

ANR–RGC PubDiplo Project

## Call for Applications for a Doctoral Contract

### Position Description — Task 2: Digital Strategic Communication and France–China Public Diplomacy

<b>Host project</b>	ANR/RGC PubDiplo – Transformations of Public Diplomacy and Reputation Management between France and China in the Digital Age: Political Developments, Communication Strategies and Impact Analysis
<b>Project reference</b>	ANR-25-CE41-4061
<b>Project website</b>	<a href="https://pubdiplo.org">https://pubdiplo.org</a>
<b>Associated task</b>	Digital diplomacy in the social media era: an analysis of France's and China's digital communication strategies
<b>Research unit</b>	DICEN – Information and Communication Systems in the Digital Age (UR 7339)
<b>Scientific affiliation</b>	Research area “Competitive Intelligence, Territories and Services”
<b>Doctoral School</b>	ED 529 – “Cultures and Societies”, Gustave Eiffel University
<b>Supervision</b>	Zhao Alexandre Huang, Associate Professor (HDR), Gustave Eiffel University; Junior Member of the Institut Universitaire de France (2026 cohort)
<b>Duration and start date</b>	36-month doctoral contract, with an expected start in autumn 2026
<b>Primary location</b>	Gustave Eiffel University, Serris campus. Participation in the activities of DICEN and the France–Hong Kong consortium

### Scientific and Institutional Context

The doctoral contract is part of the ANR/RGC “PubDiplo” project, which conducts a comparative analysis of the transformations of French and Chinese public diplomacy in the digital age. The project examines how public, quasi-public, media, cultural, economic and individual actors use digital platforms to construct narratives, manage international image and reputation, legitimise their foreign-policy positions and engage with transnational publics.

Within this project, Task 2 focuses specifically on public diplomacy practices between France and China in the social media era. It seeks to analyse and compare the digital communication strategies implemented by French and Chinese actors, their interaction networks, narrative tactics and patterns of message circulation across several geopolitical contexts: anniversaries of France–China diplomatic relations, the health crisis and the post-pandemic period, French cultural diplomacy in China, Chinese digital diplomacy in France, and controversies surrounding divergent approaches to digital sovereignty and the governance of artificial intelligence.

The doctoral research will integrate Information and Communication Sciences, platform studies, public diplomacy and digital humanities methods. The successful candidate will join DICEN's "Competitive Intelligence, Territories and Services" research area and engage with its work on socio-digital arrangements, traces, actor networks, mediation and visibility regimes.

## **Proposed Research Topic**

The successful candidate will conduct doctoral research on digital public diplomacy practices between France and China, with particular emphasis on communication strategies, actor networks and narratives deployed on digital platforms. The topic may be refined in consultation with the doctoral supervisor and the project team, taking into account the candidate's profile, linguistic and methodological skills, and access to relevant corpora.

Three empirical research directions are particularly encouraged:

### **Research Area 1 — Comparative Digital Influence Strategies**

This first research area compares the digital influence strategies implemented by China and France in order to analyse their convergences and divergences in digital public diplomacy. It will examine communication campaigns, visibility mechanisms and digital narratives developed around shared diplomatic events—including anniversaries marking the establishment of bilateral relations, the COVID-19 pandemic and the international governance of artificial intelligence—as well as contemporary geopolitical controversies. Particular attention will be paid to narrative competition in order to examine how the two countries seek to define and frame international issues, legitimise their positions and shape foreign publics' perceptions within highly competitive digital environments.

### **Research Area 2 — French Cultural Diplomacy on Chinese Social Media**

This second research area analyses the presence, communication formats and modes of interaction of French cultural institutions and actors on Weibo, WeChat, Xiaohongshu, Douyin and other Chinese digital spaces. Particular attention will be paid to the types of content produced, the publics targeted, the forms of engagement sought and the constraints specific to China's digital environment. The objective is to understand how French public and cultural diplomacy actors conduct transnational communication in a strongly regulated media environment characterised by domestic censorship and self-censorship mechanisms, information-control logics and ideologically structured propaganda, while seeking to promote their values, interests and image among Chinese publics.

