

## EU's Perceptions in China: Teacher, Co-operator, Competitor and Troublemaker

Xiang Zuotao<sup>1</sup>, Ji Wengang<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Peking University

<sup>2</sup> Shanxi University

Chinese people have four different perceptions of the European Union (EU): of a teacher, co-operator, competitor, and troublemaker. 'Teacher' means that the EU is the role model for China. Nowadays, the EU is a major destination for Chinese overseas students as well as one of the destinations where Chinese officials spend their overseas investigation trips. 'Co-operator' means the EU and China are partners rather than opponents. The cooperation between the EU and China is diversified and China shows a stronger intention to cooperate with the EU. In the economic field, the EU has become the largest trading partner of China, while China has been the second largest trading partner of the EU. China expects to coordinate and cooperate with the EU in matters concerning global affairs and local hot issues such as climate change, the fight against terrorism, resource and food safety protection, and the facilitation of international financial system reforms and global governance to improve each other's right of speech in global governance. 'Competitor' means that the EU and China should compete against each other fairly in all fields, especially in the economic field, and meanwhile seize the market by dint of technical and price advantages rather than governmental intervention. 'Troublemaker' means that the EU often criticizes China's inadequate efforts in the field of the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, requiring China to establish a diversified society in accordance with EU values.

*Keywords:* China, EU, perception, foreign policy, EU–China relations, cooperation, competition

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the European Union (EU) and China have not always been getting along well with each other. In particular, they began to be trapped in an unstable relationship after the EU published the fifth strategy paper towards China: *EU–China: Closer Partners, Growing Responsibilities*. While tapping the potential of the partnership with China and coping with the rise of China effectively, the EU often puts forward requirements that are believed to distort the facts and go against China's actual condition or intervene in China's internal affairs

---

**Xiang Zuotao** – Doctor, School of International Studies and the Center for Central and Eastern Europe studies, Peking University.

**Ji Wengang** – Institute of Marxism Studies, Shanxi University. A visiting scholar of Peking University (September 2013–June 2014) and University of Warsaw (September 2014–present).

concerning problems such as values, human rights and the Tibet issue. As a result, conflicts have occurred from time to time. On the whole, the cooperation between the EU and China has been expanded and deepened, especially in terms of the economic and trading relationships and four different images of the EU have shaped among Chinese people: of a teacher, cooperator, competitor, and troublemaker.

### **1. Teacher**

‘Teacher’ means that the EU is the role model for China. A vast majority of Chinese people will easily neglect this point as China becomes increasingly stronger and the United States (US) deepens its influence on China. As a matter of fact, since Western learning in the late Qing Dynasty, Chinese elites have long regarded European countries as their teacher, learning from them how to create a powerful and wealthy country. In China’s modern historical process, the focus has been placed on selecting a proper development model from the European society. Since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, Chinese people have restricted their focus to the social development model of the Soviet Union rather than that of Germany or France, but they learnt the socialist ideology from Marx. Since the end of the 1970s, Chinese elites showed a strong intention to learn from Europe, but their learning focus was no longer the social development model but rather the state governance experience and advanced technologies. Today the EU is still a major destination for Chinese overseas students as well as one of the destinations where Chinese officials spend their overseas investigation trips.

The threefold role of the EU as a teacher for China can be interpreted as follows.

First, it was a tradition for China to take Europe as a role model in several ways and thus China keeps encouraging students to study abroad in Europe. Cooperation in education and academics has long been one of the most vibrant fields between the two. It has also been a long tradition for China to absorb the education notions and beliefs of Europe. Early in the Qing Dynasty, the Chinese government already sent young children to study in Western countries. Various delegations and educational exchange activities in recent decades also reflect the importance of Europe for China. For instance, in early 1932, the Chinese government sent an education delegation to visit and perform field studies in Poland, Germany, France, and Great Britain for six months and studied the experience of preschool education, elementary education, higher education, and vocational education. The valuable experiences learned back then still influence China’s education nowadays. Another proof is the increasing number of Chinese students studying in the EU. According to statistics, 140 thousand Chinese students studied abroad between 1872 and 1978; this number rose to 2,644 thousand since the Opening-up policy. At the end of 2012, there were in total 250 thousand Chinese students learning in EU countries. Meanwhile, the group of European students studying in China has also increased to 10 per cent of all international students in China.

