GHENT
UNIVERSITY

RECONNECT

D4.6 SECOND PROGRESS REPORT ON RESEARCH CLUSTERS WP4 AND RESEARCH WORKSHOP

Project Information	
Acronym	ReConnect China
Title	ReConnect China: generating independent knowledge for a resilient future with China for Europe and its citizens.
Project no.	101061483
Type of Action	RIA
Deliverable Information	
Title	**D4.6 Second Progress Report on Research Clusters WP4 and Research Workshop**
WP number and title	WP4
Main Authors	Victor De Decker
Description	Annual summary of the progress made in the research clusters of WP4 and the thematic Research workshop on Chinese diplomacy with EU policymakers, stakeholders
Lead Beneficiary	Egmont
Type	R: Document, report
Dissemination Level	PU: Public
Status	Draft
History of Changes	
Draft version 0.0	First created by Egmont (28.09.2024)
0.1	Quality assurance and feedback by WP4 partners (XY)
0.2	Final draft prepared by Egmont(XY)
0.3	Final version approved by project coordinator (XY)
Version 1.0	Final version submitted as deliverable (02.10.2024)

Table of content

1   EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present document constitutes the **D4.6 Second Progress Report on Research Clusters WP4 and Research Workshop** ReConnect China, a project funded by the European Commission under its Horizon EUROPE Framework Programme for Research and Innovation under the grant agreement no. 101061483. The main objective of this deliverable is to provide an annual summary of the progress made in the research clusters of WP4 and the thematic Research workshop on Chinese diplomacy with EU policymakers, stakeholders.

The ReConnect China team regards dissemination and exploitation as key "deliverables" linked to the realisation of project objectives in the short term, and various forms of project impact in the long term. In this understanding, achieving any sustainability for the project's activities beyond the project duration (= the funding period) is largely depending on how successful dissemination and exploitation was conducted during the project as well. In addition to many other examples of EU funded projects labelled as specific success stories in their respective disciplines[1], the already concluded S4D4C project on science diplomacy could be mentioned in this regard. As a research project (S4D4C was a RIA project: Research and Innovation Action) in the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH), the project's widely acknowledged impact was no implicitness. RIA projects, contrary to IA (Innovation Actions) projects and in particular those in the SSH, often struggle with channelling their work towards one "most important" output – whatever this is, a new policy recommendation, a new service, a new product or process, a new use model etc. Thanks to S4D4C's strategic choice to develop a Science Diplomacy Training Course, many stakeholders could be reached. This (but not only) led to the formation of a European Union Science Diplomacy Alliance[2] after the project's end. This alliance continues its work until today.

2   INTRODUCTION (THE PROJECT)

ReConnect China aims to answer the question in which domains collaboration of the EU with China is desirable, possible, or impossible. The question in which domains EU collaboration with China is desirable, possible, or impossible starts from the acknowledgment that in the modern geopolitical and geo-economic world, the EU and China stand in a perpetual dynamic relationship with each other. This project therefore identifies the following key fields on which the EU should upgrade its

---

[1] The European Commission website on success stories of R&I projects collects such examples:
  https://ec.europa.eu/research-and-innovation/en/projects/success-stories

[2] https://www.science-diplomacy.eu/

RECONNECT

independent knowledge: Science & Technology, Economy & Trade, Domestic Governance, and Foreign Policy. To carry out this project, a database which will provide access to new sources of information will be developed. The independent knowledge that will be generated in this project will bring together stakeholders and experts in a Europe-China Knowledge Forum. The project also envisages to enhance awareness on China among the general public and youth.

2.1 Deliverable scope

The main objective of this deliverable is to provide an annual summary of the progress made in the research clusters of WP4 and the thematic Research workshop on Chinese diplomacy with EU policymakers, stakeholders.

2.2 Reference documents

- ReConnect China Grant Agreement no. 101061483
- ReConnect China Consortium Agreement
- ReConnect China Project Management Handbook (D7.1)
- Horizon EUROPE Online Manual https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/funding-tenders-opportunities/display/OM/Grant+management
- European Research Executive Agency – Communicating about your EU funded project https://rea.ec.europa.eu/communicating-about-your-eu-funded-project_en
- European Research Executive Agency – Horizon Europe Dissemination and Exploitation https://rea.ec.europa.eu/horizon-europe-dissemination-and-exploitation_en

3 ORGANISATIONAL WORK

Overarching work carried out by the lead beneficiary (Egmont Institute) in collaboration with task leaders (UPOL, Elcano, UI, Clingendael):