### **Research Area 3 — Chinese Public Diplomacy in France**

This third research area examines contemporary forms of Chinese public diplomacy in the French digital public sphere. It analyses how different Chinese actors—diplomatic institutions, state media, cultural organisations, business intermediaries, diaspora actors and digital intermediaries—participate in the construction, circulation and legitimation of Chinese narratives within this space. Beyond describing these communicative registers, the research will deepen understanding of how they are articulated within an integrated digital influence apparatus: narrative repertoires, target publics, media formats, activation timelines and modes of socio-digital coordination, particularly across social platforms, online media and transnational discussion spaces. This research area will clarify how Chinese public diplomacy combines logics of attraction, legitimation, reputational defence and narrative confrontation in the French context, in relation to geopolitical issues, media controversies and the opportunities afforded by digital platforms.

## **Scientific Responsibilities of the Doctoral Researcher**

In addition to teaching duties, the doctoral researcher will undertake the following tasks:

- Build, document and maintain a structured bibliography on public and digital diplomacy, international communication, digital public communication and the platformisation of communication.

- Conduct ongoing monitoring of relevant scholarship and contribute to a critical review of the state of the art, including the identification of key theoretical frameworks, controversies and gaps in the literature.
- Construct, document and clean multilingual digital corpora drawn from social platforms and institutional sources, in compliance with ethical and legal requirements and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- Identify and map digital public diplomacy actors, including public institutions, embassies, international media, cultural operators, companies, influencers, diaspora intermediaries and engaged publics.
- Implement a mixed-methods approach combining content analysis, semiotic-discursive analysis, critical discourse analysis, network mapping and, where possible, computational methods for corpus analysis.
- Participate in PubDiplo seminars, scientific meetings, methodological workshops and dissemination activities.
- Contribute to scientific outputs, including conference papers, journal articles, methodological notes, public-facing research posts, documented datasets and, where appropriate, visualisations.

## Required Qualifications and Profile

Applicants must hold a nationally recognised Master's degree or an equivalent qualification permitting enrolment in a doctoral programme. Profiles in Information and Communication Sciences, digital social sciences, media studies, political science, international relations, Chinese studies, digital humanities or a closely related interdisciplinary field are particularly welcome.

- Strong grounding in Information and Communication Sciences, international communication, public diplomacy, strategic communication or the sociology of digital media.
- Ability to formulate a theoretically informed research problem from an empirical object and to design a rigorous methodological framework.
- Academic proficiency in French (CEFR level C1 or C2 for non-native speakers) and English (CEFR level C1 or C2); proficiency in reading and analysing Chinese is a major asset for accessing field sites and corpora.
- Prior experience, including at an exploratory level, in collecting, structuring and analysing digital data.
- Awareness of ethical issues relating to platform data, interviews, diaspora publics and politically sensitive contexts.

## Application Package

The application must be submitted as a single PDF file and include the following documents:

- A cover letter explaining how the applicant's profile aligns with the PubDiplo project and Research Task 2.
- A detailed academic curriculum vitae.
- Transcripts for both years of the Master's programme and, where applicable, class ranking or any other relevant supporting document.
- A two- to five-page research proposal including a research problem, an indicative literature review, a proposed corpus or field site, a methodological proposal, a provisional timeline and a short bibliography.
- A one-page statement of professional objectives.
- A complete copy of the Master's dissertation.

- The official record of the Master's dissertation defence or, where the institution does not issue such a document, equivalent certification indicating the grade awarded.
- A letter of recommendation from the Master's dissertation supervisor.
- Any supporting document demonstrating language, methodological, computing or digital skills relevant to the project.

## Application Deadline

Applications must be submitted to Zhao Alexandre Huang (zhao-alexandre.huang@univ-eiffel.fr) no later than 4 September 2026.

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to an online interview.

## Contacts

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