



Strategies for Successful Europe-China Collaboration in Research and Education

Brussels, 7th June 2012

Round table discussion 1: "Social and cultural dimension of the Europe-China co-operation"

*Experts: **Zhu Chang** (Vrije University Brussels) and **Dr. Jeanne Boden** (China Conduct)*

*Moderator: **Marina Casals**, Rovira i Virgili University*

Global trends indicate that student mobility flows and joint degrees between the regions are increasing rapidly. Europe is an attractive destination for Chinese students, who have greater employability chances when they return home due to the quality of education and the independence they acquire while studying abroad.

This round table discussion focused on the social and cultural aspects of collaboration between the regions. To better handle the immersion of Chinese students in European universities and vice versa, it is essential to understand the social and cultural differences that condition the education system the students are accustomed to to help students adjust to these new approaches.

Chinese education system is influenced by the collectivist society and differs from the individualistic European system in what is expected from a student. Chinese students aren't used to the debate culture they encounter in classrooms in Europe. The concept of "brainstorming" is also a new approach. Chinese students tend to be more disciplined and very good at building a knowledge base in a structured way. Mathematics, Engineering and Computer Science are fields in which they excel. They are used to a more structure learning method and have a great capacity of memorizing and listening, though they can sometimes lack flexibility applying the knowledge. The students' expectations regarding teachers also differ; professors in China are viewed as a moral authority.

European students tend to be more independent learners with a greater ability for practical application. Questioning and debating is encouraged, as is learning by doing. The students also have more developed soft skills such as communication, being team players and speaking in public.

To conclude some good practices and recommendations were summed-up. Regarding the incoming students in Europe, informal



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intercultural learning communities to promote students' integration were proposed. Another suggestion from the work group was to provide incoming Chinese researchers with more structure.

As for setting up collaborations, co-ordinators must be aware that policies can vary a lot at local level in China, and that having links with the government makes co-operation much easier. E-learning was identified as potential area for future collaboration. The key to successful Europe-China collaborations is creating strong personal relationships: "building confidence to make things happen".

Round table discussion 2: "Funding Schemes for the Europe - China Relations in Research and Education"

*Experts: **Sara Albino** (University of Lisbon) and **Prof. Xu Min** (Shanghai Jiaotong University)*

*Moderator: **Jean Pierre Roose***

The European expert Sara Albino (University of Lisbon, International Office) explained in a practical way how PPP structures may help in finding additional funding. The Chinese expert (Min Xu, associate dean of International Education, Shanghai Jiaotong University - SJTU) gave a detailed summary of the scholarships for international students: Chinese Government Scholarships, Chinese Government Special Scholarship for Full-time Postgraduate Studies, Confucius Institute Scholarship, Shanghai Municipal Government Scholarship and SJTU Scholarship.

Aside from these funding possibilities and the EU Erasmus Mundus programme, Anne Haglund Morrissey (EU Commission) drew the participants' attention to the Marie Curie actions and Massimo Gaudina (ERC Executive Agency) explained how to apply for a EU Research Council grant.

More information about the grants can be retrieved here:

SJTU: http://www.sie.sjtu.edu.cn/ctrlr.asp?action=index_en



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Marie Curie actions:

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/>

ERC: <http://erc.europa.eu/>

EU - China collaboration possibilities:

http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/links/china/index_en.htm

SJTU level:

<http://www.csc.edu.cn/laihua/scholarshipdetailen.aspx?cid=97&id=1422>

Round table discussion 3: "Quality Aspect in Higher Education Collaboration"

*Experts: **Dr. Maria Boquera** (Polytechnic University of Valencia) and **Xiaohong Tong** (Vrije University Brussels)*

*Moderator: **Prof. Dimitrios Rekkas**, National & Kapodistrian University of Athens*

When discussing the topic of quality, it is crucial to mention the final beneficiary of it, meaning the society. Quality processes require continuous effort and improvement through a plan-do-study-act approach. For Dr. Maria BOQUERA (International Relations' Office, Polytechnic University of Valencia), quality is the satisfaction of students, and satisfaction can be obtained only via successful integration. That is why all international students coming to Polytechnic University of Valencia are offered a mentor ("buddy") programme. Local students taking part in the programme as "mentors" obtain ECTS credits as part of their extracurricular activities. An activity tailored to Chinese incoming students is a special Spanish language course, addressing precisely the language difficulties experienced by Chinese students.

Xiaohong TONG (International Relations & Mobility Office, Vrije Universiteit Brussel) emphasised the role of social media as an important medium of information on studying abroad, highly popular among Chinese students. As challenges related to quality in Chinese higher education, she mentioned the considerable difference in levels



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among Chinese HEIs and highly competitive entrance exams, which are a consequence of a limited capacity of Chinese Universities. As an illustration, the entrance exams' acceptance rate in 1998 was 37%, in 2011: 62%. The limited capacity urges a significant number of Chinese high school students to apply for a Bachelor abroad. Ms. TONG highlighted that the lack of opportunity to practice foreign languages at Chinese institutions is an important reason why Chinese students who pursue their studies abroad find it difficult to integrate.

