and for increasing fish resources. The success of mangrove development is also proof of successful cross-national and cross-sector collaboration. Youth from China and Indonesia were also involved in the dialogue (CHN Energy 2025).

One month later, a report on mangrove protection was produced by Xufang International Media with support from the Indonesian Mangrove Society, the Yayasan Gajah Sumatera (Yagasu), and other institutions. The report outlines the ecological and socio-economic benefits of mangroves. It also explains the

efforts of China and Indonesia in developing mangroves in their respective countries. The hope is that both sides can collaborate to conserve and utilize mangroves. This effort has already been applied around the Java 7 project, a collaboration between CHN Energy and PLN. They have successfully expanded the mangrove forest from an initial 5 hectares to 19 hectares (PR Newswire 2025).

In the field of education, China actively maintains relations with Indonesia through its state higher education institution, Tsinghua University. This relationship is strengthened by the presence of the Tsinghua Southeast Asia Center in Bali, Indonesia, an institution aimed at strengthening academic, cultural, and economic ties between China, Indonesia, Southeast Asia, and beyond. The activities conducted here are research, collaboration, and knowledge exchange to contribute to UN SDGs (TSEA, n.d.-b).

Some of the events that have been held include the International Conference on Indigenous Wisdom in the Contemporary World, a collaboration between the Tsinghua Southeast Asia Center and Udayana University, which had 155 participants. Participants came from 12 universities in Bali, 9 universities across Indonesia, and 12 institutions from 9 countries. The Balinese philosophy of life, Tri Hita Kirana, was chosen as the main topic of the conference to address contemporary global problems: environmental degradation, social injustice, and spiritual disconnection. This is evidence of the role of local wisdom philosophy in offering sustainable ways of life, reducing Western-centrism in scholarship, and providing new perspectives in viewing global issues (TSEA 2025). In addition, various workshops, conferences, training sessions, and webinars are also held by

this institution, involving a diverse range of participants, from students and teachers to policymakers at the UN and environmental activists (TSEA, n.d.-b).

The last channel is cooperation between media outlets, such as Antara-Xinhua and IESR-BRIGC. This cooperation is intended to facilitate the dissemination of information directly from China to Indonesia in the local language. By easily obtaining information, it is hoped that negative perceptions of China among the Indonesian public can be minimized. At Antara News itself, the news obtained from Xinhua is already in its final form, with the sourcing, creation, and language translation of the news all handled by Xinhua (Wahyudi 2019). Meanwhile, IESR-BRIGC is more frequently involved in event collaboration and the production of written works, both news articles and publications (Simanjuntak 2024).

The establishment of relations between China and Indonesia is progressing well through the involvement of a wide range of governmental and non-governmental actors such as NGOs, think tanks, educational institutions, and so on. The platforms for strengthening these relations are also varied, ranging from joint research, and co-hosting conferences, to conducting joint actions. These efforts have introduced China as an active country in green issues and actively engage Indonesians and others in several events. They increase the probability of gaining trust and achieving the objective of China, which is to be the global leader on environmental aspects.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

4.1 Conclusion

China's public diplomacy in Indonesia is well-executed but imbalanced in accordance with Mark Leonard's theory. The diplomatic instrument employed is ecological civilization, which represents both a national value of China and a policy of the Xi Jinping administration in the fields of ecology, the environment, and their relationship with humanity. The objective of China's efforts is to gain the trust and recognition of the Indonesian government and public as a leading and trusted country in the fields of the environment, green technology and industry, and human-nature harmony.

In news management, China positions the Indonesian audience as two types of audience: a targeted audience and a foreign audience. China is quite passive in responding to negative socio-environmental issues directed at the Chinese government. In Indonesia, there have been four news items that were specifically responded to on environmental issues but no government's responses: the Bank of China's response to the Batang Toru hydropower plant, illegal project, enterprises' response to the dam collapse in IMIP, and KCIC project's effect on flooding. Yet, all of those actors are affiliated with China's government. While, still there are many environmental issues involving China that are unaddressed well. It results in various negative sentiments from Indonesians.

As for strategic communication, China's efforts in Indonesia are conducted vigorously. Its main brandings are ecological civilization itself, the Green Silk Road (GSR), the tagline "Building A Community with a Shared Future for All

Life on Earth/Mankind," and positive narratives of China's projected both domestically and globally. EC shows the seriousness of China's government to protect nature and to use science, technology, and law to support it. The GSR often serves as a tangible example of China's green commitment in Indonesia through the implementation of green projects. Meanwhile, the tagline is often used in diplomacy as an ultimate goal for creating a joint statement, report, or international declaration. The positive narrative is used to present a good image and give another perspective of China's initiation in the environmental field and it involves Indonesian actors Antara and IESR to promote China's development on EC and other environmental aspects.

Lastly, China's relationship building with Indonesia has been carried out on a massive scale. The process already involves all layers of actors, including the government, academics, activists, youth, and business people. The platforms used are also varied, ranging from joint research, volunteering, conferences, forums, and conservation. Moreover, in recent times, China has been increasingly vigorous in establishing bilateral relations, such as the creation of the Indonesia-China Center for Ocean and Climate (ICCOC) between BRIN and MNR, the Tsinghua Southeast Asia Center, Mangrove Conservation, and the CSIS-GIP and IESR-BRIGC collaborations. Using a media collaboration with Antara and IESR for promotion has become one of strategies used by China.

In summary, the practice of China's public diplomacy in Indonesia is imbalanced because it leans heavily on the dimensions of proactive response and relationship building that potentially weaken the public's diplomacy result. Although Leonard emphasizes the importance of these two dimensions over

reactive and argumentative rebuttal, providing a reactive response is also necessary. In reality, public diplomacy also needs to involve the process of correcting misperceptions about issues that arise, which can often be done through reactive responses in the news that is being spread.

4.2 Recommendations

This research was conducted as the relationship between China and Indonesia is rapidly developing. Many collaborations newly established in 2025 have not yet yielded visible results, necessitating further research. China's commitment to fully establishing the GSR abroad by 2025 also can be further evaluated under different topics and theories. Furthermore, this research mainly focuses on the input aspect (China’s public diplomacy) and documented responses of Indonesia. Therefore, it can be a recommended research focus to deepen the responses of Indonesians through FGD, interview, and social media analysis.

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