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GREAT EXPECTATIONS, COMPLEX REALITY

Jing Men*

The year 2003 was an important year in EU-China relations. In that year, Beijing issued its first EU policy paper in the PRC's history, which is also the first policy paper that it had ever developed. Also in that year, the EU, apart from publishing a new China policy paper based on the evaluation and adjustment of the previous China policy papers, selected China as a target with which it chose to establish a strategic partnership. These noticeable achievements came as a consequence of the development of EU-China relations for about three decades.

Between 2003 and 2004, the EU and China were on good terms. Some major EU members had serious differences with the American foreign policy in Iraqi war and were addressed as "Old Europe" by the then-U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.¹ China was in favour of establishing a multipolar world. The differences between the EU and the US gave an impression to China that it could rely on the EU to balance against the US.² The exchanges during this period were impressively intensive. EU officials paid 206 visits to China in 2004, on average four visits per week.³ The Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, was the first foreign leader to pay an official visit to the EU after its historically important eastward enlargement in May 2004.

However, the development of bilateral relations in the years after 2004 indicated that the honeymoon was over.⁴ The Chinese were disappointed in 2005 that the arms embargo against China failed to be lifted by the EU. The overwhelmingly large quantity of imports of Chinese textile products to the EU in 2005 as a result of the end of Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA) alarmed many EU members including Spain, France and Italy. Later on, the rising deficit of the EU in its trade with China imposed great pressure to bilateral trade relations which led to the creation of the EU-China High-Level Economic and

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¹ 'Rumsfeld: France, Germany are 'problems' in Iraqi conflict', *CNN*, 23 January 2003, retrieved 15 June 2009, edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/01/22/sprj.irq.wrap.

² See, for example, Su Huimin, 'Western Europe Looks for Self-identity in a Multipolar World' [Xiou zai duojihua shijie zhong xunzhao ziwo], *Peace and Development [heping yu fazhan]*, No. 2, 1999, pp. 45- 48; Wu Yikang, 'The Development of European Economic and Political Integration in face of the 21st Century (part 2)' [Mianxiang 21shiji de Ouzhou jingji zhengzhi yitihua de fazhan (2)], *Research on European Integration [Ouzhou yitihua yanjiu]*, No. 3, 1999, pp. 1-11.

³ Benita Ferrero Waldner, 'The EU, China and the quest for a multilateral world', speech at the conference to mark the 30th anniversary of EU-China relations, 4 July 2005, retrieved 15 June 2009, www.europa-eu-un.org/articles/en/article_4854_en.htm.

⁴ David Shambaugh, 'The "China Honeymoon" is Over', *The International Herald Tribune*, 7 December 2007.



Trade Dialogue (HED) in 2007. The EU-China partnership faced challenges again in 2008 due to the Tibetan issue. Before the Beijing Olympic Games were held, there was opinion in the EU that its opening ceremony should be boycotted due to China's bad record in human rights.⁵ Towards the end of 2008, the EU-China Summit scheduled to be held in Lyon during the French Presidency was cancelled by China due to the planned meeting between the French President Sarkozy and the Dalai Lama.

Since 2003, the term "strategic partnership" has been used to describe bilateral relations, despite the fact that it is rather ambiguous as to whether a strategic partnership has been established or it is the future direction. From the EU side, no document or speech has been developed to directly address the definition of the strategic partnership. The China policy paper of the EU in 2003 stated that "the EU and China have an ever-greater interest to work together as strategic partners to safeguard and promote sustainable development, peace and stability."⁶ Chinese Premier Wen expected that the China-EU strategic partnership "transcends the differences in ideology and social system and is not subjected to the impacts of individual events that occur from time to time."⁷

In EU-China relations, there is a gap between the words and the deeds. Both sides seem to have great expectations from bilateral relations, however, in reality, it seems that neither side is ready to treat each other as a strategic partner. The problems in EU-China relations since 2003 may have resulted from too high expectations from each toward the other.

Expectations and disappointment

As a rising power, the EU promotes multilateralism in international relations. Such a policy conforms to the EU's interest. The European integration is based on a group of well recognised rules and norms as well as effective multilateralism. The significant achievement of enlargement from the original six members to the current twenty-seven members is a result of rule-building and institutionalised multilateral cooperation between the members. In a world in search of multipolarity, the rule-based multilateral approach can allow the EU to give full play to its successful experience accumulated in the process of European integration and in the meantime to enhance the EU's influence in international affairs. In the EU's design of world governance,

⁵ See, for example, Ashling O'Connor, Francis Elliott and Alexandra Freat, 'Sarkozy Threatens Boycott of Beijing Olympic Games Opening Ceremony', *The Times Online*, 26 March 2008, retrieved 15 June 2009, www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article3620417.ece.

