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THE EU-CHINA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

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THE EU-CHINA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

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Summary

This paper studies EU-China relations in the 21st century in order to identify the achievements of the two sides and the challenges they still face. The paper starts with a historical review of bilateral relations and of the policy papers issued by both governments. The paper also examines the framework established by the two sides to facilitate bilateral communication and cooperation. In the second part, the paper focuses on agreements and disagreements between the EU and China by looking at several issues of mutual concern. The issues covered include: understanding of the international political structure; cooperation in international affairs; the lifting of the arms embargo on China; and trade disputes. Through the analysis of these issues, the paper points out the progress and problems in bilateral relations in an effort to help readers better understand the EU-China strategic partnership.

EU-China relations have been developing rapidly in recent years. Apart from the influence of the international political environment in the post-Cold War era, the developments in both the European Union (EU) and China have created a favorable context for progress in bilateral relations. Both sides have undergone huge changes in recent years. The birth of the EU is a remarkable achievement of European integration. From the signing of the Treaty of Paris to the coming into effect of the Treaty of Maastricht; from the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in the early 1950s to the development of the internal market; the EU has been demonstrating to the world the power of economic integration. Far away from the EU, on the other side of the globe, China has also achieved great progress thanks to the economic and political reforms carried out since the end of the 1970s. From planned economy to market economy; from promoting world revolution to maintaining global peace and promoting development; China has been steadily rising. China's changes attract the EU, and the EU's experience fascinates China. Since the 1990s, the mutual attraction of the two sides has brought their bilateral relationship to a new high.

Historical Review of Bilateral Relations

In contrast to the rapid growth of bilateral cooperation in the last decade, the initial development of bilateral relations between the EU and China was rather slow. Although the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded in 1949, and the first

¹ The author would like to thank Prof. Martin Staniland for his helpful comments and good advice on this paper.

European Community (EC) came into existence in the 1950s, official relations between the two were not established until 1975. It took more than twenty years for the two sides to come together, not only because of the international political realities of the Cold War, but also due to the very different political standpoints held by the Europeans and the Chinese. During the Cold War era, China and the Western European countries belonged to two different ideological camps—China joined the socialist camp led by the Soviet Union while the Western European countries were in the capitalist camp led by the United States (US). Different political positions and ideological beliefs created animosity between the two sides. China regarded the Western European countries as the “contemptible lackeys of the United States”.² In the mid-1970s, encouraged by the Sino-US rapprochement and mutual recognition between China and most of the Western European countries,³ the EC established diplomatic relations with the PRC.

Despite this breakthrough in diplomatic relations between Beijing and Brussels, bilateral cooperation developed slowly during the next twenty years. Both international and domestic factors contributed to this lack of progress. As David Shambaugh remarked, Brussels-Beijing relations were to a large degree derivative from their respective relations with Moscow and Washington.⁴ The competition between the superpowers obstructed cooperation between Beijing and Brussels. Moreover, neither side had an independent motive for developing relations with the other. By the end of the Cold War, Brussels and Beijing had only reached two relatively important agreements: a trade agreement in 1978 and an agreement on trade and economic cooperation in 1985.

After the end of the Cold War, the global bipolar structure disappeared overnight due to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Worldwide, the focus was diverted from political and security issues to the development of economic globalization. Economic security has become a prominent issue in the post-Cold War era.

In the transitional period, EU-China relations faced a challenge. The suppression of the students’ demonstration in Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989 by the Chinese government triggered economic sanctions and an arms embargo by the West, with the US taking the lead. The EC joined the sanctions against China. Yet the relationship between the EC and the PRC was gradually normalized only one year later. Despite differences of opinion inside the Community, the attraction of the Chinese market and the benefits brought by economic cooperation with China reminded the Community of the importance of this big country and convinced the Community to relax sanctions.

² Donald W. Klein, “Japan and Europe in Chinese Foreign Relations,” in Samuel S. Kim (ed.) *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994), p. 113.

³ Since Sino-US relations improved in the early 1970s, many Western European countries established diplomatic relations with Beijing in a short period. Among them, Italy recognized the PRC in 1970; Belgium and Austria in 1971; and the United Kingdom, West Germany, Luxemburg, and the Netherlands in 1972. Much earlier, France, against the opposition of the United States, established official relations with China in 1964. West Germany wanted to follow suit, but due to great pressure from Washington, it had to give the attempt up. Examination of this period shows that the United States played an important role in hampering and promoting bilateral relations between China and the Western European countries.

⁴ David Shambaugh, “China and Europe,” *Current History*, Vol. 103, No. 674 (September 2004), p. 245.

Meanwhile, internal reforms and liberalization had brought dramatic changes to China itself. A high annual growth rate of nine per cent was maintained for more than a decade. China's trade with the EU had grown rapidly from US\$ 2.135 billion in 1980 to US\$ 14.58 billion in 1994. For the EU, the report "Towards a New Asia Strategy" produced by the Commission in 1994 marked the starting point of the EU's rising interest in Asia. Located at the centre of the EU's Asia strategy, China was given substantial attention. Starting from the first strategically-influential document "A long term policy for China-Europe relations" in 1995, EU-China relations developed on a fast track.

