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China's Foreign Policy: A European Perspective

Fernando Delage
Gracia Abad

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El Instituto Universitario de Estudios Europeos de la Universidad CEU San Pablo, Centro Europeo de Excelencia Jean Monnet, es un centro de investigación especializado en la integración europea y otros aspectos de las relaciones internacionales.

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China's foreign policy: A European Perspective

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Introduction

China's rise is arguably the most relevant development in contemporary international relations. The steady economic growth of the People's Republic of China (PRC) over the past three decades, its deepening integration in the global system, as well as its high level of defence spending have enormously increased Beijing's influence. In the space of two generations, China has become the world's second largest economy; and besides playing a major role in Asia, China's diplomacy is also active in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America. Hardly any issue in the global agenda, from climate change to financial reform, from nuclear proliferation to energy security, can be addressed without Beijing's participation.

Both in the PRC and in the world at large, China's re-emergence has stimulated a debate on its implications for the international system, and for the country's foreign policy. It is only natural that analysts ask themselves what role China is playing in reshaping the world order, and what its place is in that order¹. In a nutshell, they question whether a more powerful China will be a peaceful and responsible member of the international community, or will it throw its weight around and challenge current rules. Those of a liberal persuasion predict that the forces of economic interdependence will turn China into a constructive international partner, while many realists, in contrast, believe that the PRC's economic growth will inevitably lead to a similar development of its military power and will, in due time, challenge the existing order.

Since the ascent of China is taking place in an international order characterized by unipolarity, the discussion usually focuses on the PRC as a potential challenger to American hegemony. The United States is indeed the main variable affecting China's view of the world, and the critical factor in the shaping of its national security strategy. Likewise, China's rise is the main foreign policy concern of the United States in the longer term. It is against this general background that the Sino-European relationship must be considered.

Despite its economic and political weight, Europe is not an element of the Asian balance of power, and has no direct strategic interests involved. However, the changing distribution of power in the region, of which China is the main driver, will affect global equilibrium and therefore Europe enormously. The impact of China's economic growth and energy consumption has been affecting international markets and politics since the 1990s. In 2004 the European Union became the largest trading partner of China, a country with which it has a giant trade deficit, and promises to be an important competitor to its high tech manufacturing. Many Chinese companies are already investing in Europe, and are likely to do so on a larger scale in the future. The rise of China also affects Europe because of its impact in the setting of rules for global governance as well as on human rights issues. At the same time, China's role is growing in many parts of the world, like Africa or the Middle East, where previously its interests were limited, while Europe played an important role. In a word, "China is now a factor in every global issue that matters to Europeans"²; and as China's presence and interests throughout the world expand, so will the policy challenges for the EU.

¹ Wang Gungwu and Zheng Yongnian, eds. *China and the new international order*. London: Routledge, 2008, pp. 1-2.

² John Fox and François Godement, *A power audit of EU-China relations*. Brussels: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2009, p.9.

The global financial crisis has probably accelerated the ongoing power shift towards China and other emerging large economies³. If the PRC is the big winner of the crisis, the EU is among its greatest casualties. Europe's international influence is diminishing, while that of China is growing. Add to this the bilateral strains over the past few years, and the lack of a coherent and coordinated European position on major foreign policy issues, and the result is a sceptical attitude in Beijing towards the EU as a global political actor. If for a time Europe seemed a good partner for China to try to balance the United States or, at least, try to promote a multipolar world order, strategists in Beijing see no room today for the EU among the great powers.

As Europe reassesses how to respond to China's rise, nothing is of course more important than shaping an integrated EU approach rather than maintaining different national policies vis-à-vis the PRC. But even a coordinated strategy requires three things to succeed: a clear understanding of the role the EU plays in Beijing's diplomacy; a thorough grasp of their respective perceptions of the international system and the roles they play in it; and a systematic examination of the implications of China's re-emergence for Europe's global interests. These three issues are considered in this chapter, after first taking a quick look at the historical background of the Sino-European relationship to better appreciate its current travails.

³ Mathew J. Burrows and Jennifer Harris, "Revisiting the future: Geopolitical effects of the financial crisis", *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 2 (April 2009), pp. 27-38.

1. China and the European Union: a brief history

Although China and the then European Community established relations in 1975, the PRC's concern with its security in the context of bipolarity assigned Europe a mere "secondary role" in its foreign policy during the cold war⁴. It was only in the following decade, with the launching of economic reforms in China, that Beijing started to cultivate relations with a number of European states. In 1985 a legal basis was provided for the Europe-China relationship through the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, a document still in force.

Since the mid-1990s, a changing global political and economic landscape has driven Europe and China to adjust their relationship. With the end of the cold war and the adoption of the 1993 Maastricht treaty –which added the construction of monetary union and the shaping of a common foreign policy to the just-completed single market– China realized that the EU was becoming a major international force. For its part, the European Union also began to show a stronger interest in China as a market and as a political partner. Against the background of a new Asia strategy which it had developed a year earlier⁵, the EU issued its first strategy paper on China in 1995⁶. The first EU-China annual summit meeting took place in 1998; since then, Sino-European relations have developed rapidly although many ambiguities remain in their mutual perceptions.

If the EU and China came to recognise each other as an emerging force in international affairs after the end of the cold war, with China's entry into the WTO at the end of 2001 and the introduction of the Euro in January 2002, both parties developed a greater interest in deepening their partnership. Bilateral trade grew rapidly, and both China and the EU issued major policy documents in 2003 that aimed at a strong bilateral relationship. In October China published its white paper on EU policy, an unprecedented document⁷. It was the first time that the Chinese government published a text that defined the country's policy towards a specific region of the world and listed the objectives that both sides should achieve in order to strengthen the relationship. China showed a great interest though it remained conscious of the absence of a strong and comprehensive mutual understanding⁸. Only a month earlier, the EU had defined China as a strategic partner in a new policy paper⁹. At the annual summit held the same year, the first attended by Hu Jintao as new president of the PRC, both parties agreed on launching their "comprehensive strategic partnership".

It was obvious to both China and the EU that besides addressing bilateral questions, they should also discuss regional and international issues of common concern¹⁰. However, in 2004 and 2005 things started to go wrong. Most importantly for Beijing, it failed in its request to have the EU arms embargo imposed on China for the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989 lifted: American and Japanese pressure made Brussels change its mind on the ending of the prohibition in the summer of 2005. Although the EU remains committed to removing it, no advance has been made to this date. The Chinese see the embargo as an act of discrimination which complicates the full realisation of their strategic partnership¹¹.

⁴ Michael Yahuda, "China and Europe: The significance of a secondary relationship", in Thomas W. Robinson and David Shambaugh, eds. *Chinese foreign policy: Theory and practice*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, pp. 265-82.

⁵ European Commission, "Towards a new Asia strategy", COM(94) 314, July 13, 1994. This document was revised and updated in 2001: European Commission, "Europe and Asia: A strategic framework for enhanced partnerships", COM(2001) 469, September 4, 2001.

⁶ European Commission, "A long-term policy for China-Europe relations", COM(1995) 279, July 5, 1995.

⁷ "China's EU Policy Paper", Beijing, October 13, 2003 (www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics/ceupp/t27708.htm).

⁸ David Kerr and Liu Fei, eds. *The international politics of EU-China relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 1.

⁹ European Commission, "A maturing partnership: shared interests and challenges in EU-China relations", COM(2003) 533, September 10, 2003.

¹⁰ David Scott, "The EU-China "strategic dialogue" in David Kerr and Liu Fei, eds. *The international politics of EU-China relations*, p. 13.

¹¹ Leo Cendrowicz, "Should Europe lift its arms embargo on China?", *Time*, February 10, 2010.

Despite these difficulties, the European Commission adopted in October 2006 a new policy paper, which outlined the EU strategy for responding to the PRC's growing strength¹². Very soon however, the relationship further deteriorated. Trade and economic ties grew tenuous as Europeans began to feel the impact of economic competition with China. The EU's trade deficit with China reached 150 billion in 2007, a jump of over 25 percent from the previous year. In July 2007, speaking at the European Parliament, the European trade commissioner, Peter Mandelson, declared the bilateral relationship to be at "a crossroads", and emphasized that China should act to meet its WTO commitments, remove barriers to EU exports, protect intellectual property, and stop dumping practices. In August, the EU also took the decision to diminish its development aid to China.

