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**The issues of Identity in the EU-China relationship**

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Abstract

This paper argues that rather than trade competition, ideology, civilizational differences, or changes in the international balance of power, the root of frequent swings between cooperation and conflict in the EU-China relationship lies in their ever-changing identities. As China's roles expand and rise in the international system, China is forced to re-evaluate its identity and preferences, choosing to selectively remember or forget symbols and representations of the past and present (Thurston 2001). Transitioning from a developing country to an important member of the international system, its self-image has undergone a dramatic revolution (Yong 2001; Chen 2007). The EU meanwhile, has expanded from an EC-9 of similar Western democracies in 1973 to an EU-27 of diverse countries by 2007. Its attempt to develop a distinctive European presence in world affairs - that of 'normative power' Europe; set it on a course of collision with China, other developing countries, and also the United States, Russia and the Arab world (Adler 2010). These changes in identity have important consequences for actions and foreign policy interactions. We can thus expect China-EU relations to develop in the context of the ongoing redefinition of their identities and roles in the evolving international order. Both China and the EU will likely continue to respond to each other according to the needs and demands of their respective populations, and to the external expectations placed on them as important players in global politics, diplomacy, economics, trade, finance and security.

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# The issues of Identity in the EU-China relationship

Reuben Wong

## Introduction

From the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the EC in 1975 and the signing of the EC–China Trade and Cooperation Agreement in 1985, the relationship between the two actors has moved in fits and starts through several high and low points. The tentative Cold War “united front” (together with the USA and ASEAN) against the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s laid the foundation for burgeoning trade and economic cooperation from the 1990s, and a “honeymoon” period of mostly warm and active international cooperation from 1995 to 2005. This has since given way to a more “normal” relationship from 2006, where the two sides recognize fundamental differences in their international outlooks and visions of world order (Chen and Armstrong 2010; Shambaugh 2007).

This paper argues that China–EU relations have evolved in step with the growth and changing nature of each actor, but are now at a stage where further progress cannot be expected until internal consolidation and the cognitive underpinnings of each actor’s identity is clearer. The paper suggests that four main theoretical perspectives on the China–EU relationship- historical-civilizational; international political economy; balance-of-power strategic studies; and ideology - are actually underpinned by the evolving identities of the EU and China.<sup>1</sup>

## ‘Identity’ in the EU’s and China’s international relations

‘Identity’ became a serious concept in the study of foreign policies and international relations from the 1990s. Several states became the subject of serious work on the impact of identities - changing, multiple and overlapping. These included, *inter alia*, the Soviet Union/Russia, the United States, and even multi-state actors like the European Union (Hopf 2002). Yet, few book-length studies have addressed the issue of China’s international identity, let alone the constructed arrangement of the EU-China relationship.<sup>2</sup> In part, this has been because China’s

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<sup>1</sup> Building on my earlier literature review, “Perspectives on China’s Relations with the EU”, in E. Kavalski (ed), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Chinese Foreign Policy* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2012), pp.201-10.

<sup>2</sup> Scholars who have attempted to study China’s identity include Yong Deng (2000), “Escaping the Periphery: China’s Identity in World Politics”, in W. Hu *et al* (eds), *China’s International Relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Dynamics of Paradigm Shifts* (Lanham: University Press of America), pp.41-70; Anne F. Thurston (2001), “Community and Isolation: Memory and Forgetting: China in Search of Itself”, in Gerrit W. Gong, (ed), *Memory and history in East and Southeast Asia: issues of identity in international relations* (D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies), pp.149-72; and Zheng, Shiping (2001), “Making sense of the Conflict between Mainland China and Taiwan”, in V. Kubáľková, *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World* (Armonk and London: M.E. Sharpe), pp.203-226; and Qin Yaqing, “Struggle for Identity: A Political Psychology of China’s Rise”, in B. Womack (ed), *China’s Rise in Historical Perspective* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield), pp.249-70.

identity is often taken as a ‘given’ – that of a recidivist fast-rising power. Also, the focus of most studies which *do* consider China’s identity, is usually on the identity of China’s interlocutor- the US, Japan, or the European Union, rather than on China itself (Sutter; Garver 1997).