Policy Papers

The Commission's 1995 paper marked the opening of a new stage in bilateral relations. This document indicated an understanding by the EU of the rising importance of China in the world and pointed out the need to improve relations with China. The document suggested that the EU should establish a long-term relationship with China and that this relationship should reflect China's economic and political influence in the world and the region. It remarked:

The rise of China is unmatched amongst national experiences since the Second World War. Japan has made its mark as an economic power, the Soviet Union survived essentially as a military power. China is increasingly strong in both the military-political and the economic spheres. China is in the midst of sustained and dramatic economic and social change at home. Abroad, China is becoming part of the world security and economic system at a time of greater economic interdependence and when global problems, from protection of the environment to nuclear non-proliferation, require coordinated commitment from governments worldwide.⁵

The document stressed China's development and argued that it was time to reinforce the EU's diplomatic ties with China. Apart from the mutually-beneficial economic relationship, the EU approached China with the purpose of engaging the rising power diplomatically. With impressive insight, the document pointed out that the coming relationship with China would be "a cornerstone in Europe's external relations, both with Asia and globally."⁶

Another communication by the Commission, issued in 1998, held that "China's emergence as an increasingly confident world power is of immense historic significance,

⁵ Communication of the EU Commission, "A long-term policy for China-Europe Relations," Brussels, 5 July 1995, COM(1995) 279 final, available at http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/china/com95_279en.pdf

⁶ Ibid.

both to Europe and to the international community as a whole.”⁷ As the new document noted, much had changed in Europe, China and the world since production of the first such policy paper three years earlier. The EU needed to update its policy paper in response to the challenges posed by the changes in China. The EU recognized the rising influence of China and said that it intended to build a comprehensive partnership with the rising Asian power. As partners, the EU should (the new paper said) aim at “engaging China further, through an upgraded political dialogue, in the international community,” and “supporting China’s transition to an open society based on the rule of law and the respect for human rights.”⁸

The comprehensive partnership was upgraded in 2003 to a strategic partnership, thanks to the smooth development of cooperation between the two sides. As another policy paper produced by the Commission indicated, the EU started to emphasize shared interests not only in bilateral relations, but also in global affairs. Based on the developments of past years, the EU and China started to attach more importance to the strategic side of their partnership. The policy paper of 2003 recognized 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.”⁹

Also in 2003, the Chinese government issued its first “EU Policy Paper.” Although this Chinese policy paper was eight years later than the first EU policy paper on China, this was nevertheless the first policy paper targeting a specific country or a region ever produced by Beijing, suggesting that China attached great importance to its relations with the Europeans. The comparison between the policy papers from the two sides is interesting. While the EU stressed the importance of human rights and China’s transition to an open society, China only covered the human rights discussions in one short paragraph. China, while admitting that there were differences in understanding between the two sides, nevertheless maintained that there is “no fundamental conflict of interest between China and the EU and neither side poses a threat to the other.”¹⁰

The strategic partnership brought EU-China relations into a honeymoon period between 2003 and 2004. Exchanges of visits by top leaders on both sides became more frequent. For example, EU officials paid 206 visits to China in 2004, on average four times a week, in order to exchange views with Chinese colleagues.¹¹ The Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, was the first foreign leader to pay an official visit to the EU in May 2004 after its historically-important eastward enlargement. As Romano Prodi, the former

⁷ Communication of the EU Commission, “Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China,” Brussels, March 25, 1998, COM (1998)181 final, available at http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/china/com_98/index.htm

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Commission policy paper, “A maturing partnership - shared interests and challenges in EU-China relations,” September 10, 2003, COM(2003) 533 final, available at http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/china/com_03_533/com_533_en.pdf

¹⁰ “China’s EU policy paper,” October 13, 2003, available at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics/ceupp/t27708.htm>.

¹¹ Benita Ferrero Waldner, “The EU, China and the quest for a multilateral world,” 4 July 2005, available at http://www.delchn.cec.eu.int/en/eu_and_china/30th/sp05_414.htm

President of the European Commission, said about EU-China relations at the EU-China business forum in May 2004, “if it is not a marriage, it is at least a very serious engagement.”¹²

But since 2005, the partnership has been encountering increasing difficulties. The arms embargo (imposed after the Tiananmen Square episode) is still in place and the EU has a growing trade deficit with China. As a result, the initial enthusiasm about the partnership has been gradually replaced by disappointment. Both Brussels and Beijing have become more realistic. While cautiously optimistic about the future of the partnership, both sides have come to recognize the existence of misunderstandings, disputes, and frictions. Three years after the strategic partnership had been established with China, the Commission tried to summarize developments in bilateral relations in its sixth policy paper in 2006. While confirming the rising influence of China, it emphasized the shared responsibility between China and the EU for maintaining global peace and stability. The EU repeated its engagement policy towards China and its commitment to support China’s transition towards an open society. Meanwhile, it also realized that:

Europe needs to respond effectively to China’s renewed strength. To tackle the key challenges facing Europe today—including climate change, employment, migration, security—we need to leverage the potential of a dynamic relationship with China based on our values.¹³

Unlike the previous policy papers, the new policy paper issued by the Commission included two separate documents.¹⁴ The growing deficits in the EU’s trade with China, increasing complaints from European investors about copyright issues, and the non-transparent market conditions obliged the Europeans to re-evaluate their cooperation with the Chinese. While emphasizing the importance of the partnership with China, they requested the Chinese to compete in a fairer way by further opening up their market and leveling the playing field, particularly for copyrights of high-tech products.¹⁵

The rapidly growing political and economic relations between the EU and China caused both sides to revise their cooperation framework dating back to 1985. Both Brussels and Beijing have come to realize that the old framework can no longer cover the more comprehensive level of cooperation developed during the past two decades. Since

¹² Romano Prodi, “Relations between the EU and China: more than just business,” 6 May 2004, available at http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/news/prodi/sp04_227.htm

¹³ See “EU-China: Closer partners, growing responsibilities,” Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, COM(2006) 631 final, Brussels, 24 October 2006, p. 2, available at http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/china/docs/06-10-24_final_com.pdf

¹⁴ The policy paper issued in 2006 is composed of two documents, with one focusing specifically on EU-China economic and trade relations and the other on EU-China political and strategic cooperation.