The breadth of the Joint Statement of the 10th EU-China summit (November 2007), a document outlining bilateral views and activities ranging from political dialogue and the role of the United Nations, to counterterrorism to economics to regional issues such as Iran, North Korea, Darfur and Burma, as well as educational and cultural exchanges, reflected the wide range of problems the EU and China intended to address jointly. But during the summit, Mandelson again publicly denounced Beijing on a number of market access problems, and there were strained discussions on the value of the Renminbi, the arms embargo, Africa, and Chinese human rights practices.

Around this time, new leaders in Germany, France and the UK decided to take a tougher attitude towards China. Shortly after a trip to China in August 2007, Chancellor Angela Merkel met with the exiled Tibetan leader, the Dalai Lama, in Berlin, resulting in a strong response from Beijing and the suspension of high-level Sino-German contacts. In 2008 European governments were tainted with the problems of the Olympic torch procession through London and other capitals. In Paris a disabled Chinese athlete was attacked by protestors who accused Beijing of encouraging the Tibetan riots of March 2008. At the end of the year, China cancelled the regular summit meeting with the EU after French President Nicolas Sarkozy met with the Dalai Lama. One year later, in December 2009, China executed a British citizen for drug-smuggling—the first European to be executed in China in 50 years—despite condemnations from European governments and pleas that he be spared because of his mental illness. The same month, at the Copenhagen UN climate change conference, EU leaders were shocked by China's disdain for European efforts at securing a binding commitment to cut emissions.

The Copenhagen conference is in fact viewed by some observers as the final straw for those European policy-makers who advocated engagement with China. After Copenhagen, European attitudes have hardened and governments are reconsidering their approach to the PRC¹³. Simultaneously, the clashes of the last few years have also changed the Chinese perception of Europe: Beijing has focused more on managing its bilateral relations with individual countries than with the EU at large, and seems to have renounced the possibility of using the EU to counterbalance the United States.

Europe and China find themselves at a complex crossroads in their relationship. In a globalizing world, the two sides have an increasing contact in a growing number of places around the world, and with a growing list of economic and political issues. EU-China relations have become more difficult to manage and also more tense as a result of the European trade deficit, China's exchange rate policy and market access problems, and differences on global governance and human rights. In brief, in a context of emerging difficulties, both sides are developing a new perception of each other, and their relationship is moving from the "honeymoon" of earlier this decade to a more realistic stance¹⁴.

¹² European Commission, "EU-China: Closer partners, growing responsibilities", COM(2006) 631, October 24, 2006. This text was accompanied by a working paper on "EU-China trade and investment", COM(2006) 632, October 24, 2006.

¹³ Charles Grant, "How should Europe respond to China's strident rise?", *Center for European Reform Bulletin*, No. 70, February/March 2010.

¹⁴ David Shambaugh, "China and Europe: The 'China honeymoon' is over", *International Herald Tribune*, November 26, 2007.

2. Europe in China's foreign policy

The Chinese generally have a positive view of Europe. They have the highest regard for its cultural richness, higher education and business practices as well as for the integration process itself. The single market, the Euro, and EU's enlargement are viewed with particular admiration. Beijing's assessments of relations with Europe are equally favourable: as the 2003 China's EU policy paper puts it, "There is no fundamental conflict of interest between China and the EU and neither poses a threat to the other". Unlike the United States, Europe is not a strategic rival; however, China thinks of the EU primarily in economic terms.

Ever since China's reform and opening up in the late 1970s, Europe has been one of its most important trade and economic partners. China needed the investment, technology and experience of European countries. Thirty years later, the EU has become China's primary trading partner, accounting for nearly a quarter of the PRC's overall external trade in 2010. (In return, China is the EU's second largest trading, after the United States.) EU countries also provide China with a larger amount of foreign direct investment than does the United States, and remain an important source of technology transfers (Germany is China's largest supplier of machine tools, for example). The EU and its member states have in addition provided a significant amount of technical assistance and financial aid, originally focused on improving China's infrastructures and rural development and, most recently, on environmental protection and good governance.

In trade and other economic issues therefore the EU matters increasingly for China. And it is also in this context that Chinese analysts see –correctly– the basis of Europe's international influence. Besides the sheer size of the European economy as a bloc, Chinese commentators regard the Euro as "probably the EU's greatest institutional success", and the "most important component of Europe's external power¹⁵". Beyond this admiration, however, they see serious limits to economic cooperation with the EU.

China has sought unsuccessfully for the EU to recognise its full "market economy status", a definition that would give its goods easier access into European markets by making anti-dumping and countervailing duty cases more difficult to pursue. For China, this issue remains one of the main points of contention in the relationship, along with the arms embargo. The Chinese government has pointed out the EU's contradictory stance in conferring Russia market status in 2001 but failing to grant it to the PRC. Simultaneously, Beijing faces a long list of complaints from the EU regarding market access into the Chinese service sectors, as well as the political tension provoked by the huge European bilateral deficit. In these circumstances, despite the talk about their strategic partnership and the growing number of sectoral meetings and working groups, the negotiations launched in 2006 on a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement that would succeed the 1985 Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement have not yet concluded.

Chinese perception of Europe's place in international politics has also evolved significantly. EU countries have a special appeal for Beijing because they do not show the same degree of distrust of China's intentions as does the United States. Whereas Chinese analysts believe that the United States wants to contain China's rise, they view European policymakers as seeking to engage China and promote its stable development¹⁶. Instead of focusing on China's military modernization, Europe instead intends to see a large country going through a complex social and economic transformation. They may have different understandings of human rights, but this has not become a barrier to the development of bilateral relations. Additionally, Europe does not have military forces stationed in East Asia and does not have the geopolitical ambitions of the United States. When it comes to Taiwan, the Korean peninsula or the US-Japanese alliance, Europe is no more than a spectator. It is no wonder therefore that from China's perspective there is no strategic conflict of interests

¹⁵ Karine Lisbonne-de Vergeron, *Contemporary Chinese views of Europe*. London: Chatham House / Fondation Robert Schuman, 2007, pp. 8-9.

¹⁶ Evan S. Medeiros, *China's international behavior: Activism, opportunism, and diversification*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2009, p. 120.

between the two sides. Accordingly, developing closer relations with the EU has been viewed by Beijing as providing more options and more room for manoeuvre¹⁷.

China attached considerable significance in particular to the role of the EU in shaping a more multipolar world, and saw the transatlantic rift over the Iraq war as a unique opportunity to expand its engagement with the Europeans. Beijing considered the EU to be an independent political actor and economic powerhouse whose interests did not necessarily always coincide with those of the United States. With the deterioration of United States-Europe relations in the early 2000s during the Bush administration, analysts saw the EU-China relationship as part of a new restructuring in global power relations. A new Sino-European axis or a “strategic triangle” between the United States, the EU and China could be created, both of which would weaken American influence¹⁸.

Despite China’s expectations, its unsuccessful effort to persuade the EU to lift the arms embargo in 2005 taught Beijing some lessons on the limits of the bilateral relationship. Despite their important economic ties, China realised that, politically, the EU lacks a single, unified voice in the international arena. Its limited autonomy vis-à-vis the United States on strategic issues further reduced its attractiveness to Beijing as a potential diplomatic partner. In the words of a Chinese expert, however much Beijing would like to see a stronger Europe becoming one of the poles of an eventual multipolar order, “the American factor provides a long-term external constraint on any EU-China strategic partnership”¹⁹.

As Jean-Pierre Cabestan writes reviewing the Chinese literature, some analysts hold the view that the EU “is essentially an economic union”, and cannot be considered as a pole since it has not yet developed a credible integrated military force and it is constituted of nation-states that have jealously kept much say on foreign and security policies. Others remain very realistic about the benefits for China: “The EU will not change its alliance with the United States and the NATO framework will continue to dominate their relationship. It is basically because both are market economy democracies with homogeneous values. This makes the EU a more independent competitor but not a challenging adversary of the United States”²⁰. In fact, the United States and the EU not only share fundamental values, they also pursue similar objectives with regard to China: integrating it into international institutions and engaging it to become more involved in terms of non-proliferation, climate change, international security, and human rights. This means that from a strategic viewpoint, there is no triangle between the EU, the United States, and China, and not much chance of seeing one take shape.