In this paper, the concept of ‘identity’ is taken, following Peter Katzenstein, as a shorthand for varying constructions of nationhood and statehood - national ideologies, collective distinctiveness, and purpose (Katzenstein 1996:24). Identity is thus changeable subjective and relational. This concept is usually downplayed in analyses of the EU’s relations with external actors. China is no exception. Of course, it is much simpler, for the purposes of foreign policy analysis, to assume that the EU is unitary, and that it has fixed and ordered preferences which the EU then applies to external partners such as China. Most scholars have suggested that the EU and its member states sacrifice normative ideals so as to protect their vested economic and strategic interests in China (Grant 1995, Baker 1998, Shambaugh 2004). The underlying logic is that material interests (trade, investment, finance, etc) trump non-material interests (human rights, democracy, etc) in the EU’s dealings with China. Such studies usually fault the EU and its member states for using ‘double standards’ in their approach to China (Grant 1995; Foot 2000).

But assuming utility-maximising, rational and unitary agency, without due regard for the self-perceptions of international actors, runs into considerable problems when we consider the immense changes in the last 30 years in both the EU (which more than doubled from 12 member states as recently as in 1994, to 27 in 2007) and China (which experienced exponential economic growth, became the world’s largest creditor nation and holder of foreign reserves by 2008, and was invited into a close strategic and economic dialogue with the US).

Nicholas Onuf argued that human beings are social animals, and that human arrangements like governments, states and international organizations, and the interactions between these actors, can be understood as social constructions or arrangements with their own particular patterns and rules (Onuf 1989). This paper puts forward the hypothesis that appreciating the *identities* that China and the EU bring to bear in the social arrangement that is the EU-China relationship, is key to understanding the “rules” and the vicissitudes of this social arrangement.

This paper takes the view that identity is *relational*, ie that identity makes sense only when an actor interacts with another, and forms an image of the ‘self’ and of the ‘other’. The EU and China each has a multiplicity of identities - perceptions and images of the ‘self’ and of the ‘other’ which affect the actors’ speech acts and actions - but what is most germane here are the relevant identities that come into play in the EU-China relationship, and how the statements and actions in this relationship form a pattern which can serve as a way to change or reinforce the identity each actor has.

Smith and Vichitsorasatra (2010), for example, argue that the key purpose behind the EU's many attempts to issue statements and 'strategic papers' on the EU-China relationship, is internally rather than externally directed. Instead of a means to modify China's behavior, the strategy papers serve an integrative function; they express the desire to have a collective EU position and reflect an idea of a common EU identity in a challenging world:

“the statements embody an image of “Europe's China” – a construct that tells us as much about the internal workings and preconceptions of the EU as it does about the reality of the Chinese challenge (Smith 2011:27).

Many scholars note that the study of identity is fraught with problems of conceptual ambiguity. Four features of identity in particular – alterity, fluidity, multiplicity, and constructedness - make this concept very difficult to pin down and study (Goff and Dunn 2004). This challenge is particularly present in the EU-China relationship. The next four sections will show how Chinese and European identities have changed and adapted the Self and the Other even as two very different civilization morphed into ever-centralising political entities.

### **Historical–Civilizational Approach**

One way of looking at the China–EU relationship is to position it as an interaction between two old civilizations, which goes back millennia—before the formation of the modern state of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, and even before the modern state system in Europe—and has its origins in the dynamics of the ancient Silk Road. The first Western European traders to reach China and establish a permanent presence were the Portuguese. Tomé Pires was sent by the King of Portugal as ambassador to the Ming court in 1517 (Hsü 1990: 93; Neves 1995). Large contingents of Portuguese traders and adventurers later arrived from their bases in Goa, Malacca and the East Indies to settle on St John's Island near Canton, and in 1535 Portugal secured official Chinese permission to dry their cargoes in Macao. This was the beginning of the first (and, eventually, the last) European colony in China. Today's European Union, with its many attempts at coordinating policies internally between member states, and externally towards foreign partners, can be conceptualized as a 'civilisational community of practice' or even a 'normative power' with a self-perceived role in setting a normative example in international politics (Adler 2010; Zielonka 2008; Manners 2002).