¹⁵ See “A policy paper on EU-China trade and investment: Competition and Partnership Brussels,” Commission Working Document, Accompanying COM(2006) 631 final: Closer Partners, Growing Responsibilities, COM(2006) 632 final, 24 October 2006, p. 11, available at http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/october/tradoc_130791.pdf

January 2007, a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) has been under negotiation between the leaders of the two sides and is expected to reflect the full scope of bilateral relations. These negotiations are expected to take several years. Needless to say, this new agreement will be another important step in EU-China relations.

Framework of Bilateral Relations

As the basis for wider and deeper cooperation between the EU and China, the comprehensive strategic partnership needs to be examined in much more detail. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, in one of his speeches, defined clearly what the Chinese expected from the relationship. “Comprehensive” refers to “all-dimensional, wide-ranging and multi-layered cooperation” in various fields, including the economy, science and technology, politics, and culture. “Strategic” in this context implies “long-term and stable...EU-China relations” which transcend “the differences in ideology and social system” and are “not subjected to the impacts of individual events that occur from time to time.” “Partnership” is defined as cooperation:

... on an equal footing, mutually beneficial and win-win. The two sides should base themselves on mutual respect and mutual trust, endeavor to expand converging interests and seek common ground on major issues, while shelving differences on minor ones.¹⁶

Premier Wen’s understanding of the partnership implies a very pragmatic attitude on the part of the Chinese government in its relationship with the EU. Through stable and long-lasting cooperative ties, the Chinese intend to deemphasize the differences so as to get the best out of the relationship.

Although the EU has never directly explained the strategic partnership, its policy paper in 2003 pointed out that the EU and China share “responsibilities in promoting global governance.” The EU and China (it said) should work together “to safeguard and promote sustainable development, peace and stability.”¹⁷ In other words, as the EU is becoming a global actor, it sees itself as having an increasing strategic interest in maintaining international stability and order. Javier Solana, EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, said in Berlin later that year that:

America is the pre-eminent world power. But no single country, however powerful, can deal with all the problems alone.... A stronger Europe with a common strategic vision is also a Europe capable of consolidating

¹⁶ “Wen stresses importance of developing EU-China comprehensive strategic partnership,” *People’s Daily Online*, 7 May 2004, available at http://english.people.com.cn/200405/07/eng20040507_142556.html

¹⁷ Commission policy paper, “A maturing partnership - shared interests and challenges in EU-China relations,” see note 8.

relationships with the other great partners.... This means that it must also be a pillar of the organization of a new world, more free and more united, fairer and safer.¹⁸

Both the EU and China are active in advancing their own influence worldwide. In the meantime, they support each other in playing a more important role in international affairs.

In order to strengthen communication and cooperation, a summit meeting mechanism has been used by the two sides since 1998. The top leaders meet once a year in autumn or early winter to discuss the most important issues of bilateral concern. Along with the annual summit meetings, other notable developments have included sectoral agreements and political dialogues. Since the 1990s, Brussels and Beijing have decided to develop exchange and cooperation programs to give full play to the comparative advantages each side enjoys and to deepen and widen economic cooperation in many sectors.

Such political dialogue and communication paves the way for economic cooperation, while economic cooperation itself further stimulates political coordination between the EU and China. The stable development of bilateral relations is, to a certain degree, due to the fact that the EU and all its member states adhere to the “one China” policy. The US and the EU have different ways of handling the Cross-Strait issues. US-Taiwan relations have been far closer over the years than EU-Taiwan relations. The US has a Taiwan Relations Act, which is the legal basis for its relationship with Taiwan, while the twenty-seven member states of the EU have no such legal framework. In contrast to the US, EU countries do not sell weapons or defense technologies to Taiwan (except for France in the early 1990s). Furthermore, no European military forces are stationed in East Asia. The EU has no real military or strategic interests in this region. This allows EU-China relations to move forward without being harassed by the complicated Taiwan issue, as in the case of US-China relations.¹⁹

Policy Convergence and Divergence Between the EU and China

The EU and China are forging a strategic partnership at a historical moment in the latter’s transition. Yet both sides admit that problems and difficulties exist. In many areas, there are both policy convergence and divergence between the two sides. To further the partnership, the Chinese promote the idea of “seeking common ground while reserving differences,” while the EU actively seeks to enhance the political and economic dialogues with China.

¹⁸ Javier Solana, “The EU Security Strategy—Implications for Europe’s Role in a Changing World,” 12 November 2003, available at http://www.iep-berlin.de/mittagsgespraech/mig-2003/mig-03-solana-en_speech.pdf

¹⁹ Shambaugh, “China and Europe: The Emerging Axis,” p. 246.

Multilateralism Versus Multipolarity: Between Shared Understanding and Tacit Interpretation

A common understanding of the international political structure is the foundation for bilateral cooperation between the EU and China. In the post-Cold War era, both the EU and China intend to play a greater role in international affairs, and both promote the formation of a political structure that facilitates the ascendance of their political influence globally. In particular, the Chinese government has been getting closer to the position of the EU in advocating multilateralism in its external relations.