In 2013, there were 410 thousand Chinese students going to more than 100 countries and regions and there were in total more than 1,600 thousand Chinese students learning abroad. The number of Chinese overseas students has been the largest in the world. European countries are a major destination and share a majority proportion.

Second, the cultural exchange between China and Europe has reached a new level, owing to mutual understanding and bilateral long-term strategic planning. In 2012, the EU and China launched the EU–China High-Level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD), which was led by Chinese Vice-Premier Liu Yandong and European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth Androulla Vassiliou. The dialogue built up a high-level communication platform for Sino-European cultural exchange in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and provided lasting support for the deepening of the mutual coordination. This dialogue has become the ‘Third Pillar’, after the EU–China High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue and the EU–China High-Level Strategy Dialogue. In the two years following the establishment of the EU–China High-Level People-to-People Dialogue, abundant achievements have been made in terms of cultural exchange. Exchange activities between students and young scholars have been promoted. Multiple academic, cultural and policy forums have been hosted. Projects like the China–Europe Youth Partnership Project and Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window, China Strand, have been further enhanced and developed. The Chinese Culture Year was held in European countries with cultural and art exchange and more than 300 cooperative programs, covering literature, art, philosophy, youth communication, tourism, and other fields as well as 22 Chinese provinces and 28 EU countries. Based on statistics, more than five million trips have been made between China and EU countries. As Androulla Vassiliou said, ‘The HPPD was successful, not only in its formal aspects, but also due to the high quality of the discussions and an increased openness on the Chinese side in their desire to strengthen their performance in areas such as quality assurance and credit systems in higher education, and to learn from European experiences.’<sup>1</sup>

Third, China started to learn and adopt the people-centred and sustainable development theory from Europe. As for economic growth, the energy safety policy, banking and financial tools, Europe’s urbanisation process, and the supporting policy towards small enterprises all brought enlightening experience to China’s development. As for international relations and governance, European integration, the people-centred governance model shed light on East Asian integration. As for the societal construction, social welfare models and reforms in Europe, the benign relationships of religions and ethnicities also provide valuable experience to the social transitions of modern China. Taking the policies of the Chinese government towards small enterprises as an example, it was promulgated that the value-added tax and sales

---

<sup>1</sup> A. Vassiliou, ‘EU–China Relationship Going from Strength to Strength’, 24 September 2014, <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/feature/eu-china-relationship-going-strength-strength> (accessed on 27 October 2014).

tax would be waived for taxpayers/enterprises whose monthly sales were less than 20,000 RMB. The policy was beneficial for more than six million small enterprises and it was a typical case of experience adopted from the EU.

## 2. Co-operator

‘Co-operator’ means that China and the EU associate with each other for common goals. China and the EU have a multidimensional cooperation including the economy, politics and global issues, and China has demonstrated a stronger intention to cooperate.

### 2.1 Economic cooperation

As the second largest economy, China has experienced remarkably eye-catching speed and capacity of economic growth. Since China entered the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, the country has been paying great attention to the economy and, consequently, jumped to a new, higher level. China became the world’s largest exporter in 2009 and the largest importer in 2013. In 2013, foreign direct investment (FDI) flowing into China ranked second in the world. In brief, China’s economy stands out for its huge capacity and vitality in the context of the sluggish global market, with the country’s modernisation and urbanisation process.