⁶ Commission of the European Communities, 'A maturing partnership - shared interests and challenges in EU-China relations', COM (2003) 533 final, Brussels, 10 September 2003, retrieved 15 June 2009, http://www.eu-in-china.com/download/com_533_en.pdf, p. 3.

⁷ Wen Jiabao, 'Vigorously Promoting Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between China and the European Union', a speech by the Chinese Premier at the China-EU Investment and Trade Forum, 12 May 2004, retrieved 15 June 2009, www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cebe/eng/zt/t101949.htm.



multilateralism is an indispensable element.⁸ However, effective multilateralism will not be realised without support from China. The multipolarity promoted by China is not the same as the multilateralism advocated by the Europeans. As China attaches great importance to the traditional concept of sovereignty, it is difficult for the two to achieve consensus on the strategic vision for international economics and politics.

As a normative/civilian/soft power, the EU intends to help China transform into a country based on the rule of law, with respect to human rights and democracy. The EU is eager to integrate China into the international community so that not only cooperation between the two sides will be improved but also the EU's role in the world will be strengthened. In order to realise this goal, the EU invested for its first China National Indicative Programme (2002-2006) € 250 million and committed in the current one (2007-2010) for € 225 million. However, China's progress in this aspect seems to be unsatisfactory. By far, although China has signed both of the UN Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on Political and Civil Rights, the Chinese National People's Congress has not ratified the second covenant eleven years after its signature. Due to lack of progress, the Europeans have become increasingly frustrated in the human rights dialogue with their Chinese counterparts.

China also has expectations from the EU. China-US relations used to be the top priority in China's external relations. After the EU and China came closer in their cooperation, the Chinese government attempted to juxtapose China-EU relations with China-US relations with the intention that the EU could help to balance against the US hegemonic power. Both as rising powers, the EU and China seemed to be perfect partners in China's strategic thinking of the future world order. However, to China's disappointment, the US remains the EU's closest partner. The newly developed China-EU relations could in no way replace the importance of the US to the EU.⁹ The discussion of lifting the arms embargo in 2005 demonstrated to the Chinese that in China-EU relations, it is impossible to get rid of the shadow of the US. To cultivate relations with the EU will not help balance against the US.

The differences between the EU member states in the making of the European Common Foreign and Security Policy is another problem that failed to live up to the expectations of Beijing. Before 2005, the Chinese leadership believed that the EU institutions had considerable influence among its member states. If the green light had been given to the lifting of the arms embargo at the European level, the member states would not have presented much problem.¹⁰ With hindsight, such understanding obviously misjudged the decision-making mechanism of the CFSP. The discussion of the

⁸ See European Security Strategy: 'A Secure Europe in a Better World', 12 December 2003, retrieved 15 June 2009, www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf.

⁹ See Jing Men, 'The EU-China Strategic Partnership: Achievements and Challenges', European Policy Paper Series, No. 12 (November 2007), European Studies Centre (University of Pittsburgh), ucis.pitt.edu/euce/pub/policypapers/2007-EU-China_Partnership.pdf.

¹⁰ Author's interview with Chinese diplomats, July 2006.



arms embargo lifting in the EU indicated the gap of opinion among the member states and the limited role of the European institutions in promoting a common position of CFSP, which obliged the Chinese to adjust its EU policy and to invest more energy in the capitals of the member states instead of in Brussels.

In search of consensus

Between the EU and China, apart from the above mentioned gaps in expectations, there are other issues for which consensus also needs to be reached. For example, the European access to the Chinese market, the treatment of market economy status required by the Chinese, the huge European goods trade deficit with the Chinese, the piracy and intellectual property offences to European products in China, and etc. Currently, a major topic of negotiations between the two sides is how to cope with global warming and how much responsibility each should take in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Facing pressure from the EU and the US, Chinese Premier Wen said at the High-level Conference on Climate Change Technology Development and Technology Transfer in Beijing that "developed countries (should) shoulder the duty and responsibility to tackle climate change and should alter their unsustainable lifestyle."¹¹ The emissions per person in China are less than one-third of the average level of the developed countries.¹² As a developing country, China's top priority is economic growth.