Given the EU’s experience in a variety of policy areas that are relevant to Chinese domestic development, the PRC largely sees Europe as a useful friend and a valuable adviser. However, it does not see the EU as a real player internationally, except in economics. For the Chinese there is a sense that the EU is much less politically than the sum of its parts, that it lacks a strategic vision and suffers from internal division, which limits its global weight. Europe simply does not exist as a political centre of power, especially compared with the United States.²¹ With the exception of trade and finance, Europe’s international influence is to a great extent based on its role as a “normative power”, something which precisely clashes with China’s sacrosanct adherence to the principle of absolute sovereignty (see below).

¹⁷ Jenny Clegg, *China’s global strategy: Towards a multipolar world*. London: Pluto Press, 2009, p. 92.

¹⁸ David Shambaugh, “China and Europe: The Emerging Axis”, *Current History*, September 2004, pp. 243-248; David Shambaugh, “The new strategic triangle: U.S., and the European reactions to China’s rise”, *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 3 (Summer 2005), pp. 7-25.

¹⁹ Pang Zhongying, “On Sino-Europe ‘strategic partnership’”, *International Review*, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, vol. 46 (Spring 2007), p. 13.

²⁰ Jean-Pierre Cabestan, “Learning from the EU? China’s changing outlook toward multilateralism”, in Wang Gungwu and Zheng Yongnian, eds. *China and the new international order*. London: Routledge, 2008, p. 211. See also Zhu Liqun, “Chinese perceptions of the EU and the China-Europe relationship”, in David Shambaugh, Eberhard Sandschneider and Zhou Hong, eds. *China-Europe relations: Perceptions, policies and prospects*. London: Routledge, 2008, pp. 148-171.

²¹ Karine Lisbonne-de Vergeron, *Contemporary Chinese views of Europe*. p. xv.

In these circumstances, Beijing has made consistent efforts to expand its relations with major EU member states. It has reached bilateral “strategic partnerships” with France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. Since 2005, China’s bilateral diplomacy has become a prominent feature of its Europe strategy. Beijing realised it could gain more leverage by working bilaterally, including by playing European countries off one another²². For the Chinese there are severe limitations to seeing Europe as a united and coherent force in the world. As a Chinese observer puts it: “There are still 27 individual China policies behind the strategic partnership that the EU is seeking with us. What matters more is building up our bilateral relations with the major European nations, each of which has different ways of dealing with the Chinese government”²³.

What seems to emerge in summary is a fragmented Chinese perception of Europe. Strategists in Beijing feel a united Europe would fit into their concept of a multipolar order, however in order to play that role, the EU should develop a much more coherent foreign policy. Although that is precisely one of the main purposes of the institutional reforms put forward by the Lisbon treaty, many Chinese observers remain sceptical as to the EU’s ability to overcome its internal differences and lack of strategic leadership.

3. China, the EU and the international system

In the late 1970s, Deng Xiaoping and other Chinese leaders were convinced that only by joining the international order could China overcome its backwardness and develop its economy. Given its size, the PRC had an enormous potential, but it lacked a solid internal base to acquire the economic and military weight necessary to be considered as a great power. Accordingly, together with the reform and opening policy, the building up of “comprehensive national power” (*zonghe guoli*) would become one of the fundamental goals of China’s strategy²⁴.

In its search for great power status, China has not only deepened its integration in the international order –it has joined around a hundred international organizations and signed over 300 treaties–²⁵ but it has also turned itself into a crucial actor in the reshaping of that order. This fact cannot be overestimated when shifts in the balance of power are taking place, and the competing world visions and interests of the different actors, as well as their ability and capacity to uphold them, will determine the rules and nature of the future international system.

What are the features of the world order preferred by China? To what extent do they coincide with those upheld by Europe? The answer to these questions depends on whether China is satisfied with the current international order or would prefer to challenge it. In other words, is China a revisionist, “adversarial power”, or does it defend the status quo?²⁶ In very broad terms, China seems to be trying to develop a multipolar international order capable of restraining the United States without seeking to challenge the United States itself; an approach that would not seem to be very much in contradiction with that of the EU.

This potential convergence is regularly referred to in the Chinese official discourse on Europe. Speaking in Hamburg in the autumn of 2006, for example, the prime minister Wen Jiabao said:

²² John Fox and François Godement, *A power audit of EU-China relations*, pp. 32-37.

²³ Karine Lisbonne-de Vergeron. Contemporary Chinese views of Europe, pp. 31-32.

²⁴ Ye Zicheng, *Inside China’s grand strategy*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010; Michael D. Swaine and Ashley Tellis, *Interpreting China’s grand strategy: Past, present, and future*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2000.

²⁵ Yang Jian, “The rise of China: Chinese perspectives”, in Kevin J. Cooney and Yoichiro Sato (eds.) *The rise of China and international security: America and Asia respond*. London: Routledge, 2009, p. 25.

²⁶ Alastair Iain Johnston, “Is China a status quo power?”, *International Security*, vol. 27, no. 4 (Spring 2003), pp. 5-56.

“China-Europe relations have a solid base. Both sides share many common views in politics. China and Europe pursue multilateralism and stand for democratizing international relations and protecting the authority of the United Nations. Based on their common interests and reciprocal needs, China and Europe have strengthened and will continue to strengthen their cooperation so as to achieve the goal of trusting each other politically, making their economies complementary to each other, conducting mutual cultural exchanges, and engaging in common development”²⁷.

Only a year later, foreign minister Yang Jiechi would insist again that the two sides do not have a fundamental conflict of interest or “outstanding historical issues” standing between them, and that they both “advocate multilateralism and support upholding the authority of the United Nations”²⁸. Indeed, European and Chinese views defend a greater role for the United Nations and other multilateral organizations, and generally seek a more “multipolar” world. In this regard, the EU has consistently favoured an increasing Chinese participation in UN peacekeeping activities. By January 2008, the PRC was the largest contributor to UN peace operations among the five permanent members of the Security Council.

Although the PRC and Europe may have similar interests or views on a wide range of issues regarding the international system, their differences cannot be overlooked. This is the case, for instance, of the concept of sovereignty. Although China was a latecomer to Westphalian nation-state diplomacy, Chinese leaders have anchored their security and diplomatic practice in a rigid concept of sovereignty. At a time when European leaders stress the interdependencies that have eroded political and economic sovereignty, Chinese leaders stubbornly cling to absolute principles. Beijing argues that concern for human rights, even genocide, can never override inviolable principles of sovereignty, and that sovereignty is the last defence of developing countries. China thus condemns the doctrine of intervention, while its leaders do not seem to support the doctrine of the responsibility to protect. On its part, the Europeans insist that sovereignty can never preclude the respect of human rights or prevent human rights issues from being effectively addressed. The war in the former Yugoslavia in the late 1990s clearly proved this divergence: by emphasizing Serbian sovereignty over its treatment of the Kosovars, China appeared to be the conservative power, defending a traditional order of state rights, while Europeans seemed to be trying to reshape the international order, making the concept of sovereignty conditional on good governance.

This is a good example of perhaps the main difference which shapes the whole EU-China relationship: China is a pragmatic and realist power while the EU is first and foremost a normative power, a defender of liberal institutionalism. This fact determines the ways in which the two sides approach each other. The Europeans, already struggling to reconcile their normative agenda –the promotion of an ethical approach to international relations and defence of human rights– with their material interests as a whole, face at the same time the challenge of a rising China, an emerging power with a strategy aimed at the pursuance of its national interests, often hidden within the goal of “de-Westernizing” global politics²⁹. More often than not, the Chinese strategy clashes with European priorities. Their respective views on multilateralism and human rights are two cases in point.

Many European nations share China’s defence of a more multipolar international order but interpretations of this goal differ. Multilateralism is indeed a clear example of something that both the EU and China pursue with very different approaches. The multilateral shift adopted by Beijing over the last few years is arguably one of the most salient features of its foreign policy.³⁰ China makes a reference to multilateralism in almost

²⁷ Speech of Wen Jiabao at the Second Meeting of the China-Europe Forum, Hamburg, September 14, 2006, cit. p. Bates Gill and Melissa Murphy, *China-Europe relations: Implications and policy responses for the United States*, A Report of the CSIS Freeman Chair in China Studies. Washington: CSIS, May 2008, pp. 5-6.