- Creation of a tentative overview on task division, deadlines among all partners of WP4
- Organisation of first lead meeting 14/2/2023 (with Elcano, Clingendael and UPOL) UI: absent

  Main points of discussion:

  Some clarifications on the agreement (specifically the workshop tasks)

  Going through the provisional overview of input-providers, tasks and deadlines

  Some clarifications on the formal requirements for content and review process within WP4
- Participation in synergy meeting with DWARC 22/02/2023

  Main points of discussion:

  Discussion on and identification of possible areas of cooperation

  Preparation of the meeting on synergies between Reconnect China and DWARC on 24/02/2023
- Participation in synergy meeting Reconnect China and DWARC 27/02/2023

- Participation in meeting with European Commission DG Science and Technology 27/02/2023
- Organisation of intermediate meeting 02/03/2023 (with UI) on UI and its role within WP4

  Main points of discussion:

  Some clarifications on the agreement, specifically UI's person months and responsibilities.
- Creation of an overview for the task leads containing action points, deadlines and practical information required after the first leads meeting of 14/02/2023
- Organisation of second lead meeting 14/04/2023 (with Elcano, UI, and UPOL)

  Clingendael: absent

  Main points of discussion:

  Some clarifications on the agreement (specifically the workshop tasks)

  Discussion on the overview of action points deadlines

  Discussing some specifics on the deliverables and the way to go
- Participation in first 4.3 task meeting 24/04/2023
- Participation in first 4.2 task meeting 25/04/2023

4 T4.1: DIPLOMACY (DURATION M1-M48) – UPOL

Scope

- T4.1 identifies China's diplomatic instruments of power and influence and what implications its practices, policies, narratives (linking up with T3.2; T4.4), and ambitions have for global regions.

- Deliverables related to task 4.1:

  - Report on the results of Research cluster Chinese Diplomacy

This report presents the results of research cluster on Chinese diplomacy along the identified axes:

- *Chinese diplomacy in Europe and its neighbourhood*
- *China and great power diplomacy*
- *Chinese climate diplomacy*
- *Chinese science diplomacy*

*It collates key results and conclusions reached in **4 policy papers** and **1 research paper** and published the findings publicly.*

Progress

Annual summary of the progress made in the research clusters of WP4 and of the thematic Research workshop on Chinese diplomacy with EU policymakers, stakeholders, experts, researchers.

Annual summary of the progress made in the research clusters of WP4 and of the thematic Research workshop on Chinese diplomacy with EU policymakers, stakeholders, experts, researchers. Policy recommendations and findings will be presented at the ECKF conferences.

- Major achievements:
  - Publication of Policy Brief: "Knowledge and Perception of Research Security" by Gabor Szüdi and Philipp Brugner.

Publication schedule 4.1

Tasks	Institute	Author/participant	When	
WP 4.1 Diplomacy (Lead: UPOL)				
PB 1 => Chinese diplomacy in Europe and its neighbourhood	Egmont	Astrid Pepermans	Q1 of 2024	China's isolation policy towards Taiwan at three different levels: 1) international organizations (especially UN system organizations such as the WHO) 2) countries recognizing the Republic of China (Taiwan) 3) EU countries with which Taiwan has close economic and cultural ties (Czech Republic...
PB 2 => China and great power diplomacy	UPOL	Richard Turcsanyi and/or Filip Kra...	second half of 2024	
PB 3 => Chinese climate diplomacy	IFRI	John Seaman	Sep-24	
PB 4 => Chinese science diplomacy	ZSI	Philipp Brugner and Gabor Szudi	Q1 or Q2 of 2024	
RP	UTARTU	Eiki Berg	end of 2024 (also submission journal)	
Presentation output conference WP 5.3	Egmont UPOL (in partnership with Egmont and possibly others)	Astrid Pepermans & Victor De Deck	Conference	This report presents the results of research cluster on Chinese diplomacy along the identified axes: (3) Chinese diplomacy in Europe and its neighbourhood (4) China and great power diplomacy (5) Chinese climate diplomacy (6) Chinese science diplomacy
Targeted policy workshop		Richard Turcsanyi	end of 2024	It collates key results and conclusions reached in 4 policy papers and 1 research paper and published the findings publicly.
Result report on WP 4.1	UPOL	Richard Turcsanyi	beginning of 2025	Annual summary of the progress made in the research clusters of WP4 and of the thematic Research workshop on Chinese diplomacy with EU policymakers, stakeholders, experts, researchers.
Yearly summary	Egmont	Astrid Pepermans	Sep-23	Policy recommendations and findings will be presented at the ECKF conferences.