The EU is the largest economy and biggest economic and political group composed of developed countries. 17 of its members use one single currency, the euro, which has also become the second international reserve currency and liquidity unit that can compete with dollar. The development path and social style of the EU are also notably appealing to the rest of the world. To sum up, the EU has become one of the most important powers on the current global political and economic map even with the negative impact of the eurozone debt crisis. The EU is an attractive market to do business with. They have 500 million consumers looking for quality goods. They are the world’s largest single market with transparent rules and regulations. They have a secure legal investment framework that is amongst the most open in the world. They are the most open market to developing countries in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Commercial collaboration is the ballast of the China–EU cooperation. As the two largest economies in the world, their trade scale has grown from a tiny amount to the huge number today and the trades have great influence on the world economy. Commercial relations have also become the most important factor in the bilateral relationship. China and the EU are becoming significant associates for each other. So far, the daily trade transactions between China and the EU have reached one billion EUR and annually are close to EUR 500 billion, constituting up to one third of the global trade. Even when the global trade and world economy were under the

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, ‘EU Position in World Trade’, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/eu-position-in-world-trade/> (accessed on 6 November 2014).

severe impact of the international financial crisis, the cooperation between the EU and China still demonstrated enormous capacity. The EU remained the largest trading partner and high-tech importer; investments from the EU kept increasing and the EU ranked as the third investor in the world; and China remained the EU's second largest trading partner and export market. Although the EU–China cooperation achieved such fruitful results, China and the EU still can enhance the bilateral relationship by promoting their cooperation in next four potential fields.

The first potential field of expansion is Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Compared with the significant commodity trades, the mutual investment scale and fields are lower than 3 per cent for both sides, while China and the EU actually have quite a few common interest areas, such as infrastructure construction, industry upgrading, technology innovation, green industry, and so on, along with the urbanisation process in China. High-tech products have an especially large potential for further trading and mutual collaboration. From the perspective of trade, the United States is still the largest capital exporting country. The EU and the US have up to USD 3,700 billion and USD 2,800 billion investment along the Atlantic coasts. Although the investment of China in Europe grew rapidly, it still seemed to be a tiny number with EUR 0.7 billion in 2010 and EUR 3.2 billion in 2011 compared to the investment of the US in the EU. It is to be expected that the EU will offer increasing opportunities for acquiring a wide range of companies. The privatisation of state-owned assets under austerity programmes of the debt-ridden, periphery countries of the EU will open additional opportunities for Chinese investors.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1.** EU-27 Foreign Direct Investment flows with China (million EUR)

	2009	2010	2011	2012
EU-27 FDI in China	8,067	10,468	15,182	10,166
Chinese FDI in the EU-27	49	384	4,342	8,893

Source: European External Action Service data, [http://eeas.europa.eu/china/docs/eu\\_china\\_trade\\_in\\_goods\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/china/docs/eu_china_trade_in_goods_en.pdf) (accessed on 12 November 2014). All data for China presented in these tables exclude Hong Kong.

The second potential expansion field for China and the EU is enriching the trading catalogues. Based on the next Five-year Plan of China, there would be more than USD 10,000 billion worth commodities imported into China, USD 500 billion invested in foreign countries and more than 400 million people visiting abroad. For Europe, the huge market of China would definitely facilitate dealing with the European financial crisis and reviving the economy. Meanwhile, the EU countries have superior advantages in terms of high technology and innovation, which allows it to become the

<sup>3</sup> M. Ciuchina, 'Political Impact of Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the European Union (EU)', *Journal of Modern Accounting and Auditing*, 2013, Vol. 9, No. 12, p. 1616.

largest technical supporter of China. Further collaboration on technology industries would result in a win-win situation for both China and the EU.