Whether China is a developing country or not is an issue in dispute. There is no doubt that China is rising rapidly since its reform policy was adopted at the end of the 1970s. China is now the third largest economy in the world, the largest trading partner of many countries in the world including Japan, India, Brazil, Australia, and South Korea. It is the second largest trading partner of both the European Union and the United States. In the meantime, China has the largest foreign currency reserve and acts as the largest owner of American government debt. However, if China's GDP is analysed at the per capita level, it is ranked after 100 among all the countries in the world. China's GDP per capita in 2006 was around US\$ 2,100, whereas the GDP per capita of the fifteen members of the European Monetary Union had already reached more than US\$34,000 in the same year.¹³ China has developed unevenly in its regions. The coastal areas in the east and southeast of China have benefited most from the reform policy whereas the vast inland of China is lagging much behind. Among the Chinese, the increasing gap of income is worrisome. A report by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences demonstrates that the disparity between the haves and have-nots has

¹¹ 'Climate Technology Meeting Highlights Developed-Developing Country Divide', 14 November 2008, retrieved 15 June 2009, ictsd.net/i/news/biores/33669.

¹² 'Premier Wen Jiabao Addressed at the Third East Asia Summit', *China Daily*, 22 November 2007, retrieved 15 June 2009, www.ccchina.gov.cn/en/NewsInfo.asp?NewsId=9886.

¹³ 'Global income per capita,' retrieved 20 October 2008, www.finfacts.com/biz10/globalworldincomepercapita.htm.



widened dramatically over the past 20 years. "The richest 10 percent of Chinese families now own more than 40 percent of all private assets, while the poorest 10 percent share less than two percent of the total wealth."¹⁴ The sharp contrast of these data indicates China's uniqueness. "It has one foot in the developing world and another in the developed one."¹⁵

Related to China's status of development, the EU and China are not equal partners. Compared to the EU, China is a late comer. China was a world power before the 19th century. After the British forced the Chinese door open in 1840, China was in a state of semi-colony for about one century. The Chinese hierarchical system collapsed in the wake of the first Opium War, China lost its privileged status and turned from a rule-maker to a rule follower. At the end of the civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists, the PRC was founded in Beijing in 1949. The PRC only became a member of the UN in 1971, recognised by the European Community in 1975, and joined the WTO in 2001. The past six decades witnessed the history of integration of a new comer to the international political system established by the European powers. As the major EU member states are the founders of the current international system, China has a lot to learn from them. On the other hand, the rising power of China gives it more influence in international affairs. It has become increasingly active in the participation of global governance in the 21st century. Such changes pose a challenge to the EU.

Conclusion

Some say that China divides and rules in its relations with the EU.¹⁶ However, it is the EU which provides opportunities for China to divide and rule. The weakness of the institutional arrangement of the EU leads to different voices of the EU in its external relations. The only possibility to avoid the situation of being divided and ruled by third parties is to strengthen its CFSP so that there is a coherent policy made at the EU level towards the other actors in international relations.

The problem in EU-China relations is due to the gap between the expectations and the complex reality. The higher the expectation is, the bigger the frustration grows. The wrong perceptions of each other will damage bilateral relations. Both the EU and China hope to acquire strategic interest in global affairs by cultivating a close relationship with each other. Yet, before the goals are reached, the two sides need to have a pragmatic evaluation of the differences between them and the difficulties in achieving the goals.

¹⁴ 'China Suffers Widening Income Gap', *China Daily*, 17 January 2007, retrieved 18 June 2009, www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-01/07/content_776436.htm.

¹⁵ Domingos Jardo Muekalía, 'Africa and China's Strategic Partnerships', *African Security Review*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2004, p. 5.

¹⁶ François Godement, 'The EU meets China: united we stand?' European Council on Foreign Relations, 28 November 2007, retrieved 18 June 2009, www.ecfr.eu/content/entry/commentary_eu_china_summit.



EU-CHINA RELATIONS: IS THE EU AS WEAK AS SOME BELIEVE?

Fraser Cameron*

A number of reports and articles recently have attacked the EU for its failure to properly defend its interests *vis-à-vis* China. One of the most prominent reports was *A Power Audit of EU-China Relations* issued by John Fox and François Godement of the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). Another article appeared on 18 May in *European Voice* signed by a group of younger researchers.¹ These scholars have a deep knowledge of China but some of their judgements suggest they have rather less knowledge of the EU and its procedures.

The main criticism of the ECFR authors is that the EU is basing its policy towards China on an "anachronistic belief"² that China, under the influence of EU engagement, will liberalise its economy, improve the rule of law and democratise its politics. The EU is further attacked for believing 'naively' that engagement with China is positive in itself without any attempt to apply conditionality. Whatever leverage the EU has with China is further weakened by divisions between the member states. The results of this policy of "unconditional engagement"³ are that the EU has a trade deficit with China and that Beijing has not often sided with the west on a number of international issues.