However, the persistent image of Europe in the minds of many Chinese people, derives from the experience of colonial expansion and encroachment into China's territory during the Qing dynasty. The “century of humiliation” that followed the Opium Wars and the cession of Hong Kong to Britain, and the concessions in Shanghai to a range of European powers, the USA and Japan rendered Qing China a semi-colony. In this sense, it can be argued that China has regained its full

independence only with the return of Hong Kong in 1997 and Macao in 1999, respectively (Neves and Bridges 2000; Yong 2000).

A variation of this approach is to conceive of China and the EU not as “normal” or typical states, but as modern “empires” (Zielonka 2006). In this perspective, China and the EU are not conventional nation-states, but very large and diverse, multiethnic and multinational political entities that strive to behave like nation-states. In essence, each is the progenitor of its own civilization. Historical–civilizational approaches take into account the “shock” from the initial encounter during the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, when the Qing dynasty extended China’s borders to their greatest extent and in the process came into contact with expansionist European powers which imposed extraterritoriality and unequal treaties on a proud but hitherto self-sufficient civilization (Peyrefitte 1996; Suzuki 2009). Such contextualization helps explain the contemporary constraints and opportunities in the interactions between China and Europe (cf. Wilkinson 1983).

Historical–civilizational approaches tend either to lionize China as the noble “other” (Peyrefitte 1973, 1997); or view it as an inferior international actor, gradually brought into an international system created by Europeans, by socializing it into a Western-framed standard of “civilization” (Gong 1984; Suzuki 2009). A few “civilizational” approaches even view China as a threat to the values and interests of the “West” (Huntington 1993).

Whatever their differences, the major contribution of historical–civilizational approaches is the recognition that China’s worldview, culture, and history are very different from those of Europe (and the West, more generally). Such framing helps students come to terms with Beijing’s self-image and external outlook on its own terms, using cognitive maps and historical references familiar to the Chinese mind. The explanatory value of historical–civilization approaches is perhaps more limited today since China has gradually become a full member of “international society” (Gong 1984; Zhang 1991). At the same time, it must be acknowledged that civilizations and cultures are neither unitary nor static, but evolve and adapt as they interact and engage with each other (Katzenstein 2010).

### **International Political Economy**

A second approach views the interactions between China and the EU as essentially an “economic” relationship between two powerful economic (especially trading) actors (Dent 1999; Kapur 1990). Although very much in vogue (and, probably, the dominant approach on China–EU relations today), this perspective is of relatively recent provenance. Its proponents tend to agree that its explanatory value took off in earnest only in the wake of China’s economic opening under Deng Xiaoping.

The international political economy (IPE) perspective portrays the EU and the PRC (together with the USA) as the most important “poles” of the world economy. From the beginning of the

1990s, IPE perspectives cast the relationship between the USA, the EU, and China as an increasingly tripolar condominium. The three protagonists (often the USA is portrayed as the declining, and China, the rising actor) are seen as dominating global economic governance in decision-making and norm-producing fora such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Bretton Woods institutions, and *ad hoc* groupings (such as the G20), which meet to discuss and coordinate steps to resolve international trade and finance issues as they arise (Smith and Xie 2009; Chen 2011).

Here, studies of China–EU relations are dominated by analyses which posit that the motivating factors for the interaction are essentially economic motives (Dent 1999; European Commission 1995; Kapur 1990). IPE explanations portray China as a vast economic opportunity, a potential market of over 1 billion consumers, and the largest holder of US Treasury bonds. In this respect, China is not only a colossal market for and manufacturer of goods and services, but it also plays an important role in the management of the global economy by buying American and European sovereign bonds. The idea of an economic “triad” is thus considered as a distinct and welcome prospect in the steering of global financial issues, especially following China’s entry into the WTO in 2001 (Crossick 2006, 2009.).

IPE perspectives focus on China’s rapidly increasing importance in international manufacturing, trade and finance, and are preoccupied with the accommodation of China into the global economic system. In particular, such approaches appear to have informed the European Commission’s trade policies towards China in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, the decision to include China in a preferential agreement in 1980 involved full exemption from customs duty for all industrial goods and for partial exemption for certain processed agricultural products exported to developed countries (Kapur 1990:149–50).