²⁸ Yang Jiechi, “Work together to build a common future”, Speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, December 5, 2007.

²⁹ Uwe Wissenbach, *The EU and China: Reconciling interests and values in an age of interdependence*, Delegation of the EU Commission to Korea. 2008??

³⁰ Jianwei Wang, “China’s multilateral diplomacy in the new millennium”, in Yong Deng and Fei-Ling Wang, eds. *China rising: Power and motivation in Chinese foreign policy*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005, pp. 159-200.

every single policy document it produces. Although it would not be inaccurate to say that it is to some extent a “multilateralism with Chinese characteristics”, that is to say, marked by a highly selective implication, there is no reason to believe that it is merely rhetorical. China’s increasing involvement and participation in global and regional multilateral institutions is undeniable. Such involvement, initially more apparent in economic forums, is now also evident in security institutions³¹.

China indeed plays an increasingly relevant role in regional and global institutions related to issues such as arms control, regional security, environmental protection, intellectual property rights and human rights. This is something that the EU clearly supports, as the rising interdependence and the emergence of an increasing number of global problems and issues make it necessary to address them from a concerted framework of shared responsibility, a framework where the Western powers are not the only participants.

Situating multilateralism at the centre of China’s “new diplomacy”, Beijing has skilfully managed to create a global web of relations³², a fact with important implications for regional and international security. This multilateral inclination provides China with a good opportunity to improve its international image and be seen as a responsible power. At the same time, it proves that China no longer perceives those institutions as instruments which could eventually be used to punish or constraint it³³. They are rather seen as channels through which it can readapt to a wider international community and contribute to the reshaping of the international order as well. China also sees in multilateralism a useful instrument to try to reduce the American preponderance in world affairs, as it might provide a basis to counterbalance such preponderance. Beijing may find support from other regional powers for that strategy³⁴. In brief, multilateralism would be instrumental in the creation of a more multipolar order³⁵.

This expansion of multilateralism might seem contradictory in relation to China’s strongly held concept of sovereignty. However, it has proved willing to accept certain –however limited– restrictions to its autonomy in the expectation of some benefits and rewards³⁶. Beijing has concluded that its search of economic modernisation, national security and international status will be best served by a strategy of implication in global affairs as well as through an active participation in various forms of institutionalized cooperation. Nevertheless, it is important to note that China uses the term “multilateralism” in many cases as interchangeable with “multipolarity”. The difference is not a minor one: multilateralism refers to a particular manner of conducting international affairs; multipolarity relates to power distribution. What is more, according to Jian Yang, when the Chinese discuss this issue, they use the term “duojihua”, usually translated as “multipolarity” which, nonetheless should be translated as “multipolarization”. The difference is again of great importance: China sees multipolarity as something in the making, a process underway which has to be fostered and completed³⁷. If we take into account these differences, we can come to the conclusion that whereas the EU is committed to the promotion of multilateralism, what China is really interested in is in promoting multipolarity.

The advancement of multilateralism is in any case a platform where Chinese and EU interests might eventually coincide or, at least, where there is some room to work together, especially in the light of increasing global

³¹ Wu Guoguang and Helen Lansdowne, “International multilateralism with Chinese characteristics” in Wu Guoguang and Helen Lansdowne, eds. *China turns to multilateralism: Foreign policy and regional security*. London: Routledge, 2008, p. 3; Bates Gill, *Rising star: China’s new security diplomacy*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2007.

³² Michael Yahuda, “China’s multilateralism and regional order” in Wu Guoguang and Helen Lansdowne, eds. *China turns to multilateralism*, p. 87; Evan S. Medeiros and M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s new diplomacy”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 82, no. 6 (November-December 2003), pp. 22-35.

³³ Russell Ong, *China’s security interests in the 21st century*. London: Routledge, 2007, p. 121.

³⁴ Mingjiang Li, “China’s participation in Asian multilateralism: pragmatism prevails”, in Ron Huiskens, ed. *Rising China: Power and reassurance*. Sydney: The Australian National University, 2009, pp. 147-164.

³⁵ Wu Guoguang and Helen Lansdowne, “International multilateralism with Chinese characteristics”, p. 7.

³⁶ Thomas G. Moore, “Racing to integrate or cooperating to compete?”, in Wu Guoguang and Helen Lansdowne, *China turns to multilateralism*, p. 37.

³⁷ Yang Jian, “The rise of China”, p. 28.

interdependence in a number of areas. This is possibly the motivation behind the joint commitment to the promotion of an “effective multilateralism” expressed by China and the EU on the occasion of the EU-China summit held in November 2007³⁸. To make this possible, however, it would be helpful if the EU is seen by China as a relevant political partner.

Human rights are one of the issues which provoke greatest tensions between China and the EU. As has already been mentioned, the views of both actors on this issue are very different, sovereignty usually being the reason given by China in rejecting any foreign criticism, as it considers any comment on its human rights practices as an unacceptable interference in its internal affairs³⁹. Chinese reactions to foreign pressure on human rights are clearly conditioned by the very conception of security upheld by the PRC. Beijing assesses security and security threats in terms of the state security level and even the regime’s security, and not in terms of individual security⁴⁰. Thus, human rights claims may well be considered as threats to national security and as attempts to undermine the Chinese position in the world. In this regard, any questioning of its sovereignty may be seen as a threat to its political security⁴¹.

The most recent bilateral episode of tension as far as human rights are concerned occurred in 2008, when some European countries said that they would reconsider their participation in the Olympic Games held in Beijing if China did not change its stance on human rights and, particularly, its policies on Tibet⁴². The Chinese, as usual, reacted angrily, as they see such criticisms as Western attempts to intensify the unrest as well as the tensions already observable in these regions⁴³.

Quite unsurprisingly, the results generated by the EU-China dialogue on human rights –initiated in 1994– are far from satisfactory. It is little more than a talking shop where little advancement is achieved. All in all, China has shown respect for the UN human rights mechanism, as proved by its signature of the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The PRC even signed in 2005 the UN agreement to protect populations from genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. But this does not change the situation, and the European Parliament continues to denounce the Chinese records on these matters, urging Beijing to enforce international norms on human rights so as to guarantee their protection in China. In particular, the EU is concerned with the situation of minorities in Tibet and Xinjiang.

Moreover China’s rigid position may undermine global –and European– efforts to see human rights respected worldwide. Sudan, Zimbabwe or Burma are paramount in this regard. Economic interests seem to prevail, leading Beijing to oppose –and eventually block– any kind of sanction on those countries. This is obviously an area in which Chinese approaches are at odds with Europe as it will be considered below when discussing Africa.

4. China’s rise and Europe’s global interests

The increasing importance of the PRC makes it impossible for the EU –or for any other actor in the system– to achieve its goals without taking China into account. China’s rise has already made the PRC a power to be reckoned with and which is often needed if international affairs are to be managed effectively. But this, in

³⁸ Bates Gill and Melissa Murphy, *China-Europe relations*, p. 16.

³⁹ Mingyoung Kim, “Political construction of human rights”, in Kevin J. Cooney and Yoichiro Sato, eds. *The rise of China and international security*, p. 215.

⁴⁰ Russell Ong, *China’s security interests in the 21st Century*, p. 27.

⁴¹ Russell Ong, *China’s security interests in the 21st century*, p. 14.

⁴² Bates Gill and Melissa Murphy, *China-Europe relations*, p. 23.

⁴³ Michael D. Swaine, “Perceptions of an assertive China”, *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 32, May 11, 2010, p. 2.

turn, requires the PRC to be willing to participate and help to handle issues in an appropriate manner; it requires the PRC to behave as a “responsible international power”.

After thirty years of reform and opening up, China has become an insider in the international system, a power that wants to work to maintain the system. China accepts the values of the international system and acts in support of existing international arrangements⁴⁴. China has certainly flourished under this order. Thus, for example, China has benefited more than any other country from globalization and an open international economy; similarly, by supporting the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, China protects its status as a recognized nuclear power and prevents others from going nuclear.