These are strong charges but do they stand up to scrutiny? The authors are undoubtedly right to point to the problems of 27 member states agreeing a common policy towards China. But this is no different from the EU's attempts to agree a common line on Russia or on the US-led invasion of Iraq. It could be argued that the EU is actually better regarded by the Chinese leadership than by any other of the EU's major partners.

It is of course difficult to achieve consensus with 27 member states but there are grounds for cautious optimism. First, the Lisbon Treaty, when it enters into force, provides for new structures that should lead to more coherence,

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¹ John Fox and François Godement, 'A Power Audit of EU-China Relations', European Council on Foreign Relations, 2009, retrieved 15 June 2009, ecfr.3cdn.net/532cd91d0b5c9699ad_ozm6b9bz4.pdf. Bernt Berger et al., 'Towards a more effective European China policy', *European Voice*, 17 May 2009, retrieved 15 June 2009, www.europeanvoice.com/article/2009/opinion/05/towards-a-more-effective-european-china-policy/64906.aspx. The latter article was written by Bernt Berger from the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy, Axel Berkofsky from the University of Milan, Nicola Casarini from the European University Institute, Clara Garcia from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Jonathan Holslag from Brussels Institute of Contemporary China Studies, May-Britt U. Stumbaum from Harvard WCFA and Jakub Zajaczkowski from Warsaw University.

² John Fox and François Godement, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

³ *Ibid.*



continuity and visibility in EU foreign policy. Second, there is an increasing awareness in all foreign ministries that no single member state can better achieve its aims with China (or Russia) by operating alone than by working through the 485 million strong EU with the largest single market in the world. Size matters.

The authors suggest that the €169bn trade deficit in 2008 reflects a failure of the EU to prise open the Chinese market. But what is the measurement of success here? The US, a much stronger unitary power than the EU, runs a trade deficit €100bn higher than the EU, and has been pressing China, unsuccessfully, to restrain its exports and open its markets for years. US Treasury Secretary, Tim Geithner, left Beijing in June empty-handed after urging China to revalue the renminbi and open its markets.⁴ Many economists would also argue that these comparisons do not take into account the substantial profits that are repatriated by EU companies operating in China. To be sure, there are continuing trade barriers facing western business but the astonishing increase in trade and investment between the EU and China over the past 15 years would suggest that there is growing convergence on the benefits of globalisation. It is worth noting that there are some 30,000 EU-China joint ventures.

The authors suggest that China has somehow hoodwinked the EU by joining multilateral institutions such as the WTO and then not playing by the rules. But given the enormous transformation that China has experienced in the past thirty years and the need to train people in international trade and financial regulations, China needs time to adjust. Does anyone seriously believe that things would be better if China were outside the WTO?

It is also alleged that China is merely playing lip service to the commitments agreed at the April G20 summit. Most economists, however, recognise that China is doing a great deal in terms of domestic stimulus (over 5% of GDP in new infrastructure). The latest World Bank report is complimentary about China's contribution to kick-starting the global economy.⁵ Furthermore, China is no more protectionist than many other powers. Who can compete with the US government's bailout of Detroit?

The report also suggests that the EU has somehow failed to convince China to follow its line on a range of international issues, from Iran to Africa. This blanket criticism would seem to be based on the premise that the western approach (which is not always united) is *ipso facto* not to be questioned by any other power. But the US did not appreciate the EU3's initial approach to Iran. The US and the EU have also not seen eye to eye on development priorities for Africa. The authors give some reluctant credit to the EU for raising the issues of climate change and energy security with China.

⁴ For an assessment of US problems with China see Elizabeth Economy and Adam Segal, 'The Limits of Engagement', *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2009.

⁵ World Bank, 'China Quarterly Update', June 2009, retrieved 15 June 2009, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/CHINAEXTN/0,,contentMDK:22102737~pagePK:1497618~piPK:217854~theSitePK:318950,00.html>.



Given the starting points of Beijing on these issues just a few years ago, the EU can seriously congratulate itself on a job well done. There is also much scope for closer cooperation in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The authors' remedy for the EU's alleged supine approach is called "reciprocal engagement".⁶ This assumes that EU negotiators do not even bother to attempt to wring concessions out of the Chinese. This is certainly not the case as can be seen by the ongoing PCA negotiations.⁷ Astonishingly the authors make absolutely no reference in their report to the PCA – probably the most comprehensive negotiations the EU has ever undertaken with a third country. The Chinese side have let it be known that they consider the EU particularly obdurate when it comes to anti-dumping, market economy status or lifting the arms embargo.