The EC–China Joint Committee created by the 1978 bilateral agreement and affirmed in the 1985 EC–China Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) quickly became the most institutionalized component of the EC’s interactions with China, with the Commission playing the role of intermediary. The 1978 agreement was the first trade agreement concluded by the EC with a communist country and it placed China in an advantageous position (Hong 1998: 91–2). The cornerstone of the 1978 and 1985 Trade Agreements was the most-favored nation (MFN) clause. Article 14 in the 1985 TCA reserved the right of the member states to conclude bilateral economic arrangements with China (Bartke 1992). In practice, the Commission has been the engine in developing various forms of economic cooperation with China.

From the mid-1990s to about 2005, the Commission prioritized commercial issues over political or strategic relations. In July 1995, the European Trade Commissioner, Sir Leon Brittan, unveiled the EU’s new initiative, *A Long-term Policy for China*. The 1995 China strategy paper followed on the EU’s broadening relations with Asia, by placing even more attention on China as a “cornerstone in the EU’s external relations, both with Asia and globally.” The 1995 paper

recognized the “rise of China as unmatched amongst national experiences since the Second World War” (Shambaugh 1996; European Commission 1995). The two papers, drafted by the Commission and approved by the Council, emphasized economic relations and looked upon China as a “cornerstone” of the EU’s “New Asia Policy” (Yahuda and Zhang 1998: 194). Since 2006, however, the Commission has been less sanguine about China and has become more interested in issues associated with the political and human rights conditionality of the EU (European Commission 2006). Even then, the EU has remained China’s largest trading partner since 2007, and China continues to be important to the EU not only in trade terms, but also as a buyer and holder of European bonds.

IPE perspectives are critical in understanding the China–EU relationship today because trade and investment form the main substance of the bilateral relationship. At the same time, both Beijing and Brussels continue to be significant actors on the world economic stage. In China itself, IPE perspectives are very recent and can be traced to the early 1990s when China’s external relations and domestic reforms revealed the necessity and importance of understanding the interaction of world politics and economics. In particular, IPE perspectives became prominent during the tortuous negotiations for WTO membership (Song and Chan 2000: 28–9; Kim 2010). Indeed, China and the EU soon found themselves in conflicts over trade deficits, intellectual property rights, quotas, protectionism, and the EU’s continuing refusal to grant market economy status to China ahead of the 2016 deadline under the terms of China’s WTO membership (Zweig and Chen 2007; Kim 2010; Otero-Iglesias 2012)

European states pay attention to Beijing’s intentions and actions as China is now an important trade and financial power and holder of European debt—as witnessed by the red-carpet treatment of Chinese government and Central Bank officials in Spain and Portugal during 2010, and attempts by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and the head of the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF), Klaus Regling, to persuade Beijing to buy EFSF bonds and securities in 2011–2012 (Chen 2011; Otero-Iglesias 2012). With the Greek economy on the brink of bankruptcy, and the looming prospect of the debt crisis afflicting other eurozone countries, it appears that the economic relationship between Brussels and Beijing is becoming more equal now that China’s foreign currency reserves are estimated to be at US\$3.2 trillion. It seems that China is likely to demand EU concessions (e.g., on EU recognition of China’s market economy status) in exchange for assisting the EU at a critical juncture (Chen 2011).

IPE perspectives also serve to explain the persistent tensions in China–EU relations, which are commonplace and even considered “normal” in the relations between dyads of major economic actors, such as the USA and the EU, the EU and Japan, Japan and the USA. However, IPE perspectives in themselves may not be very good at explaining the profound and seemingly sudden shifts in the China–EU relationship—for instance, the unexpected “honeymoon phase” of 1995–



2004 turning sour by 2007–2008. IPE approaches therefore appear constrained when it comes to explaining the non-economic or non-material factors at play in the China–EU relationship.

### **Balance-of-power**

A third way of looking at the China–EU relationship is through balance-of-power lenses. China is a fast-rising power, while the EU is a would-be superpower made up of nation-states that pool their sovereignty and resources together. This approach is also one of fairly recent vintage, since one can only speak of a China–EU relationship proper after the establishment of the PRC in 1949 and the emergence of the European Community in 1957. In fact the China–EU relationship was institutionalized only with the EC’s diplomatic recognition of China in 1975, followed by the EU–China TCA in 1980 (Wong 2008).

