

The Way for Sino-EU Higher Education Cooperation in a Changing Global Environment: Reciprocal Socialization



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Ideas matter

- While material aspects are certainly important in the relationship between the EU and China, concepts and ideas are also at play
- International relations are both about material factors as well as concepts and beliefs
- The nature of the interaction between international actors is not merely the result of objective, material aspects, such as the balance of trade or the makeup of domestic institutions
- International interaction is also shaped significantly by subjective factors, i.e. the concepts and beliefs that make the agents involved to interpret events and data in specific ways

Identities, strategic cultures and norms

- Such concepts and beliefs can refer to the identities of the actors involved: How do they see themselves and how does this affect their relationships with each other
- They can also relate to “strategic cultures”, i.e. sets of beliefs about the nature of world society and the best ways to govern it
- Finally, they can convey “norms”, i.e. beliefs about what works and what is appropriate in the global arena
- These categories are highly interlinked and consequently they feed back on each other. The identity of an agent, e.g. whether he is a modern or a postmodern actor, or, a developing or a developed country, will have a bearing on his beliefs about the nature of world society and also affect his beliefs about what works and what is right or wrong in world society.

Material elements matter, but...

- As already intimated, material factors do matter in Sino-EU relations.
- While three decades ago, China and the EU traded almost nothing, now they form the second-largest economic cooperation in the world. In a relatively short time, the Chinese and EU economies have become highly interdependent. China is now the EU's second trading partner behind the United States and the EU's biggest source of imports. The EU is also China's prime trading partner.

Material elements matter, but...

- Wen Jiabao, stating in 2004 that “China and the European Union are highly complementary economically”, certainly had a point: The EU's open market has been a large contributor to China's export-led growth, whereas the EU has also benefited from the growth of the Chinese market.
- In 2010 the EU's exports to increased by 37%, making China the fastest growing market for European exports.
- Still China and the EU have great difficulty transforming this synergetic relationship into a real strategic partnership.

Why?

- A major reason is that even though the EU and China have become highly interdependent and affect each other materially, they are different from each other in terms of identity, ideas and beliefs
- Whereas for example Chinese and Europeans may agree on the importance of multilateralism and democracy as political goals, their understanding of these concepts differs substantially
- Europeans hold on to a concept of multilateralism based on rule-based management of economic interdependence and political integration, including the pooling of sovereignty in supranational organizations

Why?

- This 'post-modern' view of sovereignty also makes Europeans believe that states have the responsibility to protect in case of serious breaches of human rights.
- Chinese have a skeptical view of supranational authority and cling strongly to a traditional conception of national sovereignty. They are not overly sympathetic to the idea that under certain circumstances humanitarian interventions should be permitted.
- Chinese, in the end, hold onto an inter-governmental conception of multilateralism in which sovereignty reigns supreme.
- Similarly, when the Chinese talk about democracy they focus on responsibility, responsiveness and accountability of government authorities, while for European it is all about a free civil society, rule of law and respect for civil rights.

In the same boat

- Yet China and Europe are in the same boat. Both parties need to look for ways to keep their societies sustainable in the light of the ongoing rebalancing of the world economy.
- Obviously, the financial crisis and the subsequent economic downturn have demonstrated the necessity to reshape their economies.
- Both parties face an important challenge to combat unemployment, to improve social welfare and to be more efficient in using scarce natural resources. Increased investment in innovation, a secure climate for creative development and a dynamic services sector will be vital for developing new and sustainable sources for growth.

In the same boat

- As China claims, this is very much a national responsibility, but it can only be successfully pursued in a climate of trust and reciprocal openness.
- Both sides are confronted with similar social challenges: an ageing population, a heterogeneous ethnic society, growing urban complexes and substantial internal economic differences. They have a common interest in enhancing social equality and welfare.
- While facing different economic and political conditions, both sides in the end are aiming to make their development inclusive and sustainable.

Changing global environment

- However, with the boundary conditions of their relationship changing, the cooperation between China and the European Union has come increasingly under stress.
- China's rise and mounting influence are not only affecting Europe's position in the global distribution of forces, it also constitutes a challenge to Europe's very identity, ideas and beliefs.

Changing global environment

- China's economic growth is probing the present international order, which largely mirrors the Western liberal worldview of free markets and democracy and in which Europe was so comfortably nested in the shadow of the United States.
- While for more than half a century the United States, in close harmony with Europe, has watched over the provision of global public goods such as monetary stability and free trade, today both the US's and Europe's credibility as political drivers of global governance stand to the test
- As much as the US weighed by debt and deficits is struggling to maintain its superpower status, the EU faced with the eurozone debt crisis is struggling for its very survival

Changing global environment

- Meanwhile, China's growing economic clout increases its political influence well beyond its borders and is turning it into a more confident player. Gradually Beijing is also developing an alternative discourse of modernity and spelling out its narratives of global governance. Part of these narratives point out the shortcomings of the present-day global governance regime in providing economic and monetary stability
- As a rule emerging powers are uncomfortable with existing international regimes, which are not of their own making
- As such China's successful development is putting the Western liberal worldview to the proof and poses the question whether liberal democracy will guide global governance in the future or be challenged by other models.

Need for dialogue

- Forging a real Sino-EU strategic partnership will not come about easily. To be successful both China and Europe need to come to grips with their diverging value expectations and try to reach a pragmatic compromise on how to make their societies complementary and mutually supportive.
- Sino-European relations face a challenging road ahead.
- Governments on both sides should aim to keep ties stable by promoting mutual exchanges and dialogues.

On the right track?

- To be sure, the EU and China are already improving communication through mechanisms such as the High Level Trade and Economic Dialogue and Strategic Dialogue, and most recently the High Level Peoples to Peoples Dialogue
- While, little can be expected to result from these dialogues in terms of substantive results in the short run, it is the process itself that is important. It is the process that can shape a substantive partnership in the long run
- Over time, as analyses and viewpoints are repeated and increasingly shared, Europeans and Chinese are more likely to gravitate toward a common diagnosis of crucial problems in the Sino-EU relationship and their solution

Reciprocal socialization

- The Sino-EU cooperation in higher education is essential in making the process of a sustainable partnership formation into a success.
- The challenge is to create an enlightened and pluralistic conception of globalization, i.e. a conception that is sensitive to the growing global cultural diversity and starts from the principle of ***reciprocal socialization***

The way ahead

- As Madam VASSILIOU, the European Commissioner responsible for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, has said recently, the common ambition is that – while preserving their own cultures and traditions – China and Europe need to open themselves up to each other's cultures and societal realities.
- For this to happen we must educate our peoples to respect and appreciate diversity and cultural pluralism.
- It is mandatory to expand mobility and ensure a higher level of reciprocity in student flows. To this end, the willingness of the Chinese Government to set up new scholarship schemes for European students is to be greatly applauded

The way ahead

- Particularly important is the learning of each other's languages. It is encouraging to see that both China and Europe maintain a deep respect for the cultural and linguistic diversity on which their worlds are based. It is mandatory to preserve this richness, and it is telling that in China the teaching of the 23 EU official languages is already in full swing. In Europe, more and more Europeans are learning Mandarin.
- In a globalised world, multilingualism is becoming increasingly important. More language training and mobility opportunities for students and professors are therefore crucial. Languages are the best channel by which to exchange ideas and experiences among peoples of different countries and diverse cultures.