The Chinese postponement of the November 2008 summit is highlighted as an indication of Beijing's disdain for the EU. But early in 2009 prime minister Wen Jibao visited EU headquarters in Brussels, the two sides met for their newly-established high-level trade and economic dialogue, and the postponed summit was held in Prague. According to China's ambassador to the EU, the discussions at the summit were "candid, amicable, vibrant and in-depth."⁸ Although little of substance emerged (agreements were signed on a clean energy sector, SMEs and science and technology), the decisive summit will be in China in November just a few weeks before the Copenhagen climate change conference.⁹

When it comes to recommendations, the authors reveal a lack of understanding of EU procedures. They suggest the European Council should launch a major review of EU policy towards China with a view to selecting a small number of priorities. But this is exactly what the European Commission has been doing at regular intervals over the past two decades. The point is that there is never sufficient time at European Council meetings to debate strategy on any subject! Ministers do have their six-monthly informal Gymnich meetings and it would certainly be useful to have an in-depth discussion on the EU's strategic partners. But the problem again is the limited time and the desire to focus on the most immediate issues which get media attention.

The proposal that the member states should rationalise their bilateral dialogues with China to avoid overlapping is a sensible idea but will not be easy to implement. One would have to search long and hard to find a member state which would be willing to close down an existing bilateral dialogue. Some of the larger member states would argue that they have a special interest or competence in a certain area which is highly important for their national interests. The UK financial dialogue with China is a prime example. Meanwhile some of the dialogues have proved quite successful

⁶ John Fox and Francois Godement, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁷ Conversations with Commission officials.

⁸ Remarks at EPC event on 12 June 2009.

⁹ See Stanley Crossick, 'Whither the EU-China Relationship', Blogactiv, 13 June 2009, retrieved 15 June 2009, <http://crossick.blogactiv.eu/2009/06/13/whither-the-eu-china-relationship/>



such as China adopting EU exhaust standards. It is also worth stating that process does lead to increased trust, an important aspect in dealing with the Chinese.

Another odd suggestion is that the EU develops an “open troika”¹⁰ system for dealing with China. Anyone that can contribute on an issue would be welcome to a seat at the table. This would hardly contribute to a coherent EU approach which the Lisbon Treaty is supposed to help promote. Let's give the new structures a chance.

Fox and Godement do have some good ideas although some would be difficult to achieve. For example, they suggest reducing the number of policy dialogues. But which ones would they cut? On what basis? And what would be gained from deleting a dialogue from ‘the books’? Sometimes these dialogues take time to produce results because of changes in personalities or priorities. As regards human rights they suggest concentrating on four areas including “reconciliation in Tibet.”¹¹ This is an obvious non-starter given Chinese sensitivities. How we would react to Chinese offers to assist in reconciliation in Northern Ireland, the Baltic States, Cyprus, Kosovo or the Roma issue?

The analysts writing in *European Voice* are also critical of what they call “making process instead of progress.”¹² While the EU's member states were rightly criticised for failing to get their act together, they suggest that the European Commission should do more to develop a more coherent European strategy. They do not suggest, however, how the Commission should do this given the aforementioned constraints and the very limited resources at its disposal.

The China watchers suggest that developing countries “often seem to have more influence on China's positions than does Europe.”¹³ But the evidence they offer for such an assertion is scant. On climate change they suggest that the change in China's approach is more because of national interests than EU pressure. This may well be true but years of EU pressure certainly played a role in lifting climate change higher up on Beijing's agenda. China is also highly interested in learning from the EU on social and regional policy; and gaining insights on science and technology.

It is further suggested that recent policy shifts in China are not benefiting the EU as China is now an “aggressive competitor”¹⁴ of the EU in new energy technologies. The authors also recognise that China is becoming more and more effective in using multilateral channels to promote and protect its own interests. But how is this different from any other power? The authors later state, rightly, that “China cannot be blamed for this.”¹⁵ The authors fail to elaborate on the rising demand for China to be included in the

¹⁰ John Fox and Francois Godement, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹² Bernd Berger et al., *op. cit.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*



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G8 and to receive more votes in the IMF as befitting its economic and financial strength.