From a Western perspective, though, China seems in many instances to prioritize its pursuit of short-term national interests, rather than following and shaping global rules, and investing in building international institutions which in the long run –according to the Europeans– would best serve its own interests⁴⁵. A real partnership between the EU and China can only succeed if they work together effectively in international organizations, but when it comes to taking on some of the responsibilities of a leading power, Beijing has held back. China contends more often than not that it remains a developing country which still has a long way to go, and it also sees the main institutions of global governance as being run by Westerners for their own benefit. At the same time, the manner in which China defines its own security means that what may be considered as responsible behaviour by outside powers may be seen as dangerous for its own security by the PRC⁴⁶. The difference in the Chinese and European approaches helps to explain the tensions which emerge in a number of issues in which the PRC’s rise directly affects the EU’s positions, such as global governance and climate change, non proliferation, and Beijing’s growing presence on other continents.

4.1. Global governance

The system of global governance is not working. The Copenhagen conference on climate change proved that the UN system is too weak to create effective international energy and carbon emissions control policies. The global trade system is also in deep disarray: the inability to produce a new multilateral trading regime in the Doha round has led instead to regional and bilateral agreements. The G7 has lost its previous relevance and the G20 will be the new platform for securing a consensus among the main powers on trade, finance, and the environment, but it is still in its early stages. There are more and more problems that can only be properly addressed by countries working together and many of the key institutions are working less and less well. The international system needs new frameworks for cooperation or, at least, to find a way to overcome institutional sclerosis.

The EU wants strong global institutions so as to operate within a framework of international law and binding precedents; this is not the case with China. Thus, whilst it is undeniable that there is plenty of room for a concerted action between the EU and China on global issues as well as within global frameworks, a convergence of their positions has not always been achieved. They may reach some agreements, as exemplified by the 2004 EU-China Joint Statement on Non-Proliferation and Arms Control or the EU-China Partnership on Climate Change announced at their 2005 annual summit⁴⁷, but disagreements have also frequently emerged often on these same topics.

International economic institutions must choose between reform and irrelevance. But they cannot be reformed without China’s active involvement. The current system of global economic governance does not adequately reflect the rise of China and other emerging economies, while Europe remains over-represented

⁴⁴ Zheng Bijian, “China’s ‘peaceful rise’ to great-power status”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 5 (September-October 2005), pp. 18-24.

⁴⁵ Charles Grant with Katinka Barysch, *Can Europe and China shape a new world order?* London: Centre for European Reform, May 2008, p. 89.

⁴⁶ Russell Ong, *China’s security interests in the 21st century*, p. 12.

⁴⁷ David Scott, “The EU–China ‘strategic dialogue’”, in David Kerr and Liu Fei, eds. *The international politics of EU–China relations*, p. 16.

in these institutions, relative to its shrinking share in the global economy. The IMF and the World Bank, created after the Second World War, have to be redefined both to reflect new realities and to increase the representation of those emerging powers. China is getting a larger voting share, a Chinese national has been appointed as the IMF's chief economist, and Beijing is becoming more engaged in debates about development strategies. But China itself is becoming a big lender to the developing world, and its unconditional lending to poor countries in Africa and elsewhere may at times undermine the World Bank's role.

The WTO is seen by developing countries as biased towards the interests of advanced nations, but China has opposed liberalisation plans for agriculture and services. The failure of the Doha round could seriously weaken the WTO and the multilateral trading system, accelerating the proliferation of bilateral deals. As the world's second exporter, China should have an interest in defending the multilateral trading system against the threat of fragmentation.

The G7 has also become unrepresentative and ineffective. Since the early 2000s, their leaders have been inviting selected emerging powers, including China, to their summits. But China was reluctant to participate, defining itself as a developing country, and fearing that this could burden it with more responsibilities for dealing with global economic imbalances, climate change and development issues. Even in the G20, which has replaced the G7 as the institution of reference in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, China has been reluctant to play a leading role in global economic governance issues. The G20 summit in London in April 2009, in which China offered a modest contribution of \$40 billion, demonstrated Beijing's inclination to avoid major burdens.

As one of the largest economies and trading nations, China has also become influential on regarding international financial issues. In particular China has gained new prominence as an international creditor. Its foreign exchange reserves reached \$2,5 trillion at the end of 2009, and the Chinese government has significantly increased its intergovernmental loans as well as its foreign aid⁴⁸. The strength of China's economy during the global recession has reinforced China's new status in global finance, and its willingness to participate in the making of new rules on financial governance.

In early 2009, at the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao stated that "the current crisis has fully exposed the deficiencies in the international financial system and its governance structure (...) [There must be] a push for the establishment of a new world economic order that is just, equitable, sound and stable"⁴⁹. As a reflection of this orientation, Beijing has actively promoted international coordination involving the developing countries, and, at the same time, has taken steps to promote the use of the Renminbi in Asia, signing bilateral swap agreements and allowing selected companies in Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Guangdong to settle cross-border transactions in Renminbi. It has also stepped up its efforts to shape the global policy debate: the boldest move came from the governor of the People's Bank of China. Zhou Xiaochuan, who in March 2009 joined the debate over the reform of the international monetary system, criticizing the dollar-denominated monetary system and suggesting the creation of a new reserve currency, expanding the role and the composition of Special Drawing Rights.

Such a proposal marked a major departure from China's traditional approach to global governance. According to the two analysts Wang y Rosenau: "rather than being a rule-taker, China is seeking to be a major rule maker"⁵⁰. In fact, however, China's ability to influence the international financial system remains limited. On the one hand, China remains heavily dependent on exports, especially to the United States, which means that it has a vested interest in the stability of the US Dollar. On the other hand, the traditional Chinese notion

⁴⁸ Gregory China and Eric Helleiner, "China as a creditor: A rising financial power?", *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 62, no. 1 (Fall-Winter 2008), pp. 87-102.

⁴⁹ *Financial Times*, 29 January 2009.

⁵⁰ Hongying Wang and James N. Rosenau, "China and global governance", *Asian Perspective*, vol. 33, no. 3 (2009), p. 28.

of national sovereignty makes it hard for Beijing to propose a proper regulatory regime or for that matter any global governance arrangement that might reduce state sovereignty.

4.2. Climate change

China has been the world's top producer of greenhouse gases since 2007, overtaking the United States and producing double the emissions of the EU. Although its leaders agree that action must be taken to reduce the country's emissions, China has pursued an inflexible stance with respect to climate change negotiations. For some authors, there is no area where the room for confrontation and conflict between China and the EU is so great⁵¹.

The EU has led efforts to construct a global system for limiting global warming after the Kyoto protocol expires in 2012, conscious that without Chinese participation these efforts are doomed. The Chinese negotiators have argued that it is unfair to compare between different countries ignoring their size in terms of population; and that Western industrial nations, whose greenhouse gas emissions have been building up for more than a century, bear the main historical responsibility for climate change.

Over time, Chinese leaders seem to have recognised the adverse impact that climate change can cause not only in terms of its environmental impact but also its even greater negative economic repercussions, especially on agriculture. China signed the Kyoto Protocol but, as a developing country, it has no quantitative obligations to reduce its emissions. Today, no post-Kyoto system will succeed unless China is part of it. In November 2009 Chinese President Hu Jintao and his American counterpart Barack Obama agreed that a pact was necessary at the Copenhagen UN conference to be held the following month, and that it should include binding emission cuts for developed nations and "nationally appropriate" emission cuts for others.

However, as expected by some, there was an absolute lack of consensus among the leaders. China was at the centre of the discussions in Copenhagen, confirming that it had become the main factor in the negotiations. Beijing was blamed by many as responsible for the failure to agree on legally binding caps on emission levels on which Europeans have insisted so much. Reporters with access to the negotiating sessions have said that China single-handedly blocked a broader deal, opposing a target of 50 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2050 and an 80 per cent reduction by developed countries⁵². The final "Copenhagen Accord" was the product of personal negotiations among the political leaders of BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India and China), meeting subsequently with President Obama, and with the Europeans conspicuously absent. The accord promises a mobilization of \$100 billion in annual funding for developing countries to meet the challenges of climate change from 2020 and also pledges about \$30 billion by 2012 but has no deadline for the finalization of the negotiations and no figures for emission reduction targets by developed nations by 2020.