The third potential field of collaboration are the opportunities brought with the upgrading of China's economy. From the perspective of long term development, the importance of China being a strategic partner would increase day by day. Since the Open-up Policy, China's achievements are self-evident and the emergence of market economy is bringing unprecedented opportunities for the EU. The EU must also notice the opportunities from the new visa issue regulation of the EU. The European Commission promulgated new simplified visa rules attracting international tourists, especially from China. By simplifying the visa process, the EU would expect 4,600 thousand more tourists from all over the world, a EUR 60 billion income raise and 500 thousand jobs. Since 2011, more than one million Chinese tourists apply for travelling or business visas to the EU and the total number of travellers doubled from 2009 to 2013.

Indeed, there are issues with the trading balance between China and Europe, mostly a trade deficit of the EU (Table 2). China's limitation on service imports collides with the EU's great potential of the service industry, especially in the fields of telecommunication, shoemaking, textiles, and metals (Table 3).

**Table 2.** China–EU Bilateral Trade 2009–2013

Indicator	Unit	Period	Imports	Exports	Total trade	Balance
Last Year	Mio EUR	2013	280,095	148,297	428,392	-131,798
Rank As EU Partner		2013	1	3	2	
Share in EU Trade	%	2013	16.6	8.5	12.5	
Annual Growth Rate	%	2012–2013	-4.1	2.8		
Annual Average Growth Rate	%	2009–2013	6.8	15.8		

Source: European Commission data, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/china/> (accessed on 5 November 2014).

**Table 3.** Trade in services 2011–2013 (billion EUR)

Year	EU imports	EU exports	Balance
2011	18.1	25.4	7.3
2012	19.9	29.2	9.4
2013	20.6	32.2	11.6

Source: European Commission data, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/china/> (accessed on 12 November 2014).

A trade imbalance can be observed in the data for the decade between 2004 and 2013. Although such an issue also exists between the EU and its other trading partners, it is most evident for the trade with China (Table 4).

**Table 4.** EU-28 trade balance in goods with China (billion EUR)

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
China	-80.8	-109.3	-132.1	-162.0	-170.8	-132.9	-170.5	-158.6	-147.8	-131.8

Source: European Commission data, [http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc\\_122532.pdf](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_122532.pdf) (accessed on 6 November 2014).

As a matter of course, there are some arguably flawed trading policies of the EU towards China in terms of commercial strategies. For example, China has for years longed for deepening the trading partnership with the EU, but regretfully the EU has yet to acknowledge China’s market economy status. Even though in 1998 the EU had removed China from the list of non-market economy countries, China was never officially admitted as a market economy country. Instead, China has been described as a ‘special market economy country’ by the EU. The EU currently refuses to recognise that status for technical reasons – particularly because China would not meet the five criteria set by European legislation covering government influence on corporate decisions, public ownership, company accounting standards, bankruptcy regulation, and exchange rate policies.<sup>4</sup>

**2.2 Political collaboration**

The diplomatic relations between China and the EU were growing to maturity since the relations had been officially established in 1975. The frequency and depth of political negotiation and exchanges were enhanced by leaps and bounds. Systematisation and normalisation of political exchanges between both sides have been set and further cultivated especially after the mutual agreement of regular meetings at the Asia–Europe Meeting in April 1998. In October 2003, China and the EU set up a comprehensive strategic partnership and three dialogue mechanisms were structured, including the high-level strategy dialogue, the high-level commercial and trading dialogue and the high-level culture dialogue. By March 2014, the number of regular dialogue and negotiation systems was increased to more than 60 from 19 in 2003. The foreign minister of China, the foreign minister of the rotating Presidency of the EU and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy may have meetings at any time, if necessary. Since 2010, China and the EU launched the China–Europe Political Parties Forum. Regular contacts between

<sup>4</sup> ‘Is China Already a Market Economy? What Implications for the EU’s Trade Defence Policy?’, <http://www.madariaga.org/images/madariagareports/2012-jun-22%20-%20china%20market%20economy%20status.pdf> (accessed on 14 November 2014).

institutions from China and Europe are also in accordance with the trend. The Chinese National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) set up regular meeting schemes with the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee. In November 2013, 'China–EU 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation' was formulated and promoted in Beijing, elevating the importance of the collaborative programmes 'Peace' and 'Security' ahead of 'Prosperity', 'Sustainable development' and 'Cultural exchange', indicating the importance of China–Europe relations for both sides.