The Chinese have been known by their efforts to push toward multipolarity in the post-Cold War era. The Chinese policy of multipolarity is attributed to Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, who in one of his speeches claimed:

Nowadays the old structure is in the process of transformation, and the new structure is not yet formed.... No matter how many poles there will be in the world structure, three poles, four poles, or even five poles.... for the so-called multi-polarity, China should be counted as one of the poles.²⁰

The Chinese leaders are clear that multipolarity cannot come about overnight. In Beijing's view, "the move towards multipolarity is a tortuous and long process."²¹

In the first EU-China summit in 1998, the Chinese proposed to use the term "multipolarity" in the final joint declaration. The British representative resisted this idea, probably being afraid that it would make the US unhappy.²² The EU prefers multilateralism to multipolarity. According to Benita Ferrero Waldner, the Commissioner for External Relations:

For the EU, ... it is not the number of poles which counts, but rather the basis on which they operate. Our vision is a world governed by rules created and monitored by multilateral institutions. And I know China shares this approach."²³

The EU is wary of the term multipolarity, fearing that the weak transatlantic relationship after the Iraqi crisis would be further damaged by its misinterpretation in Washington.

²⁰ Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan (Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping)* (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1993), Vol. 3, p. 353.

²¹ Chinese government's viewpoint on multipolarity before 2003 is available at <http://www.chinaembassy.se/eng/zgwj/jbzc/t100415.htm>

²² The author got this information from her interview with a Chinese diplomat.

²³ Benita Ferrero Waldner, "The EU, China and the quest for a multilateral world," see note 10.

China, although by no means hiding its craving for multipolarity, has quietly revised its view on the development of multipolarity in recent years. Before 2003, the Chinese Foreign Ministry held that multipolarity “helps weaken and curb hegemonism and power politics, serves to bring about a just and equitable order and contributes to world peace and development.”²⁴ Without mentioning the US by name, China made it clear that such a policy of multipolarity was intended to counterbalance American power:

At present, by virtue of its economic, technological and military advantages, an individual country is pursuing a new "gunboat policy" in contravention of the United Nations Charter and the universally-acknowledged principles governing international relations in an attempt to establish a monopolar world under its guidance. This is against the tide of history and is doomed to failure. Innumerable historical facts demonstrate that hegemonism may hold sway for a time, but it cannot wreak havoc for a long time. China is firmly opposed (to) any form of hegemonism and power politics.²⁵

Its interactions with the outside world necessarily shape China’s understanding of international relations. In the diplomatic field, the Chinese have been gradually changing from an exclusively bilateral approach to an increasing reliance on the multilateral approach, from suspicion of multilateralism to being gradually at ease with it. Such a change has also affected its interpretation of multipolarity. Since 2003, a new understanding of multipolarity by the Chinese government has appeared. As the following statement indicated:

Our efforts to promote the development of the world towards multipolarization are not targeted at any particular country, nor are they aimed at re-staging the old play of contention for hegemony in history. Rather, these efforts are made to boost the democratization of international relations, help the various forces in the world, on the basis of equality and mutual benefit, enhance coordination and dialogue, refrain from confrontation and preserve jointly world peace, stability and development.²⁶

While the term multipolarity is still used by the Chinese government, its implication has been quietly changing. In the new interpretation, the Chinese highlight the elements of multilateralism such as democratization of international relations and the strengthening of coordination and dialogue, which to a large degree has brought them closer to the EU’s understanding of international relations. Although the term multipolarity is still in use, the Chinese are oriented more towards multilateralism in international politics in the 21st

²⁴ See Chinese government’s viewpoint on multipolarity before 2003, see note 20.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Chinese government view on multipolarity since 2003, available at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/wjzc/t24880.htm>

century. Such changes are rather recent. They help bring the Chinese and the Europeans closer in their understanding of international politics.

International Cooperation: Between Lofty UN Principles and Down-to-Earth National Interests

For a long time after the founding of the PRC, China was forced to stay outside the United Nations (UN) due to the US's support for the Chiang Kai-shek government in Taiwan. The Beijing government was only recognized by the UN in 1971, largely thanks to the support of an increasing number of newly-independent countries in Asia and Africa. Partly because the Chinese Communist regime was regarded as illegitimate in the UN where the US was dominant, Beijing had adopted a revolutionary approach to international relations from the 1950s to the 1970s. Since the adoption of the opening and reform policy, however, China has gradually changed from attempting to transform the international system to supporting it. In contrast to the period between 1949 and 1979 in which China was a member of only 34 international conventions, she joined 185 more such agreements between 1979 and 1999. China changed dramatically from being a "revolutionary" power outside the international regime to being a relatively conciliatory power within the international system.²⁷

Since becoming a member of the UN, China has been learning to pursue its national interest by staying inside the system and exploiting its important position as a member of the Security Council while developing workable relations with other countries. A peaceful and stable environment is crucial to enabling China to pursue its economic reforms and nation-building. Maintaining peace is China's primary national interest. As the UN takes peace and development as its lofty causes, Chinese national interests and UN goals effectively coincide. But by practicing multilateralism in the UN, China also hopes that the UN approach will serve as a check to the US's unilateralism.