China had demonstrated great skill in the lead-up to the conference, teaming up with India and other emerging countries to resist the pressures from the industrialized world. From a Chinese viewpoint, the climate change negotiations failed because of the actions and attitudes of the West. Chinese analysts criticise the industrialized countries and in particular the EU for politicising the climate change negotiations and thus dooming them to failure. They say that, while the EU initially played a pivotal role in setting targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, it is now less willing to show leadership in the climate change debate because of its fear of competition from emerging countries and the pressure of conservative policies within the EU⁵³.

Climate change thus promises to become a big source of conflict between Brussels and Beijing. The battle to limit carbon emissions will dominate global governance in the coming decades, and the post-Kyoto system will probably need new institutions to make it work. Europe would expect China to be a leader in the shaping

⁵¹ Charles Grant with Katinka Barysch, *Can Europe and China shape a new world order?*, p. 70.

⁵² Geoff Dyer, "China's push for soft power runs up against hard absolutes", *Financial Times*, January 4 2010, p. 2.

⁵³ François Godement, "Does China have a real climate change policy?", *China Analysis*, no. 27. European Council on Foreign Relations, June 2010, p. 3.

of these institutions. Nonetheless, while no doubt climate change is moving up the Chinese political agenda, it is unlikely that China will agree to any climate mitigation action that compromises its national objectives of sustaining economic growth and maintaining social stability⁵⁴. From a European perspective, with regard to climate change China has displayed that multilateral environmental governance not only is not a priority but is viewed as an obstacle to its freedom of action. Again, China seems to frame the debate over climate change policy as a sovereignty issue.

4.3. Security and non-proliferation

It is interesting to note that, in spite of the circumstances derived from the arms embargo, security cooperation and exchanges between China and the EU exist and are increasingly effective in a number of issues. At this point we have to mention EU exports of civilian technologies which, nonetheless, may be considered as double-use technologies, as they have both civil and military uses. In addition, military exercises and other military exchanges between both actors are being held⁵⁵. All in all, it is in the field of new security issues where the cooperation between the EU and China seems to be more relevant.

In this context one must mention the establishment in 1994 of a “sectoral dialogue” to deal with energy security issues. The dialogue provides a framework in which to discuss energy policies and strategies, the evolution of energy markets and the possibilities of securing supplies so as not to endanger sustainable development. This has been an area where cooperation has been particularly successful so far. In 2005 the EU and China signed a MOU on transport and energy strategies which provided the framework for intensified cooperation in areas such as energy regulation, energy efficiency, renewable energy, natural gas and clean coal technology. As far as the latter is concerned, these two parties also launched an Action Plan on Clean Coal in 2005. In the same vein, on the occasion of the EU-China summit held in 2007, both parties insisted on the increasing attention that the issues of energy security, climate change and environmental protection would receive in the framework of the bilateral relation in the years to come⁵⁶.

Partly related to these issues is also the question of non proliferation and counter proliferation, an area where China is also expected to behave as a responsible power contributing to prevention and reduction of proliferation. Thus, if China could once be considered as a proliferator, over the last few years it has introduced effective controls as far as the export of nuclear related materials and technologies are concerned⁵⁷. However, for many, even if China sees non proliferation regimes more favourably now than it did in the past, it has not contributed enough towards measures to prevent exports of certain technologies and proliferation⁵⁸.

4.4. Regional policies

If we look at the ways both actors approach the different regions in the world, the picture is pretty much the same: the EU tries to enforce a number of normative values through mechanisms such as conditionality whereas the PRC will be much more guided by pragmatism and self interest⁵⁹.

⁵⁴ See Ying Ma, “China’s view of climate change”, *Policy Review*, no. 161 (Summer 2010).

⁵⁵ Bates Gill and Melissa Murphy, *China-Europe Relations*, pp. 18 and ff.

⁵⁶ François Godement, “Does China have a real climate change policy?”, pp 27.

⁵⁷ Charles Grant with Katinka Barysch, *Can Europe and China shape a new world order?*, p. 79.

⁵⁸ Russell Ong *China’s security interests in the 21st century*, p. 122.

⁵⁹ David Shambaugh, “Beijing: A global leader with ‘China First’ policy”, *Yale Global Online*, 29 June 2010.

As mentioned above, if there is an area or issue on the international agenda where European and Chinese approaches are clearly different, it is the case of Africa⁶⁰. Europe is still the most important foreign actor in the African continent but the Chinese presence is growing quickly. China's presence in Africa is in fact one of the most prominent examples of the “go out” strategy launched by the PRC in 2001, a strategy aimed at increasing its presence in the Third World countries⁶¹.

Hu Jintao has paid visits to Kenya and Nigeria and affirmed that Beijing wanted to establish a “New Partnership with Africa”⁶². Meanwhile, Chinese business and economic activity in Africa has been fostered by the Export-Import Bank of China and the China Development Bank. These financial institutions have provided Chinese entrepreneurs and investors with loans and investment guarantees of different kinds.

Likewise, in December 2005 the Chinese government adopted its “Africa White Paper” giving an account of its official “African policy”. The document outlined the main elements which would shape Chinese cooperation with Africa over the next few years and might also serve as a framework for economic ventures. A step further was taken almost a year later when 48 African leaders attended a meeting in Beijing. On that occasion Hu Jintao announced credits and loans worth several billion dollars and different initiatives to promote Chinese investments in Africa⁶³.

The expansion of trade exchanges, which have grown at an average annual rate of 33.5 percent since 2000⁶⁴, the increase of investments and the enhancement of cooperation in the field of human resources with the countries of the region have been especially intense since 2005⁶⁵, suggesting the success of the strategy.

However, rather than trade it is energy that drives Chinese interest in Africa (as in some other regions, too). About a third of the oil imported by China comes from Africa, a proportion which keeps growing. This helps to explain why the oil and mining extractives industries are at the centre of most Chinese economic exchanges with the African continent⁶⁶. The construction of a 1,500 km pipeline in Marsha-el-Bashair in Sudan and the acquisition of natural resources extraction rights in countries such as Gabon, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe are some examples of this⁶⁷.

The leaders of countries such as Sudan or Zimbabwe have welcomed the lack of concern with human rights and democracy shown by China –a lack of concern justified by Beijing in the name of sovereignty and non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states– while they see in the PRC an alternative to the conditionality of the West⁶⁸, the EU of course included.

In the light of the Chinese position, even the softer approach developed by the European Union in 2007 on the occasion on the EU-Africa summit, shifting from “conditionality” to “political and financial incentives programs” in order to try to foster good governance in the African continent (as is mentioned in the context of Africa-EU strategic partnership 2007) will appear as too demanding at the eyes of the African countries⁶⁹.

⁶⁰ Bates Gill and Melissa Murphy, *China-Europe Relations*, p. 41.

⁶¹ Joshua Eisenman, Eric Heginbotham, and Derek Mitchell, eds. *China and the developing world: Beijing's strategy for the twenty-first century*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2007; Dittmer Lowell and George T. Yu, eds. *China, the developing world and the new global dynamic*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2010.

⁶² Abanti Bhattacharya, “Hu's foreign visits: Emerging Beijing consensus”, *IDS Strategic Comments*, 11 May 2006, www.idsa.in/publications/stratcomments/AbantiBhattacharya110506.htm. With access 28 October 2008

⁶³ Charles Grant with Katinka Barysch, *Can Europe and China shape a new world order?*, p. 83.

⁶⁴ Luke Hurst, “China and Africa: friends and benefits”, *East Asia Forum Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 1 (January-March 2010), p. 24.

⁶⁵ Harry Broadman, “China and India go to Africa” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 87, no. 2 (March/April 2008), pp. 95-109.

⁶⁶ Harry Broadman, “China and India go to Africa”, op. cit.

⁶⁷ Karine Lisbonne-de Vergeron, *Contemporary Chinese views of Europe*, p. 29.

⁶⁸ Barry V. Sautman, *Friends and interests: China's distinctive links with Africa*, Center on China's Transnational Relation, Working Paper No. 12, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, 2006.

⁶⁹ Uwe Wissenbach, *The EU and China*, op. cit.