In the political field, China is always expecting a strong, prosperous and united EU and is always ready to cooperate with the EU on international and regional issues in order to build up a fair and rational international political order. 'If Beijing and Brussels are serious about changing the nature of great power politics, a strategic axis between China and Europe built on mutual benefit and understanding will be indispensable,'<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, it is not favourable for China to be approached with the so-called China Threat theory. 'The key question for the future is how the EU can best tailor its strategy towards China to achieve its political, security and economic interests.'<sup>6</sup>

### 2.3 Collaboration on global issues

China and the EU share a lot of common interests in global issues, especially both appreciating multilateral international organisations and relations and advocating multi-polarisation and democratisation. China and the EU also take a common stand on global warming, terrorism, proliferation of weapons of massive destruction, illegal immigrants, international crimes, global health issues (such as AIDS and Ebola hemorrhagic fever), international financial system reform, energy security, food security, and so on.

## 3 . Competitor

'Competitor' means that the EU and China should compete against each other fairly in all fields, especially in the economic field, and meanwhile seize the market by dint of technical and price advantages rather than governmental intervention. However, in recent years, the EU has often imposed anti-dumping duties on Chinese goods. It makes sense for the EU to do so because some Chinese enterprises have indeed behaved in a wrong way. Nevertheless, if the EU conducts a market survey on relevant Chinese industries, they will find that a punitive tariff is not an inevitable choice.

---

<sup>5</sup> G. Geeraerts, 'China, the EU, and the New Multipolarity', *European Review*, 2011, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 66.

<sup>6</sup> F. Cameron, 'The Development of EU–China Relations', *European Studies*, 2009, Vol. 27, No. 1, p. 63.

Likewise, supposing the EU has an objective understanding of China's automotive industry, it will not believe that the anti-monopoly measure taken by the Chinese government is meaningless. In regions such as Africa and the Middle Asia outside the EU and China, the competition between the EU and China should be fair. Undeniably, China differs largely from the EU in the investment behaviours in these regions. China will not require these countries to accept such values as democracy, freedom and human rights, but the EU will. China does not accept that the EU censures China for supporting local dictatorships and promoting neo-colonialism, because China has been following the basic principle of foreign policy – non-interference in internal affairs. As a country enslaved to other countries for a long time in history, China dislikes treating other countries in that way.

The competition between China and Europe can be divided into direct competition and indirect competition.

Direct competition mainly refers to the competition between China and the EU. Three typical cases illustrate direct competition. The first case was the China–Europe textiles trading dispute in 2005, which was the most serious trading dispute between the two parties since China's entering the WTO. The second case was the photovoltaics dispute, which was the largest trade conflict between China and Europe. In July 2012, the EU ProSun, an industry association of manufacturers headed by the company SolarWorld, filed a complaint to the European Commission against 'the dumping of Chinese photovoltaics manufacturers'. On 6 September, the European Commission announced anti-dumping investigation on the photovoltaic panels, photovoltaic batteries as well as other photovoltaic devices imported from China. On 25 September, the EU ProSun Association made an appeal to the European Commission accusing Chinese photovoltaic enterprises of getting subsidies from the government and requesting punitive import tariffs on photovoltaic products from China. On 8 November, the Commission officially started the investigation on countervailing measures concerning Chinese photovoltaic products. On 22 May 2013, China's Electrical Products Import and Export Chamber of Commerce (CEPIECC) made a statement, declaring that CEPIECC would submit a proposal on price guarantee schemes. However, the Commission rejected the proposal without addressing the questions and explanations of CEPIECC. Thus the first round of negotiation on the anti-dumping anti-subsidy case broke down. On 4 June 2013, the Commission proclaimed 11 per cent provisional anti-dumping duties on solar panels. Until July 2013, both sides went through days of hard negotiations and finally settled on a new price scheme. The third case was the trade dispute on telecommunication devices, which was the latest dispute in the China–Europe trade. The Commission's anti-dumping and anti-subsidy investigation started in May 2013. After one and a half years of continuous negotiation, Chinese telecom industry representatives and the European side eventually reached an agreement on the Commission's withdrawal of the anti-subsidy charge and their future collaboration on 18 October 2014 in Brussels.