Regarding multilateralism as one of the successful experiences in its integration process, the EU is the most steadfast supporter of this approach. In the face of most regional conflicts, the EU prefers peaceful means to military intervention. Such a general standpoint partly led to the crisis in the transatlantic relationship over the Iraqi war in 2003. Annoyed by German and French recalcitrance regarding the use of force to remove Saddam Hussein, Donald Rumsfeld, the US Defense Secretary, described the two countries as "problems" in the crisis over Iraq ("the Old Europe").²⁸

In principle, the EU and China support each other in the international arena in promoting peace and security and in fighting against terrorism. In reality, high principle wrestles with individual national interests. When the principle conforms to self-interest, there is no problem of cooperation between the EU and China. As China's high-profile

²⁷ Qin Yaqing, "Guojia shenfen, zhanlüe wenhua he anquan liyi" (National Identity, Strategic Culture and Security Interests), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (World Economics and Politics), No. 1 (2003), p. 11.

²⁸ BBC news, "Outrage at 'Old Europe' Remarks," 23 January 2003, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2687403.stm>

mediation between the parties involved in the Korean nuclear crisis suggests, China wants to acquire an image as a responsible power so long as such behavior facilitates or at least does not pose a threat to its vital interests. Actively promoting first the four-party talks and then the six-party talks, China played a crucial role in pushing the crisis towards a peaceful solution. The joint declaration in September 2005 by the US and North Korea would have been impossible without the earnest mediation of the Chinese. Thanks to China's efforts, the breakthrough in early 2007 in the six-party talks led to the final solution of the crisis. The EU spoke approvingly of China's achievement over the North Korean problem. In a similar way, the EU is making efforts to solve the Iranian nuclear crisis in a peaceful way.

However, the issue of Iran is much more complicated for the Chinese than the issue of North Korea. To keep the Korean peninsula free of nuclear weapons conforms to China's national interest, but to penalize Iran even without conclusive evidence of a nuclear weapons program is an entirely different matter. China became a net oil importer in 1993 as a result of lagging domestic oil production and rapid economic development. Since then, China has been increasingly dependent on the international oil market. China has been active overseas in bidding for oil companies and in signing contracts with countries rich in oil. Official figures show that China imported 226 million tons of oil in 2003, of which 13 per cent came from Iran. China signed its biggest oil and gas contract (one for US\$70 billion) with Tehran in 2004.²⁹ Therefore, when the EU decided to submit a motion setting Iran up for referral to the UN Security Council in September 2005, the European and Chinese policies clearly diverged. As a matter of fact, China's attitude had already been clarified one year earlier during Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing's visit to Tehran. According to Mr. Li, referring Iran to the Security Council would only make things more complicated.³⁰

China's appetite for energy may affect its foreign policy and lead it astray from the basic UN principles it endorses. The anxiety of other countries over the direction of China's development was captured in an article in the *International Herald Tribune*, which noted that "Without assurances that its interests will be respected, ... China is likely to resist international pressure and potentially be seen as a roadblock to global security."³¹ As a rapidly growing power, China's attitude has a direct impact on global security. China needs to compromise between fulfilling its national interests and establishing a responsible image worldwide. While promoting its interests, it also cares more than ever about the international reaction to its foreign policy and external behavior. For example, in the Iranian nuclear crisis in late 2005, China endorsed the new offer given to Iran by the US and the EU, and exerted pressure on Iran to soften its stance.³² At the end of 2006, China also joined the other members of the Security Council to vote unanimously to impose a first, limited set of sanctions on Iran. Facing so many

²⁹ "China, Iran Sign Biggest Oil & Gas Deal," *China Daily*, 31 October 2004.

³⁰ See Antoaneta Bezlova, "China-Iran Tango Threatens US Leverage," *Asia Times*, 30 November 2004, available at http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/FK30Ak01.html

³¹ Drew Thompson, "Darfur Complications: Disaccord on Sudan Could Poison China-US Ties," *International Herald Tribune*, 18 November 2004.

³² The Associated Press, "IAEA Chief to Press Iran on Compromise," *New York Times*, 13 November 2005.

challenges to a peaceful and stable world, it is in the EU's and China's interests to work together on the main strategic issues in international politics. To strengthen communication and cooperation between the EU and China in international affairs will not only serve their own interests, but may also contribute to world peace.

The Arms Embargo: Between General Promise and Specific Difficulties

The rapid development of EU-China relations is, as mentioned earlier, attributable to improved US-China relations. While both the EU and China attempt to exert greater influence in world politics, they admit that the relationship with the US is still the most important external relationship that each has to deal with. The US factor plays an important role in EU-China relations, despite the increasing independence in the EU's foreign policy-making and the fact that EU-China relations have been gradually developed more through initiatives by Brussels and Beijing.

Between the EU and China, a crucial issue is the arms embargo imposed in 1989 by the Western countries against China under the leadership of the US. The lifting of the arms embargo has been a topic for discussion in the EU since late 2003. Four countries are subject to the EU's arms embargoes, namely Burma, Sudan, Zimbabwe and China. To equate China with the other three countries on the embargo list is inconsistent with the strategic partnership between the EU and China. As the arms embargo is the lingering legacy of the Tiananmen event in 1989, its removal would indicate the EU's recognition of China's progress in recent years, as well as its growing clout in global affairs. The EU, led by France and Germany, agreed that a new code of conduct³³ regulating deliveries of European weapons to Beijing should be prepared to replace the arms embargo.

In appearance, lifting of the arms embargo seems to be simply a bilateral issue. The US, due to its close relationship with Taiwan and its suspicion of China's emergence in the world, interferes with and strongly objects to any discussion in the EU of lifting the embargo. Since the beginning of 2005, the Bush administration has been increasingly vocal in opposing a lifting of the embargo. President Bush and other American leaders have visited the EU and its member states to convince them that the arms embargo should be kept. The American Congress has also reacted strongly against any relaxation of the arms ban. Earlier in February 2005, the American House of Representatives passed a resolution by 411-3 that condemned the EU's plan.