All in all, economic benefits may not be the only reason for the active Chinese presence in Africa. The PRC may well have seen in the African countries good partners in its efforts to raise its international profile⁷⁰. In fact, the Chinese approach to developing nations and African countries in particular might well be seen as a continuation of the path initiated at the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Conference held in Bandung in Indonesia in 1955, and another example of the implementation of the five principles of peaceful coexistence⁷¹. By the same token some aspects of Chinese anti-colonial and anti-imperial rhetoric and feelings will help its connection with developing countries to some extent. In fact, probably to try to deal with this kind of problem, the European Commission, in its 2006 strategy for Africa, called for more equal relations with the continent⁷².

European and Chinese approaches are therefore very different. Whereas the European Union tries to get China to support and/or follow its policies against authoritarian governments in the continent and in favour of development, China is much more concerned with its economic and energy interests. Beijing invests large amounts of money, grants loans on very favourable conditions or protects some governments from international sanctions in exchange for access to their energy resources or particularly beneficial conditions for its companies⁷³. Moreover, China criticizes what it considers as "European hypocrisy": it defends itself by saying that it should not be accused of preventing the improvement of the situation in Africa as Europe has been the dominant actor there for years and the situation has remained unchanged⁷⁴.

In an effort to try to deal with these conflicting views and approaches, the European Commission proposed to set up a trilateral dialogue with Africa, China and the EU as participants to try to reconcile the interests of all of them⁷⁵. Similarly, in September 2006, in the context of the EU-China summit, both actors considered it convenient to launch a regular dialogue on Africa which might take place at a senior official level⁷⁶, an initiative which was later confirmed by the EU Council in December. Through such cooperation, both could jointly contribute towards fostering growth and development in Africa, an area considered of "key strategic interest" for both. These dialogues might need to be enlarged to also include on some on other actors with (increasing) interests in the African continent, such as the United States, Brazil, India or Russia⁷⁷.

The consolidation of China as a great power over the last decades together with its need to diversify its energy sources have also meant a growing and closer relation between the PRC and the countries in the Middle East⁷⁸. Energy concerns have been the reason for the creation of mechanisms such as the China-Arab Cooperation Forum or the China-Gulf Cooperation Council Framework Agreement aimed at increasing its energy security⁷⁹.

A case of particular interest is Iran, a country deemed of major importance for China for strategic as well as for economic considerations. In the eyes of Chinese observers, the Islamic Republic is not only a power expected to play an increasingly important role in its region but is also a possible balancing element of vis-à-vis the United States and its allies in the Middle East⁸⁰. At the same time Iran is a great source of energy-related products

⁷⁰ Luke Hurst, "China and Africa: friends and benefits", p. 25.

⁷¹ Russell Ong, *China's security interests in the 21st century*, p. 13.

⁷² Charles Grant with Katinka Barysch, *Can Europe and China shape a new world order?*, p. 86.

⁷³ John Fox and François Godement, *A power audit of EU-China relations*, p. 42.

⁷⁴ Karine Lisbonne-de Vergeron, *Contemporary Chinese views of Europe*, p. 29.

⁷⁵ Wissenbach, Uwe *The EU and China*, op. cit.

⁷⁶ Karine Lisbonne-de Vergeron, *Contemporary Chinese views of Europe*, p. 31.

⁷⁷ Luke Hurst "China and Africa: friends and benefits", p. 25.

⁷⁸ Michael Dillon, "The Middle East and China", in Hannah Carter and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, eds. *The Middle East relations with Asia and Russia*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 4.

⁷⁹ Russell Ong, *China's security interests in the 21st century*, p. 17.

⁸⁰ Michael D. Swaine, "Perceptions of an assertive China", p. 2.

for China. The result is that Sino-Iranian relations have been intensifying, allowing the PRC to become Iran's largest trade partner in 2007. Likewise, China has dramatically increased its investments in Iranian infrastructure.

China is especially interested in Iranian fossil fuels, as shown by the fact that Iranian oil currently accounts for 15 percent of Chinese total oil imports. In addition the PRC is negotiating investments in Iranian gas fields worth several billion dollars, it signed a contract worth 1,500 million dollars to develop several oil projects, and Sinopec will also invest 2,500 million dollars to upgrade the Arak refinery. In addition Sinopec will also be in charge of the exploration of the Yadavaran gas field, while CNPC (China National Petroleum Corporation) will develop the North and South Azadegan oil fields. For its part, Iran has welcomed this Chinese presence, partly as a tool to counter Western sanctions, and has even invited Chinese experts to advise it in aspects related to economic development.

These policies may be in contradiction of international policies, sanctions and pressures that have been put in place to try to get Iran to fulfil its obligations under the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). While China clearly dislikes the possibility of a nuclear Iran, which would be a serious source of instability in the Middle East and Central Asia, would increase the number of nuclear powers in its neighborhood and would damage the global non proliferation regime, it also considers that the Iranian right to civilian use of nuclear energy has to be safeguarded, as it is something inherent even to Iran's sovereignty. The PRC would only support sanctions if they are partial and aimed at getting Iran to achieve a negotiated solution to the nuclear issue.

In fact, this is one of the points where the EU and China partially coincide regarding Iran: both have advocated the use of diplomacy and dialogue as instruments to push Tehran to fulfil its international obligations, as well as the importance to achieving a negotiated solution. In this regard the PRC has supported EU efforts (conducted by the 'EU-3': Britain, France and Germany together with the High Representative Javier Solana) to get Iran to abandon its nuclear program through a combination of sanctions and incentives and has even tried to convince Iranian leaders to reciprocate the EU's efforts. In turn, within the framework of their strategic dialogue, the EU has sought to convince the PRC to use its influence on Iran⁸¹.

Likewise, the PRC is also seeking to develop good relations with Saudi Arabia as the visit paid by Hu Jintao to the Kingdom seems to suggest. This is not surprising if we take into account that it has also been developing exchanges, deals and investments of different kinds in Saudi Arabia to try to secure the oil coming from this country⁸². It is particularly interesting at this point to stress how, unlike the US, China has managed so far to maintain fluent relations simultaneously with Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Nevertheless energy is not the only element in the exchanges between China and the Middle East as we pointed out above. On the contrary some other aspects such as arms exports have to be taken into account too. In fact, the PRC is one of the many suppliers of the most important military partners for Iran, having developed solid military relations with Iraq, Saudi Arabia or Yemen over different periods in recent history as well. Notwithstanding this, China is also managing to develop increasingly close military relations with Israel which would supply China with military software and related technologies⁸³.

The Chinese presence in Latin America is also growing fast, to the point that if this pace continues, it is likely to replace the EU as the region's second largest trading partner after the United States.⁸⁴ Thus, China has become one of the main trading partners of Peru, Chile and Brazil and is trying to establish strategic

⁸¹ Charles Grant with Katinka Barysch, *Can Europe and China shape a new world order?*, pp. 79-81.

⁸² Karine Lisbonne De Vergeron *Contemporary Chinese views of Europe*, p. 34

⁸³ Michael Dillon "The Middle East and China", p. 4 and ss

⁸⁴ Eric Farsworth, "Is China good for the Americas?", *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 2010.

partnerships with some countries in the region. Likewise, almost 50 percent of total Chinese FDI goes to Latin America⁸⁵.

In this case, it seems that raw materials in general⁸⁶, and not merely oil and gas, make Latin America very interesting for China⁸⁷. That would have been the reason for a massive increase of Chinese FDI in the production sector in that continent over the last few years. But, as in the case of the Middle East, energy resources are an important factor in the equation: the three biggest Chinese oil companies, CNPC, Sinopec, and CNOOC have reached exploration deals with a number of countries in the region, notably Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, Argentina and Bolivia⁸⁸.

In the case of Brazil, it is interesting to mention how Baoostel, the largest Chinese steelmaker, invested 1.4 billion dollars in a joint venture with Brazil, while the main Chinese companies are working with Petrobras to expand oil production. Likewise, President Lula, in the course of a visit paid to China, expressed his will to build a partnership to integrate the economies of both countries which might be used as an example of South-South co-operation⁸⁹.

In the case of Venezuela China has invested more than 400 million dollars in the oil and gas production sectors⁹⁰. In exchange, it is trying to secure the long term supply of petroleum. In addition, there are plans for Venezuela to provide Iran with assistance so that it can channel its oil to China⁹¹. In Bolivia, President Evo Morales is also trying to expand its relations with the PRC. He is particularly interested in obtaining Chinese investments in the hydrocarbons sector.