However, it is a relationship that both recognize to be limited by multiple factors, despite calls on both sides for a “strategic partnership.” Unlike geostrategic accounts of USA–China relations, which are overwhelmingly dominated by American realists who see China as a military threat to the USA, and whose rise needs to be slowed down, if not contained (see Wong 2012b), the geopolitical perspectives of China–EU relations acknowledge that each side can use the other as strategic weight to balance off troublesome neighbors or even partners, such as the USSR/Russia or even the USA. Thus, in the 1970s, China was wooed by both the USA and the European Community as a valuable associate and a “16th partner of NATO” in a bid to contain Soviet expansionism.

In this context, European perspectives on the rise of China have thus far been less alarmist than those of American analysts (Cabestan 1995, 2008; Védrine 2001; Stares and Régaud 1998; Peyrefitte 1996). The prime reason for this trend is that China is too far away, and Europe has no strategic disputes with China (such as Taiwan, for instance) that could conceivably drag it into a potential conflict.

Within such geopolitical reading, one influential strand sees balance-of-power maneuvering as essential to keeping the system stable. This perspective goes back at least to the Cold War and gives center stage to the USA, portraying it as the Cold War leader of the free world and the shield for European integration and Asian multilateralism in a global effort to contain Soviet power (Peterson 1996; Yahuda 1996). With the Sino-Soviet split and the US–China rapprochement of the 1970s, the balance-of-power school portrayed Washington as the linchpin of a Euro-Sino-American front defying Soviet aggression in Afghanistan and Cambodia. The EU–China relationship is thus framed by the legacy of such Cold War experience (Cabestan 1995; Nuttall 1993).

After the Cold War and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, such geostrategic analyses have tended to focus on the “China threat”—the construction of China as a rapidly rising power and challenger to American hegemony. In this setting, the question has been raised: what role will the Europeans play in this power shift. Some analyses (principally, by French or Chinese commentators) have privileged the idea of the EU and China as alternative poles to a

unilateral America (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1997; Chinese Foreign Ministry 2003; Védrine 2001).

One of the biggest hurdles to understanding Chinese foreign policy—recognized by China observers and Chinese scholars themselves—is that “few subjects are more complicated—and mysterious than Chinese foreign policy ... so far there has been little consensus and much frustration in this field of study, to say nothing of the failure to bring it into the mainstream of theoretical inquiry” (Hao 1998: 510). Yang (2009) argues that the perceptual approach—which studies Chinese foreign policy by focusing on “perceptions held by Chinese foreign policymakers, specialists, and scholars at different levels,” is helpful today because of the current expansion in international relations education and research, China’s opening to the outside world, and the pervasiveness of the cognitive frameworks underpinning Chinese foreign policy.

Some analyses were even suggesting that the EU and China were moving towards a relationship that could form a “new axis” in international relations. For instance, David Shambaugh has suggested that such a “strategic partnership” could provide opportunities to (i) enhance China’s involvement in international affairs by involving it in multilateral institutional arrangements; (ii) intensify the bilateral Sino-European ties; and (iii) improve China’s “domestic capacity” to govern (Shambaugh 2004).

Others have argued that a US–EU–China strategic triangle is emerging, in which the USA might be friendlier with the EU than with China, or vice versa (Wong 2012a, Chen 2011, Crossick 2009). However, more realistically, China is probably acting according to a logic of *yi chao si qiang* (one superpower, four great powers), where the USA is the overwhelming center of power, and plays off other great powers in three-cornered triangles (Chan 1999: 110–12).

### *‘Strategic Partnership’*

A recent variation of the balance-of-power approach, the idea of EU–China relations as a “strategic partnership,” saw its apogee during 2003–2004. The EU entered into strategic linkages with China (especially in aerospace cooperation projects) in 2003—coincidentally the year in which China became the third nation to send a man into space (see Chapter 31). A joint Sino-European satellite navigation cooperation center was opened in Beijing in February 2003, and an agreement was reached in September of the same year, committing China to finance up to €230 million (or one-fifth) of the EU’s Galileo satellite positioning system which is seen as an alternative to the US Global Positioning System (BBC News 2003; European Commission 2003; *Le Monde* 2003a). The announcement of the decision made a positive prelude to the 6th EU–China summit in Beijing, although human rights, market access and the EU’s growing trade deficit with China continued to be nagging issues (*Le Monde* 2003b).