5 T4.2: SECURITY AND DEFENCE (DURATION M1-M48) – UI

Scope

- T4.2 seeks to explain the phenomenon that China's security and defence posture in recent years has become more belligerent. Crucially, it aims to understand and discuss the effects of China's power projection in various regions of vital geostrategic importance to China and Europe. Understanding China's geostrategic actions and ambitions in the wider Indo-Pacific (as well as in the Middle East) is thus of critical importance to European actors. T4.2 will also closely scrutinise changing EU-China relations in face of growing Chinese security and defence challenges for Europe. The looming Sino-US great power rivalry, and rectangular or even multipolar great power relations which include Russia, the EU and other actors, and which revolve around issues of overlapping or colliding interests, is an important frame for this task.

- Deliverables related to task 4.2:

  - Report on the results of research cluster Security & Defence

This report presents the results of the research cluster on China's security and defence policy along the identified axes:

- *(1) China's security relations with the wider Indo-Pacific (Taiwan, Japan, two Koreas, SE Asia and USA)*
- *(2) China's security and defence challenges for Europe; China and great power rivalries (US, Russia, EU)*
- *(3) China's security footprint in the wider Middle East.*

*It collates key results and conclusions reached in **4 policy papers and 2 research papers** and published the findings publicly.*

Progress

- Major achievements: No output so far. First task meeting 25/04/2023
- Work carried out by the participants:
o Publication of Policy brief "'Remonstrating,' the Art of Forging Relations" by Bart Dessein and Jasper Roctus (Egmont Institute)
o Publication of Policy Brief "China in the Middle-East: Consequences for Europe" by Bernard Siman (Egmont Institute)

- Deviations, corrective actions performed, and any consequence or impact to achieve critical objectives: Two instead of one policy brief will be written on *China and great power rivalries (US, Russia, EU)* (Egmont & IFRI)

Annual summary of the progress made in the research clusters of WP4.
Policy recommendations and findings will be presented at the ECKF conferences.

Publication schedule 4.2

Tasks	Institute	Author/participant	When	
WP 4.2 Security and Defence (Lead: UI)				
PB 1 =>China's security relations with the wider Indo-Pacific	IFRI	Marc Julienne	May 2025	Analysing China's ambition and strategy in the South Pacific, and how traditional powers (US, Australia, France, UK) respond. Monitoring China's security cooperation with regional stakeholders (Solomon Islands especially).
PB 2 => Chinese security and defence challenges for Europe	Egmont	Astrid Papermans	Q1 of 2025	
PB 3 => China and great power rivalries US, Russia, EU	IFRI & Egmont (2 policy briefs)	Marc Julienne (1) & Jasper Roctus, Bart Dessein (1)	Bart & Jasper: May-June 2023 Marc Julienne: October 2024	Marc Julienne: With the war in Ukraine and China-Russia deepening partnership and ambitions to reshape the international system, how do the EU can respond to the great challenges posed to the rules based international order.
PB 4 =>China's security footprint in the wider ME	Egmont	Bernard Siman	Oct-23	The Chinese security policy narrative based on the conceptual framework of Great Power Narcissism
RP 1	UI	Linus Hagström	?	
RP 2	Egmont	Astrid Papermans & Victor De Decker	end of 2024	
Presentation output conference WP 5.3	Egmont, IFRI, UI	all authors WP 4.2	Conference	"This report presents the results of the research cluster on China's security and defence policy along the identified axes: (1) China's security relations with the wider Indo-Pacific (Taiwan, Japan, two Koreas, SE Asia and USA) (2) China's security and defence challenges for Europe; China and great power rivalries (US, Russia, EU) (3) China's security footprint in the wider Middle East. It collates key results and conclusions reached in 4 policy papers and 2 research papers and published the findings publicly. Utter deadline: M42 (end of 2026)"
Result report WP 4.2	UI	Patrik Andersson	2025	
Yearly summary	Egmont	Victor De Decker	Sep-23	
Extra paper	Egmont	Bart Dessein/Jasper Roctus	Published May 2023	

6 T4.3: CONNECTIVITY (DURATION M1-M48) - ELCANO

Scope

T4.3 aims to explore Chinese connectivity instruments, which play a central role in China's external action. The 'Belt and Road Initiative' is Xi Jinping's signature foreign policy programme and has seen a gradual shift in its ambitions and operations, e.g., from heavy, physical infrastructure to digital (Digital Silk Road, linking up with T1.4), health (Health Silk Road) and human linkages. That the EU understands the trajectory of the BRI and how it advances China's economic, diplomatic and security interests abroad, is of critical importance (linking up with T2.1 & T2.2). Simultaneously, the far reach of the BRI into the EU neighbourhood with financial and digital instruments requires careful assessment and understanding to be able to address appropriately.