Two strategic concerns make the Americans worried. First, they fear that lifting the arms embargo will change the balance of power across the Taiwan Strait in China's favor. Such a shift may tempt Beijing to resolve Taiwan's future by force. Secondly, the Americans are reluctant to see China replace the US as the pre-eminent power in the Asia-Pacific region. With weapons bought from the EU, the Americans fear that China

³³ Inside the EU, the Code of Conduct makes the rules and conditions that all the EU member states should follow and based on which they may sell their weapons to other countries.

will challenge US military supremacy in the region and be able to deter, delay, or deny American military intervention in the Pacific.³⁴

Rather than being a bilateral issue, the arms embargo turns out to be an important concern for all three parties. The EU faces a difficult situation due to pressure from the US and its commitment to the Chinese on lifting the embargo. In order to get the US to acquiesce in lifting the arms ban, the EU plans to prepare a carefully drafted code of conduct with the intention of keeping arms sales to China under strict control. The EU argued that the “results of any decision should not be an increase of arms exports from EU member states to China, neither in quantitative nor qualitative terms.” The EU stated that its:

... objective is not to sell to China any items and technologies, which would help China to acquire a capability it does not already possess and which may have a destabilizing effect in the region. The EU does not intend to change the strategic balance in the region, especially in the Taiwan Strait.”³⁵

The embargo issue became more complicated after China passed an anti-secession law³⁶ in March 2005. Washington hardened its opposition to EU arms sales to China and has urged the EU to maintain the embargo. In order to impede the EU’s determination, the US has threatened to cut off American transfers of military technology to Europe. US Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick has warned EU officials that if ever “European equipment helped kill American men and women in conflict, that would not be good for the (transatlantic) relationship.”³⁷ Both the US’s position and China’s newly-passed law affected the EU’s decision on lifting the embargo. The EU does not want an increase in Cross-Strait instability and the risk of an arms race in the Taiwan Strait. Opposition in the EU to lifting the ban became stronger. In April 2005, the European Parliament voted 431 to 85, with 31 abstentions, in favor of a resolution urging the EU to keep the weapons embargo.³⁸ Member states disagreed with one another about whether to lift the ban on weapons sales to China. As Eldar Subasic, Luxembourg’s Foreign Ministry spokesman admitted, “Looking at the positions that have been taken in different capitals, the chance of lifting the embargo by June now looks reduced.”³⁹

³⁴ Peter Brookes, “The Lifting of the EU Arms Embargo on China: An American Perspective,” *Heritage Lecture*, 2 March 2005, available at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Europe/hl866.cfm>

³⁵ Prepared by Annalisa Giannella, personal representative on non-proliferation of Javier Solana, available at <http://www.eurunion.org/legislat/ChinExpContrSysts.doc>

³⁶ The anti-secession law was approved by China National People’s Congress with the purpose of emphasizing its sovereignty over Taiwan and of keeping Taiwan from declaring independence.

³⁷ Sebastian Alison, ‘US warns EU over lifting China arms ban,’ *Renters*, 5 April 2005.

³⁸ Richard Bernstein, “Backpedaling on the arms ban,” *International Herald Tribune*, 15 April 2005.

³⁹ Katrin Bennhold and Graham Bowley, “EU weighs tying arms embargo to rights,” *International Herald Tribune*, 13 April 2005.

As a result of the introduction of the anti-secession law by Beijing, some Europeans have argued that the EU's efforts to lift the arms embargo should be linked to a gesture from China on progress in human rights. Annalisa Giannella, personal representative on non-proliferation of Javier Solana, remarked in April 2005, "Nobody has said we are going to lift our embargo for free. It would require an important concrete step to be taken by the Chinese."⁴⁰ The EU hopes that China will soon ratify the United Nations Convention on Political and Civil Rights it signed in 1998. The British ambassador to China, Christopher Hum, said that China must set a timetable for signing the international covenant on human rights before the EU will lift the ban. Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, has insisted that the embargo should remain in place until China improves its human rights record.⁴¹

The arms embargo issue falls into the domain of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) that needs the approval of all of the member states of the EU.⁴² When the embargo was introduced in 1989, the Community had only 12 members. Following the enlargement process, the number of member states has grown to 27. To achieve consensus on scrapping the arms ban among all the member states will be an arduous task.

Discussion of lifting the arms ban occurred mainly between 2004 and early 2005. Due to the damage that the Iraqi war did to transatlantic relations, the European side has been eager to repair its relations with Washington. In such a context, the Europeans wanted to avoid the embargo issue upsetting the Americans. As a consequence, the development of the issue disappointed the Chinese. By April 2005, the EU had developed a clearer attitude: the issue (it said) should be reconsidered, the timing was not right. Beijing showed its disappointment at the changing attitude of the EU. As a Chinese newspaper, *Global Times*, remarked:

The EU is doing some hand-wringing again on the arms embargo. This reflects the notion that the EU common diplomacy is still weak. The US makes an all-out effort to prevent the EU from lifting the ban – this should be the EU's own business. The arms embargo issue shows that (the) EU still has difficulty distancing itself from the US in international affairs.⁴³

The US's pressure on the EU reflects the competitive relationship between the US and China over East Asian security. It also reveals that the CFSP is rather weak, and still has

⁴⁰ Quoted in Katrin Bennhold and Graham Bowley, "EU Weighs Tying Arms Embargo to Rights," *International Herald Tribune*, 13 April 2005.