It has become more and more self-evident that there would no winner in the EU–China trade war.

Indirect competition mainly refers to the competition between China and the EU in the rest of the world, especially in Africa. ‘The European approach emphasises on good governance in Africa and it seeks to build a better framework for governance on the continent, while the Chinese approach stresses on effective governance and tries to build an improved economic basis for political governance in Africa.’<sup>7</sup> The EU assumed that its position and influence on African countries were threatened along with the deepened interaction between China and Africa. The EU was concerned that China may not only influence African countries with the Chinese development model but also replace the EU and take the lead on African issues. The rapid bonding between China and Africa stirred up anxiety and concern among European countries. Chimeric discussions and remarks about ‘neocolonialism’ of China in Africa spread. Even nowadays, there is still suspicion about the legitimacy of China’s activities in Africa, about how the democratisation process might be distorted, or concerns that the EU’s policies in Africa might be paled by China’s economy assisting strategies. The European Parliament was filled with suspicion and criticism about ‘how China was encouraging dictatorships in Africa’, or ‘China was raking in African resources’. As one Chinese scholar said, ‘though China and the EU have quite a few differences between their policies concerning providing aid to Africa, it does not mean that the two sides would necessarily get into conflict. As long as they switch their perspectives, reshape their relations in a proactive and constructive way, China and the EU will be able to achieve complementarity of advantages and a win-win cooperation in supporting and promoting African development.’<sup>8</sup> In fact, aside from China’s policies towards Africa, the EU also started to modify their own Africa policies. On 17 October 2008, the European Commission published the document *European Union, China and Africa: Towards Trilateral Dialogue and Cooperation*, in which it proposed collaboration suggestions including guidelines and basics of the trilateral cooperation, the practical and the progressive method, and effective co-assistance. Specific goals involve the peace and security of Africa, African infrastructure construction, sustainable development and management of natural resources, food security and safety, and the maintenance of all the needed partnerships. The proposed partnership and policy dialogues include promoting the African continent and regional integration; strengthening the role of the EU Delegation in order to promote dialogue between the EU, the African Union and China, especially dialogue on regional peace and security; ensuring the European Commission’s part in facilitating Africa’s building up its regional economic communities. From the perspective of multi-lateral dialogue,

---

<sup>7</sup> V. Papatheologou, ‘EU, China, Africa Towards a Trilateral Cooperation: Prospects and Challenges for Africa’s Development’, *Journal of Africa Studies and Development*, 2014, Vol. 6, No. 5, p. 84.

<sup>8</sup> J. Ling, ‘Aid to Africa: Can China and EU Share Their Experience’, *China International Studies*, 2009, No. 6, p. 72.

regular official and unofficial communication among ambassadors was emphasised and promoted. From the perspective of bilateral dialogue between the EU and China, the African issue became the official agenda. 'The key to the future of EU–China engagement with Africa will be firstly, how the European Union (EU) and China reconcile aspects of their development paradigms to support Africa's development.'<sup>9</sup>

#### 4. Troublemaker

'Troublemaker' means that the EU often criticizes China's inadequate efforts on the protection of basic rights and freedoms, requiring China to establish a diversified society in accordance with the EU's values.