After a lengthy critique of the member states failing to agree on common policies towards China, the authors state that “fostering awareness of the EU's member states interdependence as regards China is inevitably a slow and laborious process.”¹⁶ This is the nub of the issue. We are not dealing with two similar actors. The EU has a unique and often frustratingly slow decision-making process. There are measures for change in the pipeline. Meanwhile let us recognise that EU-China relations have come a long way in the past two decades.

¹⁶ Ibid.



EU-CHINA-AFRICA TRICHOTOMY: THE EU, CHINA AND THE NORMATIVE POWER CONCEPT ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT

Benjamin Barton*

In 2002, renown scholar, Ian Manners, classified the European Union (EU) as a 'normative power', which "[...] refers to a specific form of power: 'power over opinion'. Normative power is thus defined as 'the ability to shape conceptions of normal in International Relations'."¹ This description, or what is referred to as 'soft power', anchors the EU's foreign policy approach towards the international system, and denotes influencing others by normative or diplomatic means over 'hard', militaristic methods. The promotion of normative guidelines has become a predominant feature of the EU's behaviour overseas, and is highlighted in the majority of legal documents that contribute to shaping the EU's foreign policy (ex: the Treaty on the European Union). The EU has shown a keen desire to export its norms, especially to developing countries, and has not hesitated to insert clauses guaranteeing the respect for these norms, most notably in Africa. However, of late, the EU's normative aspirations have taken a dent, because of the rise of influential competitors on the African continent: essentially China. Many critics have disclaimed China's tactics in Africa, by claiming that they undermine Europe's normative strategy, are purely mercantilist by nature², and hurt African interests in the long-term. Nevertheless, can China be considered a normative power in Africa, in the same way that the EU attempts to be?

After a brief definition of normative power, my aim will be to present the idea that in the short-term, it appears unlikely that China will evolve towards normative superpower status in Africa. Yet, my third section, shall serve to affirm that China, may already be a normative actor in Africa, because it is offering a model to African countries that is perhaps more efficient than the EU's model. The fact that the West has so sharply criticised China's role in Africa, may provide the greatest indication, thus far, that they recognise China as a normative power. Hence, I wish to demonstrate that China acts as an alternative normative power in Africa.

Defining the EU's normative power

As aforementioned, the EU attempts to apply its norms in the majority of its foreign policy agreements. This is especially true, for example, with the

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¹ Ian Manners, 'Normative power Europe: a contradiction in terms?', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2002, p. 239 cited in Sybille Scheipers and Daniela Sicurelli, 'Empowering Africa: normative power in EU-Africa relations', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 2008, p. 609.

² Ian Taylor, 'China's Oil Diplomacy in Africa', *International Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 5, 2006, p. 940.



Cotonou agreement ratified in 2000, between the EU and the African-Caribbean-Pacific grouping of countries.³ This legal document highlights the application of normative powers in the EU's external relations, as it indicates that: "a political environment guaranteeing peace, security and stability, respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law, and good governance is part and parcel of long term development."⁴ The EU emphasizes the need to promote values, principles and its beliefs, via the intermediary of its foreign policy, which conditions its position as a normative superpower. It perceives its spread of 'universal' norms, as a way of empowering others⁵, and furthering international solidarity. One cannot help but think that, the EU is also furthering its empowerment in this asymmetric *rapport de force* with underdeveloped African countries that have to integrate these norms, in exchange for vital overall assistance.

In practice, to obtain the goals in its normative foreign policy requirements, the EU has to apply political conditionality, with Cotonou as a prime example.⁶ Inside Cotonou, not only do we find the different types of normative priorities that are designed by the EU towards the African continent (democratic promotion, good governance...), but also the positive (incentives) and negative (sanctions) conditions tied, to help the Cotonou partners reach these goals. This agreement permits the EU to protect its interests whilst facilitating regime change.⁷ This section should thus help to better comprehend how the EU advances normative power internationally, in theory and practice.

China's supposed lack of normative power in Africa

The EU is, *de facto*, a self-proclaimed normative superpower, especially in Africa. On the other hand, China is a major player in Africa, whose influence has been steadily rising.⁸ Both of these entities possess policies that differ and converge, towards Africa. However, it would be perhaps too far-fetched for us to suggest that China behaves as a normative power, in the same sense that the EU does in Africa. Much to the contrary, the Chinese promote a 'no-strings-attached' policy in Africa that does away with political conditionality (except for the 1-China policy⁹), and is primarily focused on undertaking business with their African counterparts. China does not produce 'EU-inspired norms' that it wishes to encourage upon others, principally because it does

³ In this case, I am using Cotonou, but focusing purely on the African partners.