⁴¹ "In Europe, Hu Faces Trade and Human Rights Issues," *The New York Times*, 9 November 2005.

⁴² Please see a concise yet deep analysis of the institution building and the developments and problems of European integration written by Youri Devuyst, *The European Union Transformed: Community Method and Institutional Evolution from the Schuman Plan to the Constitution for Europe* (Presses Interuniversitaires Européennes – Peter Lang, revised and updated edition 2006).

⁴³ Zhang Niansheng et al., "What difficulties does the EU face in lifting arms embargo against China," *Global Times*, 25 March 2005.

a long way to go before the EU can have an independent and well-developed foreign policy.

Both the EU and China take pains to dilute the negative impact of this issue on bilateral relations. To get the issue solved, the EU needs to assure its Chinese counterpart of its commitment to lift the embargo in order to keep the partnership intact. The EU also needs to get a green light from the US on the code of conduct. The Chinese government needs to address the negative impact of the anti-secession law in the international arena by improving its human rights record. It also needs to strengthen the dialogue with the US in order to improve mutual understanding about regional stability and peace. Due to its traditionally close relationship with the EU and its important strategic interest in the Asia-Pacific region, the US enjoys undisputable influence on this issue. How this issue might evolve will depend directly on interactions between the three parties involved.

Complementary Economies: Between Mutual Benefit and Relative Gains

EU-China relations began with economic cooperation and trade in the Cold War period. Since then, the economic complementarities and the pursuit of mutual benefit have gradually increased interdependence between the two partners. With low labor costs and a big market, China is attractive to the Europeans. On the other hand, the EU's comparative advantage in technology and capital makes China increasingly rely on the EU in its economic modernization. By the end of 2006, China had approved an accumulated 25,418 EU-funded projects, involving a contracted EU investment of 97.95 billion US dollars. China has used US\$ 53.18 billion of EU funds, or eight per cent of total foreign funds used in China.⁴⁴

Compared to the dynamic economic development in China, the economic growth rate in the Euro zone is not so impressive. The growth rate of the fifteen member states was down from 1.0 per cent to 0.8 per cent in 2003, and the growth rate of the 12 Euro countries dropped from 0.8 per cent to 0.4 per cent.⁴⁵ Although the economic growth rate of the Euro zone has been improving from 1.4 per cent in 2005 to more than 2 per cent in 2006, the European governments still face a formidable problem in reducing unemployment and encouraging sustainable development. How to effectively explore external markets in order to revitalize the economy is an important concern for the EU countries.

Since the economic reforms were carried out in China in 1978, two-way trade between the EU and China has been growing at an astonishing speed. Bilateral trade reached US\$100 billion for the first time in 2003, when it was three times the bilateral trade volume in 1995. Encouraged by the rapid growth in bilateral trade, the leaders from

⁴⁴ "China-EU trade hits US\$272.3 billion in 2006", *China Daily*, 28 January 2006, available at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2007-01/28/content_794691.htm

⁴⁵ Yang Fengmin and Sun Dingdong, "Zhongguo yu Oumeng: yidui zhongyao de maoyi huoban" (China and the EU: an Important Trade Partner), *Ouzhou yitihua yanjiu (European Integration Studies)*, No. 2 (2005), p. 21.

both sides set a new target at the EU-China summit in 2003 that two-way trade should reach US\$200 billion by 2013.⁴⁶ To the surprise of both sides, this target was in fact fulfilled by 2005 and two-way trade grew further to US\$272 billion in 2006.⁴⁷ Since 2004, the EU has become China's biggest trade partner, while China has become the EU's second biggest trade partner after the US.

Bilateral trade is both an important motive force and a sensitive issue in EU-China relations. Together with the impressive growth in bilateral trade, the imbalance in trade has been rising rapidly. While China's exports to the EU grew nearly nine times from US\$19.09 billion in 1995 to US\$181.98 billion in 2006, China's imports from the EU have only increased from US\$21.25 billion in 1995 to US\$90.32 billion in 2006. In other words, the EU's trade deficit has been growing gradually during these years, from US\$4.619 billion in 1997 to US\$91.66 in 2006.⁴⁸

Such imbalanced trade, according to the EU, has been partly caused by obstacles to market access in China. In order to increase its exports to China, the EU has urged China to liberalize trade flows by removing barriers to imports including price controls, discriminatory registration requirements, and arbitrary sanitary standards.⁴⁹ The two sides have also strengthened their trade and economic dialogues⁵⁰ covering trade policy, the trade in textiles, competition policy, customs cooperation, intellectual property rights, and regulatory and industrial policy.

The gap in trade volumes triggered more problems in 2005 when the 40-year-long quota regime was abolished on January 1.⁵¹ The sharp rise in Chinese textile exports to the EU in the first three months of 2005 led to vocal demands from about half of the 25 EU member states to impose immediate limits on Chinese textile imports. According to the statistics of Chinese customs, Chinese textile exports to the EU-15 countries indicated a 78.4 per cent increase compared to the same period of the previous year; its exports to Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Belgium all increased by more than 80 per cent.⁵² Among the nine categories of textile products under investigation by the EU, the volume of T-shirt imports from China into the EU had shot up by 187 per cent, compared with

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

⁴⁷ See "China-EU trade hits US\$272.3 billion in 2006," *China Daily*, 28 January 2006.