Although the European Parliament (EP) has no accountability regarding administration or diplomacy and limited accountability in terms of legislation, the EP can always get its voice heard through the Commission's policies towards China. On 24 October 2006 at Strasbourg, France, the Commission released the document *EU – China: Closer partners, growing responsibilities*. In December 2006, the European Council published the *EU–China Strategic Partnership*. The relationship with China was summarised from maturing partnership to competitive and collaborative partnership on the EU's side, requesting China to build up a more diversified society with pluralism. In the paper, it was pointed out that 'the Council continues to have serious concerns about the human rights situation in China and deeply regrets the fact that there has been little progress in a number of areas'; and that 'the EC urges China to ensure fair trial provisions, to lift severe restrictions on freedom of expression, association and religion as well as on access to information, to respect the rights of persons belonging to minorities'.<sup>10</sup>

Specifically, the disagreements between the EU and China are mainly about two areas – human rights and the Tibet issue.

First, let us focus on human rights. From 1999 to 2010, the European Parliament released 13 rounds of human rights resolutions on China, a total of 13 joint motions and 68 motions from the European Parliament. The authors believe that the Chinese government does need to work on certain social issues, but still the EU should recognise the progress that China has made and the pressure on the Chinese government – is it really practical and fair to demand of the largest developing country with 1.4 billion population to get close to what the EU has achieved for its civil society? Moreover, although the EU–China Human Rights Dialogue started in 1997 and the summits were already held 32 times, disagreement was still overshadowing the partnership between the EU and China. Even though the EU respects the mutual values

<sup>9</sup> V. Papatheologou, op.cit., p. 85.

<sup>10</sup> Council of the European Union, Press Release, 2771<sup>st</sup> Council Meeting, Brussels, December 11–12, 2006, 16291/06 (Presse 353), art. 12, p. 9, [http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/china/gac.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/china/gac.htm) (accessed on 14 November 2014).

and promotes democracy, legitimacy, human rights and freedoms, the differences in social conventions, values and political systems between the two sides still affect the choices on social and economic reforms and to some extent limit further cooperation.

Second, there is the Tibet issue, which is even more upsetting for China. Only from 1993 to 2009, the European Parliament passed more than 20 resolutions on the Tibet issue. On 23 September 2007, German Chancellor Angela Merkel held a private meeting with the Dalai Lama, which was the first time in German history that a Chancellor him/herself met the Dalai Lama and also the first time that the head of a Western state met the Dalai Lama in his/her own office. On 7 December 2008, President of France Nicolas Sarkozy, who was chairing the rotating EU Presidency, met the Dalai Lama in person in spite of repeated opposition from China. As a result, Premier Wen Jiabao cancelled the scheduled meeting with Sarkozy. Afterwards, the passing on of the Olympic torch encountered some difficulties in London and Paris. After the riots in Lhasa on 14 March 2008 some European politicians publicly expressed support for the Tibetan independence forces and called for boycotting the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. For the European Parliament, the core issue regarding Tibet is human rights, thus the Tibet issue has always been included in their Annual Human Rights Report. Not only did the European Parliament frequently invite the Dalai Lama to give speeches, but it also publicly supported his secessionist activities, criticising the Chinese government for oppressing minorities in Tibet. Moreover, the European Parliament even interfered with China's Tibetan policies, asking for complete autonomy for Tibet except diplomacy and defence. To sum up, the essence of the European Parliament's resolutions on Tibet issues was favouring the Dalai Lama's political pursuit to make Tibet independent, which was severely harming China's interests and unity.