⁴ European Council, Council of Ministers, 'Partnership agreement between the members of ACP Group of States and the European Community and its Member States', Official Journal L317, Cotonou, 2000.

⁵ Sibylle Scheipers and Daniela Sicurelli, op. cit., p. 609.

⁶ Mary Farrell, 'A triumph of Realism over Idealism? Cooperation Between the EU and Africa', *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2005, p. 272.

⁷ Ibid., p. 270.

⁸ Ruchita Beri, 'China's Rising Profile in Africa', *China Report*, No. 43, 2007, p. 298.

⁹ James Kyngé and Zhang Tiejun, 'Africa', in Stanley Crossick and Etienne Reuter (eds.) *China-EU: A Common Future*, Singapore, World Scientific, 2007, p. 153.



not believe that these values are considered to be specifically related to Chinese political culture. This is also true of Chinese policy in Africa: “the irony reflects the overall tensions in Chinese foreign policy in its simultaneous pursuit of engagement and a critical stance towards certain norms that underpin the existent global order.”¹⁰

One may even admit that China, far from promoting norms of ‘international solidarity’, actually employs *a contrario*, a mercantilist framework towards Africa. This reflects the desire to cater for its growing demand for natural resources¹¹, and its refusal to intervene in domestic affairs.¹² “[...] Beijing spirited defense of elite sovereignty certainly jars against the growing international consensus that political leaders cannot escape justice for violation against an emerging, if fragile global norm.”¹³ The empirical evidence highlights China’s utilitarian approach towards Africa: in opposition to the EU’s desire to interact only with countries that ‘respect’ its values, China operates differently, by selecting its African partners, on the basis of economic needs. China does not see itself as a guide, but more as a partner. For example, it is very focused on the partnership of equal South-South cooperation, via its aid donorship program¹⁴, and stresses the importance of equal relations, struggles and interests with its African ‘friends’.¹⁵ In effect, China is not seeking to impose its ways upon others, in a ‘soft’ or ‘hard’ format. As the Chinese government indicates in its African policy paper: “China will [...] develop a new type of strategic partnership with Africa, featuring political equality and mutual trust.”¹⁶

Moreover, it goes against China’s foreign policy principles to interfere in the domestic affairs of a fellow country. In relation to the EU, China wishes to fully respect the national sovereignty of a fellow country, so as to inadvertently protect its own national sovereignty, from other prying nations. It thus attempts to clearly differentiate business from politics, with virtually no insistence upon the second.¹⁷ China, thus, does not wish to be considered as a normative power, in the same fashion as the EU, because this runs contrary to its interests. This is most evident, in the relation between the EU and China with the African Union (AU). The EU attempts to push through regional integration in Africa, by building-up the AU, whilst China pays, in comparison, little attention to this institution.¹⁸ The EU’s attempt to shape the AU on its design is sufficient proof of its normative power usage in Africa, whereas

¹⁰ Ian Taylor, op. cit., p. 940.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 938.

¹² Ibid., p. 940.

¹³ Ibid., p. 958.

¹⁴ James Kynge & Zhang Tiejun, op. cit., p. 155.

¹⁵ Richard J. Payne and Cassandra R. Veney, ‘China’s Post-Cold War African Policy’, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 38, No. 9, 1998, p. 870.

¹⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, ‘China’s African Policy’, 12 January 2006, retrieved 15 June 2009, www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t230615.htm

¹⁷ Ian Taylor, op. cit., p. 950.

¹⁸ Mary Farrell, op. cit., p. 273.



China prefers bilateral interaction, which is logical for a country unfamiliar with regional organizations. Nevertheless, China does not attempt to push through its norms onto the continent, via its relations with the AU. Its interests lie more so, in not tarnishing its image in Africa: attempting to force its norms upon its African 'friends' would render China's credibility even more vulnerable on the continent, which consequently may jeopardize its access to natural resources, and indirectly undermine its objective towards sustained high-level economic growth.¹⁹

China as an alternative normative power in Africa

From the EU's perspective, China does not match the necessary criteria to be considered as a normative power, in Africa. However, in this sense, China may not be one, but this is not to say that China is not already a normative actor. If I refer back to Ian Manners' proposition of 'power over opinion', it is obvious that China, has accumulated much influence in African political circles, especially in countries where the EU's normative power has little effect in the short-term (ex: Zimbabwe that looks East rather than West²⁰). By emphasizing economic growth over political conditionality, China is promoting a model and norms (whether consciously or not) in its development policy towards Africa. It is 'soft-power', but applied in a different context than the EU's. "China sees itself as a model of economic advancement and national emancipation"²¹, and is trying to help Africa achieve the same goals in the same manner: this is normative power at work, with stability preferred over political reform.