- Deliverables related to task 4.3:

• Report on the results of research cluster Connectivity

This report presents the results of the research cluster on Chinese narratives in foreign policy along the identified axes:

- Chinese narratives strategies and competition with US/Russia
- Measuring effects of Chinese narrative strategies
- Sino-European narratives competition: implications
- and Chinese discourse patterns in international organisations

It collates key results and conclusions reached in 3 policy papers and 1 research paper and published the findings publicly.

• Second progress report on research clusters WP4 and research workshop

Progress

Annual summary of the progress made in the research clusters of WP4 and of the research workshop on Chinese narratives in foreign policy with EU policymakers, stakeholders, experts, researchers.

Policy recommendations and findings will be presented at the ECKF conferences.

- Major achievements:

- Publication of Policy Brief "Geopolitical Narratives are Counterproductive" by Aurelio Insisa (IAI) & Mario Esteban (Elcano).

RECONNECT

-        Publication of Research Paper "China's BRI and EU Global Gateway experiences with Public-Private partnerships for infrastructure projects in Africa: Assessing impact and significance" by Aurelio Insisa (IAI)

- Deviations, corrective actions performed, and any consequence or impact to achieve critical objectives:

John Seaman (IFRI) will write a policy brief for WP 4.3. Whereas the initial topic in the grant agreement was "the role of finance/AIIB in BRI", he suggested instead to write on "Soft connectivity: Technical standards cooperation and China's regional diplomacy." (amendment proposed to the EC)

☐ Objective: Explore and analyse China's efforts to develop cooperation on technical standards within its regional diplomacy, including through the BRI and partnerships with ASEAN and African countries (FOCAC)

☐ Rationale: Technical standards are key enablers for connectivity in that they establish the technical specifications that allow for interoperability of infrastructure, goods, and services across markets. If broadly adopted, technical standards could enhance global market connectivity. On the other hand, national or regional differentiation of standards leads to greater market fragmentation. China has been proactive in international standards forums such as the ITU, ISO and IEC, advancing work on global standards development. At the same time, Beijing has also made standards cooperation and "mutual standards recognition" a key dimension of its bilateral and regional diplomacy, through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and through regional dialogues, for instance with ASEAN and African countries (via FOCAC). Such activities could contribute to the development of spheres of Chinese economic influence and a broader fragmentation of the global economy. Against this backdrop, this policy brief will explore and analyse the role that technical standards cooperation plays both nominally and functionally in the BRI and China's regional partnership agreements.

Publication schedule 4.3

Tasks	Institute	Author/participant	When	
WP 4.3 Connectivity (Lead: Elcano)				
PB 1 => BRI in Europe and neighbourhood and its implications	Egmont	Astrid Pepermans	Beginning of 2024	
PB 2 => Competing connectivity approaches (Japan, US, Australia, Russia, EU)	Elcano/IAI	Mario Esteban/Giulio Pugliese	Last quarter 2023 or first quarter 2024 (Mario Esteban)	
PB 3 => Role of finance/AIIB in BRI suggested modification of topic Soft connectivity: Technical standards cooperation and China's regional diplomacy	IFRI	John Seaman	June/24	
PB 4 => BRI in Africa & Chinese influence	UPOL	Richard Turcsanyi	Dec-24	
RP	IAI	Giulio Pugliese	Feb-24	
1 targeted policy workshop	Elcano	Mario Esteban	end of 2024 - beginning 2025	
Presentation output conference WP 5.3	IAI/IFRI/UPOL/Elcano	all authors WP 4.3	Conference	
Result Report WP 4.3	Elcano	Mario Esteban	?	This report presents the results of the research cluster on China's connectivity agenda along the identified axes: (1) The BRI in Europe and its neighbourhood: implications for EU; (2) How BRI relates to other regional approaches (JAP, US, AUS, RUS, EU); (3) The role of finance/AIIB in the BRI; and (4) BRI in Africa and Chinese influence. It collates key results and conclusions reached in 4 policy papers and 1 research paper and published the findings publicly.
Yearly summary	Egmont	Astrid Pepermans	Sep-23	"Annual summary of the progress made in the research clusters of WP4 and of the thematic Research workshop on Chinese diplomacy with EU policymakers, stakeholders, experts, researchers. Policy recommendations and findings will be presented at the ECKF conferences."