Third, there is also the Taiwan issue, on which disagreements occur even among the EU institutions. The EU's stance on Taiwan was clearly described in the *EU–China Strategic Partnership* in 2006: 'The Council remains committed to its One China policy. The Council is convinced that stability across the Taiwan Straits is integral to the stability and prosperity of East Asia and the wider international community. The Council welcomes initiatives by both sides aimed at promoting dialogue, practical co-operation and increased confidence building, including agreement on direct cross-straits flights and reductions in barriers to trade, investment and people-to-people contacts. The Council encourages both sides to continue with such steps, to avoid provocation, and to take all possible measures to resolve differences peacefully through negotiations between all stakeholders concerned. The Council encourages both sides to jointly pursue pragmatic solutions related to expert participation in technical work in specialised multilateral fora.'<sup>11</sup> However, the European Parliament has repeatedly presented an opposite position. It has supported Taiwan's efforts to

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

join international organisations as an independent nation and also frequently criticised China and praised Taiwan for human rights protection. Merely from 1996 to 2005, the Parliament passed 14 resolutions on the Taiwan issue.

## 5. Conclusions

To conclude, China and European countries present major differences in terms of political visions and values. The fact that China has different social conventions and ideologies led to the conviction of some European media and political figures that China does not play according to the Western rules. This group believes that China is still violating human rights; ignoring the Western legal standards; deliberately acting against democracy as defined by the Western discourse; and doing whatever it takes to maintain stability. Recently, there has been a popular and influential opinion in Europe that as a large emerging country, China has been challenging the Western model, values and interests because the country is trying hard to make its voice heard in the world after more than a century of humiliation and oppression. The EU should understand and accommodate the peaceful emergence of China instead of reacting with all the questioning and hostility.

Overall, China has always been the weaker player and Europe is the tougher one in the mutual relations. This can be especially observed in the newest policy paper released by the Chinese government in 2014: *Deepening China–EU Mutually Beneficial Strategic Partnership*. ‘A healthy and sound China–EU relationship begins with the correct strategic cognition by the two sides and is ruined by their strategic misjudgment.’<sup>12</sup> From the perspective of China, perception of the EU is more that of a teacher and cooperator, while the proportion of competitor might be increasing. To facilitate a benign relation in future, the EU should comprehend more of China’s context and social status before formulating its policy towards China. Scholars and citizens are more than welcome to come to China for field survey and study. It is expected that stereotypes and bias on China can be eliminated and that the media will break their post-Cold War mindsets. Only this way, China and the EU would mutually benefit from a fairer and more balanced relation.

Multiple factors affect the EU–China relation, such as the governance mechanism of the EU, the influence of the United States and the modification of Chinese foreign policies. However, it has to be restated that the future global pattern and order is heavily impacted by the EU–China partnership. China and Europe are not simply two powers of international configuration. They are two powers with the most similar perceptions on the global pattern and order. The EU is ‘involving’ China, expanding and diversifying its global role, and together, they are being seen as two economic

---

<sup>12</sup> Z. Hong, ‘Cognitive Dislocation in China–EU Relations’, *China International Studies*, 2011, No. 5, p. 81.

giants who have the potential to influence the international balance of power. The EU and China could form an 'axis' in the coming decades.<sup>13</sup> The future development of the EU–China relation plays a key role in whether the post-crisis world may get rid of the previous zero-sum game and containment actions so that a more peaceful and multi-lateral world could be built. On the other hand, various challenges also lie in the way. One of the weaknesses of the EU–China partnership is the lack of institutional mechanisms similar to the laws and treaties established between the EU and the US. Even though China has become an important associate for the EU, the connection is still much weaker than that between the EU and the US. Moreover, the EU–China relation is still pushed forward mainly through political dialogue and executive promotion, while the US–EU relation is more institutionalised and steady. Anyway, opportunities between the EU and China by all means succeed far more than challenges. Currently, China is working towards the goal of achieving a well-off society in an all-round way (Xiaokang Society), and the EU is carrying out the Europe 2020 strategy to promote structural reforms. The two programs bear similarities in all aspects, which again provide valuable opportunities and new windows for EU–China cooperation.

---

<sup>13</sup> S. Noman, 'EU–China Strategic Relations: Challenges and Prospects', *Journal of European Studies*, 2013, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 51.