In relation to academic screening of Chinese students, an initiative of creating a general scheme for academic & language screening at the European level was put forward. For the moment being, different academic evaluation centres at the national and regional level have been in charge of this task (e.g. Campus France for France, Akademischen Prüfstelle for Germany, Austria, and Belgium)

Round table discussion 4: "Strategies of developing excellent partnership between European and Chinese universities"

*Experts: **Dr. Stephen Wallis** (University of Kent) and **Zhou Ze** (Erasmus Mundus Student and Alumni Association)*

*Moderator: **Prof. Luciano Saso** (Sapienza University of Rome)*

Following short individual presentations, in which every participant stated their goal in joining the round table discussion number 4, Zhou Ze, Luciano Saso and Stephen Wallis discussed the best strategies of developing a partnership with Chinese HE institutions. Dr. Wallis highlighted the importance of individual efforts to develop partnerships between Chinese and European universities. The process also takes time as it involves a step-by-step approach to establish excellent cooperation between regions.

The first stage for a European HE institution on its way to initiate partnership with a Chinese university is to create a strategic plan which should focus on the type of cooperation e.g. research, education, administration or the exchange of students, graduates,



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academic staff. The partnership can also aim at the creation of full degrees or double/joint degrees or even the establishment of a Campus abroad.

The second and perhaps the most important stage to develop an excellent partnership with China is identifying partners. This can be achieved through various ways, such as ranking systems (which was considered by the discussion group as not reliable), participation in fairs, conferences and workshop on this topic, consultation and advices from embassies and the Confucius Institute, as well as from university students, alumni, staff members and professors who might have personal links of with Chinese institutions. The importance of a possibility to consult Universities' Networks such as the SG Network, UNICA or Compostela Group was also considered valuable to identify potential partners and build trust.

Based on the experience of the round table participants, the potential obstacles for excellent cooperation between Europe and China in Higher Education were: social issues, the visas for Chinese exchange students in Europe and vice-versa should be taken into account when initiating a partnership, language barriers, recognition of titles and credits between regions, curricula, capacity of the European institutions to accept a large number of exchange students and also funding.



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Concluding remarks by Jean-Pierre De Greve, Vice-Rector for International Relations Vrije Universiteit Brussel, member of the UNICA Steering Committee

At academic level, a lot will happen between China and Europe in the coming decade. A lot more than what happened in the past. Evidence? The willingness of the Chinese government to invest very strong in mobility going both ways, as was shown by Mr Li in his presentation. It is also clear that this must happen taking into account the different views on how to govern a society, and how to work together as sovereign states. But one thing is clear: both in China and in Europe, high-level knowledge workers with transnational experience are needed to jointly investigate global and regional problems and come up with solutions.

Some buzzwords popped up during this meeting, and I'll address them in no particular order.

- **Reciprocity:** Reciprocity is the word for the next decade. It popped up at the speech of Mr Li. It surfaced in analysis we heard as well as in several of the practical cases. Partnerships with mutually balanced contributions are necessary for success, with input from both sides, including staff, students and resources for research and for education.
- **Quality,** or better quality enhancement, is a second buzzword. Not only related to education (we all want good programmes with good students, and content delivered by good educators, don't we?), but even more related to research. Truly integrated research projects on global issues, and research interacting with industry and society must be developed at the highest possible level of quality. Only this will assure continued support from governments and university authorities on both sides. From the vivid discussions two other notions emerged:
 - The first notion was that Sino-European collaboration must serve local needs, and that it must be based on the strong competences of the partners. This is about creating economic value for the regions through knowledge transfer. A relationship of trust built up over



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years is a necessary condition to achieve the desired objectives. But there is more needed on the road to success. Make sure that there are benefits for each partner. Keep the lines of communication intense, using diverse channels. Have tangible output in mind and have the intention to move from the bilateral to the multilateral level.

- The second notion is that internal hurdles should be removed. Create the conditions inside the universities to enable people to move. Sufficient offering of courses in a common language, or matching curricula are a part of that. But perhaps more needed are the enthusiastic encouragement from the academic staff, and a centrally supporting platform, as the one shown by Mrs De Coen from Ghent. They will certainly help a lot. Such a platform must be embedded in a central strategy that is based on an internationalization policy that is carried by the whole university. The central approach must be felt as supportive and encouraging by the faculty and it should involve all stakeholders. This becomes more important in a time where both China and the European Commission put more emphasis on collaborations at an institutional level. But never forget, knowledge creation and knowledge transfer is a bottom-up process, coming from individuals.

Finally, to conclude, I express my gratitude to the leading officers of the three networks for working out an initiative that I think was well received. I also sincerely thank the local people, such as Xiaohong Tong and Alastair Ross with his team of the Brussels branch of the University of Kent. And to my colleagues Maurits Van Rooijen of the Compostela Group, and John Tuppen of the Santander Group I say: "We must do this more". It serves our member universities very well.