Evidence that China has begun to take the EU seriously as an international actor could be found in the publication of the Chinese Foreign Ministry’s first-ever “EU Policy Paper.” This was

mirrored by detailed analyses in leading Chinese academic and policy journals on international affairs (Men 2006). The October 2003 Foreign Ministry paper noted that the EU was an important international player and that the single European currency and the EU enlargement process enhanced Brussels' weight in international affairs. As the "EU Policy Paper" indicated, although there were "twists and turns" in China's relations with the EU, neither Brussels nor Beijing perceived each other as security threats, and shared fundamentally similar views and interests on trade and world order (Chinese Foreign Ministry 2003).

In this context, the PRC formally broached the question of ending the arms embargo imposed in the wake of the Tiananmen protests. The final paragraph of the "EU Policy Paper" called on the EU to "lift its ban on arms sales to China at an early date so as to remove barriers to greater bilateral cooperation on defense industry and technologies" (Chinese Foreign Ministry 2003). Over the following year, a number of EU leaders announced their support for lifting the ban, most vocally by then German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and French President Jacques Chirac. Europe took a major step toward meeting Beijing's request in December 2004 at the 7th EU–China Summit, with the EU committing to work toward lifting the embargo.

Then the Council of the European Union approved a joint statement and called on the EU presidency to "finalize the well-advanced work in order to allow for a decision [on the embargo]" and "underlined that the result of any decision should not be an increase of arms exports from EU member states to China, neither in quantitative nor qualitative terms" (Griffin and Pantucci 2007). The Council further stressed that the EU should move to adopt a revised "Code of Conduct" on arms exports and a new instrument on exports to post-embargo countries, known as the "Toolbox."

The EU found itself under a lot of pressure in 2004–2005 from the USA when Paris and Berlin prematurely announced that the EU arms embargo on China—in place since 1989—would soon be lifted. Washington threatened that the EU's response on this issue would be seen as a test of its loyalty. The resulting internal dissension within the EU scuttled the lifting of the embargo, and instead intensified the USA–EU joint consultations and intelligence sharing on China (Barysch et al. 2005; Godement 2005; Gompert et al. 2005).

Increased arms sales to China (which now has the second highest defence budget in the world) would boost the ailing European arms industry. It would also help make the EU–China dialogue more of a "strategic one," as both sides had announced at the EU–China summit in 2004 (Barysch et al. 2005; Smith and Xie 2010b). Despite the Council's intention to strengthen the Code of Conduct, there were indications in early 2005 that Paris had entered into talks with Beijing on the sale of advanced Mirage 2000-9CS fighter aircraft.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Europe in February 2005 to begin patching over the damage from the Iraq War, but the issue of the US response to Europe's pending decision to lift its arms embargo threatened to overshadow the talks with EU leaders. Critics in Congress blasted Europe for 'selling out' the alliance in order to cut deals in Beijing, and legislators such as

Senator Richard Lugar threatened to cut transatlantic defense–industrial cooperation if Europe lifted the embargo. In the face of such acrimony from the USA and growing domestic criticism, Brussels backed down, but the issue is not dead.

The first visit by German Chancellor Angela Merkel to China in May 2006 looked set to continue her predecessor’s close relations with the PRC (Eyal 2006). When the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao attended the 9th EU–China Summit in September 2006, he received a pledge that Europe would continue efforts toward lifting the embargo. One month later, Chirac declared his continued opposition to the embargo in a joint communiqué with President Hu Jintao: “The moment has come for the EU to make the most of the expanding partnership between the EU and China, most notably by lifting the arms embargo which is no longer pertinent to the present situation” (Griffin and Pantucci 2007).

Debates over the meaning of the EU’s ‘strategic partnerships’ (with China, India, Japan, South Korea, Brazil, Indonesia, etc) are important because they indicate contestations over whether the EU should remain a ‘civilian power’, or seek to move towards greater independence from the US and become a normal superpower which builds and employs strategic resources in the pursuit of foreign policy objectives (K. Smith 2008; Godement 2008; Smith and Xie 2010b). In this vein, it will be interesting to see if and how the eurozone debt crisis, and disillusion with NATO, may impact the EU’s commitment to the arms ban.

