

## Cooperation with China

Understanding of and respect for different cultures is expected to be a general norm. For the people working in international relations offices, it is a necessary precondition for managing their work well.

The main dimension which is useful to describe cultural values is individualism-collectivism. Individualistic cultures emphasize more personal achievement versus group goals. For example, Western Europe countries and the United States are considered to be individualistic cultures. Collectivistic cultures set group goals on the foreground. China, Korea and Japan, for example, are considered to be collectivistic cultures. Political systems, in turn, add another dimension to this dichotomy.

The current case study focuses on the cooperation with China. As we have all seen, China's importance in international exchange and cooperation is constantly growing. At the same time, European universities seem to be rather cautious about this cooperation. I believe we have had different experiences in cooperating with China: some of us have probably been in the process for several years and others may have only started. I hope we will have an interesting and useful discussion about our experiences. To start, let me present a case that took place at our university.

The Confucius Institute was opened at Tallinn University last year. It was a long process of negotiations, but after almost two years of preparations everything was ready for the official opening. A week before it we learned that the most possible high-level party delegation will come to the opening. We took notice of it, coordinated the event with all the parties involved and invited the corresponding people. Approximately an hour before the official opening, the Chinese partner university representatives put up a slogan in Chinese and English that glorified the Communist Party and the important party representative who was coming to the opening. There was no way we could agree with this that a foreign country would put up its propaganda in our university. Estonia suffered over 50 years from a totalitarian regime and red party slogans are absolutely no-no among Estonians. And we strongly believe that universities should be free of ideology. The situation was quite nervous. The Chinese partner university representatives and the Chinese embassy people were terrified that they were not able to strictly follow their rules and we were upset by that most unexpected situation. To cut a long story short, we managed to find a compromise. What it was, I will tell you at the end of our discussion.

I would now like to ask you to share your experiences. Good and bad practices? How to achieve win-win situations when you feel that your ethical principles are strongly tested? And let's see if we can come up with some conclusions that we all agree to.

Marvi Pulver  
Head of International Relations Office  
Tallinn University