RECONNECT

7 T4.4: CONNECTIVITY (DURATION M1-M48) - CLINGENDAEL

Scope

T4.4 aims to analyse China's growing ambition and skill in utilising narratives (linking up with T3.2-4) as a power instrument in its global affairs. China has become a narrative entrepreneur and is rapidly expanding its role in shaping global discourse on norms and values. New operations through social media and other (new and old) channels are often combined in complex strategies to target specific audiences in Europe and elsewhere. Simultaneously, Chinese narratives encounter competition and reinforcement by other global and regional narratives. Identifying and understanding the different strategies which China employs and their effect on norms of societies and institutions remains an understudied phenomenon and requires new datasets, methods, and attention.

This report presents the results of the research cluster on Chinese narratives in foreign policy along the identified axes:
(1) Chinese narratives strategies and competition with US/Russia
(2) Measuring effects of Chinese narrative strategies
(3) Sino-European narratives competition: implications
(4) and Chinese discourse patterns in international organisations
*It collates key results and conclusions reached in **3 policy papers and 1 research paper** and published the findings publicly.*

- Fourth progress report on research clusters WP4 and **research workshop**

Progress

Annual summary of the progress made in the research clusters of WP4 and of the research workshop on China's security and defence policy with EU policymakers, stakeholders, experts, researchers.
Policy recommendations and findings will be presented at the ECKF conferences.

- Major achievements:
  - ○ Roundtable organised and held by the Egmont Institute and Clingendael on the topic of "Engaging Chinese narrative power: in kind, or else?" in March 2024
- Work carried out by the participants: Ties Dams (Clingendael) is planning to finish a research paper for WP 4.4 and present this paper at a workshop by the end of 2024:

"The topic of Chinese narratives of 'Europe' in context of competition with US and Russia. He expects he will cover recent history of US, Russian, and Chinese narrative power looking into the evolution both of dominant geopolitical narratives as well as the infrastructures of narrative power that these states deploy to narrate 'Europe' since 1989, based on a synthesis of relevant literature and interviews."

Publication schedule 4.4

Tasks	Institute	Author/participant	When	
WP 4.4 Narratives (Lead: Clingendael)				
PB 1 => Chinese narratives strategies and competition with US/Russia	Uturku*	Hermann Aubié (to be confirmed)	?	"I'd like to write it on how Beijing seeks to leverage its various types of 'aid' in the Global South/Majority World to position China as a 'responsible great power' by highlighting the gap between the rhetoric and reality on the ground."
PB 2 => Measuring the effects of Chinese narrative strategies	UPOL	Richard Turcsanyu	Nov-23	
PB 3 => Sino-European narratives competition	UPOL/IAI?	Richard Turcsanyu/Beatrice Gallelli?	Dec-25	
PB 4 => Chinese discourse patterns in international organisations	IAI	Beatrice Gallelli	?	"the topic of Chinese narratives of 'Europe' in context of competition with US and Russia. He expects he will cover recent history of US, Russian and Chinese narrative power looking into the evolution both of dominant geopolitical narratives as well
RP	Clingendael	Ties Dams	First half of 2023	as the infrastructures of narrative power that these states deploy to narrate 'Europe' since 1989, based on a synthesis of relevant literature and interviews."
Presentation output conference WP 5.3	Egmont	Astrid Pepermans & Victor De Decker	Conference	This report presents the results of the research cluster on Chinese narratives in foreign policy along the identified axes: (1) Chinese narratives strategies and competition with US/Russia (2) Measuring effects of Chinese narrative strategies (3) Sino-European narratives competition: implications (4) and Chinese discourse patterns in international organizations It collates key results and conclusions reached in 3 policy papers and 1 research paper and published the findings publicly.
specific policy workshop	Clingendael	Xiaoxue Martin	Dec-23	
Result report WP 4.4	Clingendael	Xiaoxue Martin	2026	
Yearly summary	Egmont	Victor De Decker	Sep-26	"Annual summary of the progress made in the research clusters of WP4 and of the thematic Research workshop on Chinese diplomacy with EU policymakers, stakeholders, experts, researchers. Policy recommendations and findings will be presented at the ECKF

RECONNECT