### **Ideology and Culture**

A fourth approach to China–EU relations is to see the relationship through ideological lenses. During the Cold War, China’s relations with the European Community were predominantly a “secondary relationship,” a relationship dependent on China’s (and Western Europe’s) “primary relationship” with the USA and the USSR (Yahuda 1994; Shambaugh 1996). Yet, even after the Cold War, despite the rise of China as an economic superpower and the emergence of the European Union (EU), this relationship does not seem to have emerged from the ever-present shadow of the USA to become a primary, important “axis” in its own right (Shambaugh 2004).

From Beijing’s perspective, ideology is the communist–capitalist lens often used by Chinese policy-makers and academics to understand the world. At the birth of the PRC in 1949, most European countries were seen in Beijing as belonging to either of two camps—on the one hand was American-led capitalist western Europe, which had been responsible for two world wars, and on the other hand was Soviet-led industrializing communist central and eastern Europe.

Mao himself saw the USA and USSR as superpowers in the “first world,” Europe, Japan, and Latin America in the “second world,” and most of Africa and Asia as the “third world” (Chen 1979). However, this ideological prism is largely moderated by power-based perspectives, as discussed in the preceding section. During the worst of the Sino-Soviet conflict, Europe (and America) was seen as a potential counter-weight to Soviet belligerence. This tendency was

accelerated in post-Mao China, where Deng Xiaoping urged China's leaders to follow a pragmatic foreign policy (Cabestan 2010). A more recent (and somewhat problematic) debate revolves around the universalism/relativity of norms (such as human rights) and the "Asian values" debate (Clapham 1999; Foot 2000).

Balance-of-power perspectives help to explain China's options as rising power, and the steps taken by others in response to China's growing influence. Ideological perspectives were helpful in using Marxist lenses to explain communist China's actions and relations with European states in the first decades of the PRC, but they have since been overtaken by other ideological lenses involving culture and post-Cold War debates over human rights and their universality/relativism.

Normative concerns for the promotion of human security concerns (eg. human rights and the protection of the earth's resources), have since become an important rallying point for European NGOs, civil society, European institutions like the EP, and member states alike to build some sort of distinctive identity in international politics (Clapham 1999; Manners 2002).

### **Tentative Conclusions**

In the discussion above of four approaches to the EU-China relationship, we see how at times, the identity of the EU or Chinese Self is defined against the Other (often in historical narratives, on human rights and ideological issues, and increasingly on IPE issues). But we also see how difference from the Other can result in the alteration of the Self's identity in the direction of the Other (such as in shared anxieties about Soviet expansionism in the 1970s, and joint statements about multipolarity directed at American unilateralism from 2001-2005).

The frequent shifts in the tenor EU-China relations can be explained – as they usually are – as a function of international political economic ties (in particular, the transition in the trade advantage from the European to the Chinese side), ideology, historical–civilizational transitions, or as a function of changes to the balance-of-power in the international system.

But if we dig deeper, we become cognizant of the ever-changing nature and identities of both the EU and the PRC. These evolving identities inform their self-images, the choices that these actors make and even the preferences that they hold. The EU expanded from a grouping of nine Western democracies in 1973, to a diverse club of 27 of countries (many of which were former communist countries) by 2007. It is a major global player, and perhaps its most important attempt to develop a distinctive European identity in world affairs is the framing of external affairs through the content and practices of "normative power." The gist of the EU's normative foreign policy is encapsulated in its political and economic "conditionality" (Adler 2010; Manners 2002).

Meanwhile, China has come a long way from being a communist developing country in 1975, to a middle-income, conservative G-20 trade superpower (or even G-2 power, as some in Washington seem to believe). However, as its roles expand, Chinese foreign policy will be forced to re-evaluate its identity and preferences, choosing to selectively remember or forget symbols and

representations of the past in order to act in the present and, thus, shape the future of international politics (Thurston 2001).

It is therefore expected that the EU-China relationship will develop in the context of the ongoing redefinition of their identities and roles in the evolving international order. Both China and the EU will probably continue to respond to each other according to the needs and demands of their respective populations, and to the external expectations placed on them as important players in global politics, diplomacy, economics, trade, finance and security. Equally significantly, the evolution and potential outcome of the eurozone debt crisis is likely to provide one of the most significant contingencies shaping the patterns of the EU's relations with Beijing.

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