All in all, this growing Chinese presence in Latin America has not benefited all the countries in the region to the same extent. On the contrary, it has increased competition for some countries, notably Mexico, Central America and some Caribbean countries. But Chinese interests in Latin America, at least for the time being, seem to be purely economic and devoid of any political implication. However, as in the case of Africa, the lack of political conditions and the perception of China as an actor which operates outside the liberal economic orthodoxy inherent to the Europeans and the Americans, are very attractive factors for some political leaders in the region⁹².

⁸⁵ Karine Lisbonne-de Vergeron, *Contemporary Chinese views of Europe*, p. 34.

⁸⁶ Carlos Malamud, "Los actores extrarregionales en América Latina (I): China", *Documento de Trabajo 50/2007*, Real Instituto Elcano, 13 November 2007.

⁸⁷ Diego Sánchez Ancochea, "El impacto de China en América Latina: ¿Oportunidad o amenaza?", *ARI 119/2006*, Real Instituto Elcano, 21 November 2006.

⁸⁸ Evan Ellis, "Strategic implications of Chinese aid and investment in Latin America", *China Brief*, vol. 9, no. 20, 7 October 2009.

⁸⁹ Jiang Shixue, "The Panda hugs the Tucano: China's relations with Brazil", *China Brief*, vol. 9, no. 10, 15 May 2009.

⁹⁰ Diego Sánchez Arcochea, "El impacto de China en América Latina", op. cit.

⁹¹ Joshua Kurlantzick, "How China is changing global diplomacy", *The New Republic*, 27 June 2005.

⁹² Eric Farsworth, "Is China good for the Americas?", op. cit.

Conclusions

China's rise has enormous implications for how the international order is structured and governed. China is now an integral part of the world economy and one of the major winners of globalisation. In joining the world, it has brought about not only changes but also challenges to the existing order. The impact of China's exports, outflow investment and its growing domestic demand are inevitably reshaping the global trade system. Its rapidly growing consumption of energy and raw materials is changing prices and access to these resources. Equally important have proven to be its foreign aid policies and loans. Overall, China's rise has meant an ever growing need for raw materials and natural resources, in order to maintain the pace of growth. This need conditions and often shapes Chinese foreign policy.

As its role in the international economy has grown, so has China's economic relations with Europe. The EU is now China's biggest trade partner, and it is this economic dimension of China's rise that has primarily fuelled concern in Europe. While workers fear the transfer of employment to China, and trade unions an unbalanced competition in terms of labour and safety standards, companies are concerned about intellectual property rights, and governments about the growing trade deficit with China, and China's growing demand for resources and energy. In many quarters there is the belief that China is the winner of globalisation while Europe will in the longer run lose employment and competitiveness. Against this perspective, there is the fear that China's rise is a major challenge not only to specific European industrial sectors, but even to the EU's social and economic model. Moreover, the EU also sees how China's growing presence in other regions, notably Africa, gradually affects Europe's traditional role as the main partner of such region. This may not only challenge EU economic interests but also undermine its ambitions as a global actor.

China is also a crucial factor in the reform of the institutions of global governance, a matter of great relevance to Europeans. For them, the strengthening of multilateral rules and institutions is a priority. And they see that Beijing has taken an active role in a number of policy areas to defend its expanding national interests and to strengthen its influence in the world. China's position on controversial issues, ranging from human rights to climate change and non proliferation, shows a readiness to shape global governance according to its own preferences⁹³. China's leaders seem to have a strong focus on their country's immediate interests, rather than being willing to take on more responsibilities for global governance issues whether in security or in economic affairs.

This is a demand which puzzles the Chinese, proving the structural asymmetry lying at the heart of the Sino-European relationship. China's foreign policy is predominantly realist, focused on the pursuit of the national interest, while Europeans are driven by rules and the principle of multilateralism. As a consequence, economic governance, climate change, Iran or Africa have become sources of friction in the bilateral relationship. The EU expects China to shoulder more global responsibilities but it is not clear that China is moving in that direction. Aware of its growing capabilities, China seems to prefer an international system based on the balance of power rather than norms and institutions. And yet, China's prosperity and influence –like Europe's– depends on the openness and stability of an international order based on rules.

⁹³ Hongying Wang and James N. Rosenau, "China and global governance", *Asian Perspective*, vol. 33, no. 3 (2009), p. 6.

Ultimately, China is seen as a challenge to the existing world order which was created and defined by the West after the Second World War. With the rise of China (as well as India and other emerging nations) as major new powers on the regional and global level, the Europeans have finally realised that a tectonic shift is taking place in the global balance of power and they are concerned about its effects. But despite the ample space for frictions and misunderstandings, both the EU and China are key players in adapting the international order to these new realities⁹⁴.

Even if the single most important geopolitical relationship of the 21st century is likely to be that of China and the United States because of their economic power and potential strategic rivalry, the China-EU relationship will also be indeed crucial. Both sides would therefore benefit from a closer partnership. If China and the EU manage to build a friendly and fruitful strategic partnership they can do a lot to bring about a multilateral world. But if their relation becomes frosty, the scenario of competing blocks will become more plausible⁹⁵. For these reasons, it is perhaps about time to recognise, as François Godement writes, that “[a] strategic partnership between China and Europe is not designed to limit a strategic competition that does not exist. It is necessary to unlock the potential of each partner along lines of shared interests, with global governance as a goal and respectful debate as the norm”⁹⁶.

⁹⁴ See Robert S. Ross, Oysten Tunsjo and Zhang Tuosheng, eds. *UE-China-UE relations: Managing the new world order*. London: Routledge, 2010; and Nicola Casarini, *Remaking global order: The evolution of Europe-China relations and its implications for east Asia and the United States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

⁹⁵ Charles Grant with Katinka Barysch, *Can Europe and China shape a new world order?*, p. 7.

⁹⁶ François Godement, “Forum on China-EU strategic partnership: Turning challenges into opportunities”, Beijing, November 19-20, 2009, *Paper Asia Centre Conference Series*, p. 4.

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Resumen: El ascenso de China y su creciente influencia en el mundo son posiblemente dos de las dinámicas más reseñables de las Relaciones Internacionales contemporáneas. El hecho de que casi ninguna cuestión pueda ser abordada sin participación china ha estimulado un intenso debate sobre el papel y el comportamiento de China en la escena internacional.

Aunque Europa no tenga ningún interés estratégico en Asia (en el sentido tradicional de hard power), se va a ver enormemente afectada por el cambio en la correlación de fuerzas a nivel global derivada del ascenso de China. La UE también sentirá el impacto de la diplomacia china y de las políticas económicas, comerciales, energéticas y financieras de Beijing en las diferentes regiones del mundo.

Esta transformación es un asunto de gran relevancia para Europa. Además de a su declive relativo, paralelo al ascenso chino, debe hacer frente a las tensiones que se aprecian en las relaciones bilaterales durante los últimos años y al escepticismo con que Beijing ve un posible papel de la UE como “actor global”.

Palabras clave: Relaciones UE-China, Política Exterior China, Papel de China en el Mundo, Intereses Europeos en China, Gobernanza Global, Cambio Climático, Seguridad y No-Proliferación, Políticas regionales

Abstract: China's rise and the subsequent growth of its influence throughout the world is arguably the most important development in contemporary international relations. The fact that hardly any issue can be addressed without Chinese participation has, in turn, stimulated a polarized debate regarding China's role and behaviour in the international order.

Although Europe has no direct strategic interests in Asia (in the traditional hard-power sense), it will be enormously affected by the change in the global distribution of power which China's rise is causing. The EU will also feel the impact of Chinese diplomacy in different areas of the world, as well as the consequences of Beijing's economic, energy, investment and trade policies.

This shift is a major concern for Europe; to its relative decline, in parallel with China's ascent, we must add the strains in the bilateral relationship over the last few years, and Beijing's scepticism over Europe's role as a global actor.

Keywords: Relations UE-China, China Foreign Policy, Role of China in the World, European interests in China, Global Governance, Climate Change, Security and Non-proliferation, Regional Policies

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