China has further based this model on reciprocity, mutual respect, and simultaneous development that essentially concerns economic prosperity, and demands much less from the political side, which is deemed as Africa's business and highlights the desire to promote African ownership. How can China's model, and normative power not be taken seriously by the EU in Africa, when China's approach helped contribute to economic growth of over 5% GDP, as well as improving infrastructure?²² China is presenting a new development option for African nations²³, and even if the EU perceives it as less ethical (so as to legitimize its own actions in Africa²⁴), China is undoubtedly an efficient normative model for those countries that are interested. Not applying EU norms and values does not signify that China does

¹⁹ Bernt Berger and Uwe Wissenbach, 'EU-China-Africa Trilateral Development Cooperation', Discussion Papers, Bonn, German Development Institute, No. 21, 2007, p. 19.

²⁰ Harsh V. Pant, 'China in Africa: The Push Continues But All's Not Well', *Defense and Security Analysis*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2008, p. 37.

²¹ Katharina Hofmann et al., 'Contrasting Perceptions: Chinese, African, and European Perspectives on the China-African Summit', *International Politics & Society*, No. 2, 2007, p. 80.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 87.

²³ Chris Alden, 'China and Africa: A New Development Partnership', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2008, p. 300.

²⁴ Giles Mohan and Marcus Power, 'New African Choices? The Politics of Chinese Engagement', *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 115, 2008, p. 36.



not care about Africa, or that it is not a normative power. Alden demonstrates the existence of the so-called 'Beijing consensus': "predicated upon non-interference in domestic affairs of states and the promotion of sovereign integrity."²⁵

In fact, China's normative vision in Africa is having such impact, that it has forced the EU to claim that the Chinese normative policy and model is unacceptable (even though many EU Member-States used such tactics in the past). This feeling of marginalisation that is emanating from the EU's side highlights two important elements: firstly, it certifies China's role as a normative actor in Africa, because the EU has awoken to a new and dangerous competitor, in a field that it believed to have appropriated. Secondly, it also outlines that the EU has realised its normative approach in Africa is not fallible, is not particularly efficient at achieving goals in the short-term, and may need revising.

This analysis is drawn up from the fact, that while the EU focuses specifically on the promotion of issues relating to good governance, the protection of human rights or the establishment of a democratic system, this may in fact act as an obstacle to African development, because it demands time, energy and infrastructures that African governments do not often possess. No one is questioning the excellent intentions of the EU's actions in Africa, but "this is a relationship based on inequality and general institutional inertia."²⁶ Perhaps the advancement of China's norms is helping the EU realise that its strategy is sub-optimal, in the short-term. Furthermore, China (whose model is far from reaching perfection) "[...] believes that with development, more effective governance might follow, but while people are starving, it is a luxury to talk about good governance."²⁷ China is perchance best placed to behave as a normative actor in Africa, because as a fellow developing country it best comprehends Africa's needs. China's presence has certainly helped provide Africa with further choice and objectivity concerning this issue of normative power that will ultimately decide the path chosen for its development.

Conclusion

Throughout this essay, my aim has been to define two objectives: firstly, that China is not a normative actor, in Africa, in the same way that the EU is; which principally signifies that China does not adhere to the promotion of specific values or employs similar modes of interaction with African countries. There exists very little convergence on these matters. Secondly, and most importantly, I wished to highlight the fact that despite not being classified as a normative power in the same way as is the EU, China is nonetheless, a relatively successful normative power, yet conceived in a different manner than the EU. China, like the EU, is trying to 'sell' its model, when it undertakes

²⁵ Chris Alden, op. cit., p. 300.

²⁶ Mary Farrell, op. cit., p. 268.

²⁷ James Kynge and Zhang Tiejun, op. cit., p. 156.



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business in Africa. However, even if China's model may 'appear' less ethical than the EU's, it is a certifiable model, based around different norms and priorities. This is an undeniable fact, as shown by its popularity on the African continent and one which is having profound consequences: it is incrementally marginalising the EU's strategic partnership with Africa. Finally, one must not forget that neither normative model is foolproof, China's included²⁸: this is why the EU and China must cooperate and collaborate in, and with Africa, so as to reach a more optimal outcome for all parties involved.

²⁸ Chris Alden, 'China in Africa', *Survival*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 2005, p. 161.