⁴⁸ Luo Xiumei and Zhang Jing, "2004nian Zhongguo yu Oumeng maoyi huigu" (A Look at the China-EU Trade in 2004), *Ouzhou yitihua yanjiu (European Integration Studies)*, No. 2 (2005), p. 33; and "China-EU trade hits US\$272.3 billion in 2006," *China Daily*, 28 January 2006.

⁴⁹ See EU-China Trade Relations, available at http://www.delchn.cec.eu.int/en/eu_china_wto/EU%20China%20Trade%20Relations.htm.

⁵⁰ For example, the textile trade dialogue was proposed by Chinese Premier Wen at his visit to Brussels in 2004 in order to get rid of the potential conflicts after the abolition of textile quotas on 1 January 2005, as well as to assure a smooth transition to the quota-free textiles trade environment.

⁵¹ An important conclusion of the Uruguay Round of General Agreement for Trade and Tariff (GATT) in 1994 was to abolish the Multifibre Agreement (MFA) for the textile and garment industries. The abolition of the MFA took ten years from January 1, 1995 to the end of 2004. From January 1, 2005 on, quotas have been removed for the export of textile and garment products.

⁵² Cai Xiang, "Zhongguo ruhe yingdui Oumeng 'tebao dabang'" (How China Should Counteract Against the EU's Safeguard Measures), *Ouzhou yitihua yanjiu (European Integration Studies)*, No. 3 (2005), p. 42.

the first quarter of the previous year.⁵³ When China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, the admission agreement included a clause that allowed other WTO members to safeguard their own textile industries with measures including quotas if they face a sustained surge in Chinese imports that cause irrevocable harm to their own producers. Nevertheless, the accession agreement required that all the safeguard measures against Chinese textiles be removed by the end of 2008.

Inside the EU, trade issues fall under the first pillar,⁵⁴ which should be dealt with by the Commission. Facing a sharp increase in Chinese products in the European market, some of the member states, particularly the Southern European countries, exerted pressure on the Commission to adopt emergency measures against the huge quantity of Chinese imports coming into Europe. Fearing that the dispute on textiles, in addition to the recent EU refusal to end its arms embargo on China, would have a negative impact on the partnership in general, Peter Mandelson, trade commissioner of the EU, took pains to leave the door open for negotiations and to avoid a confrontation with the Chinese.

The formal negotiations between the two sides reached an agreement in June 2005, introducing quotas on some of the categories of Chinese textile products. However, European importers took advantage of the month-long delay of the enforcement of the restrictions and placed huge orders in an attempt to get quota-free goods into Europe before the deadline arrived. The newly introduced quotas were rapidly exceeded. From July to September 2005, millions of Chinese garments piled up at EU ports awaiting a new round of negotiation between Brussels and Beijing. This issue had to be solved as it threatened to sour EU-China trade relations specifically and the partnership in general. Agreement was reached in early September that year when the British Prime Minister Tony Blair held the rotating presidency of the EU.

The textile dispute revealed some problems in bilateral economic relations. First, although the member states have already transferred part of their sovereignty to the European Commission, and the latter has the right to make overall decisions concerning the economic and trade policies of the Union, the Commission and the member states differ about trade relations with China. Different member states have different interests in trade issues, with the countries in the north promoting market liberalization and the countries in the south trying desperately to protect their markets. It is therefore difficult for the Union to speak with one voice. Secondly, within specific countries, specific groups have different interests. Trading companies, wholesalers and consumers benefiting from cheap products from China are naturally in favor of more imports from China. In contrast, European workers and textile enterprise owners, unable to compete with cheap labor in China, want to exclude and limit Chinese imports. Thirdly, both the EU and China lack a necessary understanding of each other's market development. Information exchange should therefore be strengthened. For example, the US has more than 1,000 employees in its embassy in Beijing, whereas the EU has only about 100 people in its delegation in Beijing, with only about ten people in charge of trade relations

⁵³ Paul Meller, "EU cuts off China talks and moves to WTO," *International Herald Tribune*, 26 May 2005.

⁵⁴ The Treaty of Maastricht which established the European Union has divided EU policies into three main areas. These areas are called pillars. The first pillar covers economic, social and environmental policies.

with China. Facing growing trade between the two sides, the EU needs to invest more human resources in this field. How trade relations will develop in the coming years will largely depend on the policy coordination of the two sides, with China trying to devote major efforts to removing market access barriers to EU exports to the Chinese market, and the EU facing up to the challenge of economic liberalization. As the basis of the EU-China strategic partnership, economic relations have a direct impact on bilateral relations in other fields.

Concluding Remarks

In examining the development of EU-China relations and the establishment of a strategic partnership, this paper points out that both the international political environment and domestic developments on each side have played an important role in bringing the two closer in the post-Cold War era. The confrontational Cold War circumstances and the conflictual ideologies held by the Europeans and the Chinese prevented bilateral relations from developing independently. Despite the normalization of diplomatic relations between Brussels and Beijing in 1975, neither side was seriously committed to developing their bilateral relations until the 1990s.

The collapse of bipolarity fundamentally changed the international political structure. As a consequence of relaxation in the external environment, economic issues largely replaced the security and military issues and topped the agenda of national policy-making. A focus on economic growth and the promotion of globalization in the post-Cold War era have noticeably enhanced economic interdependence between many countries. Between the EU and China, trade relations and economic cooperation serve as the basis for the partnership. Without the dramatic increase of bilateral trade and economic cooperation in the past ten years and more, bilateral relations would not have been as important as they are now. The comparative advantage each side possesses attracts the two towards more business and cooperation, but the growing deficit the EU has developed in its trade with China is a serious problem. If this problem is not addressed in a cautious way, the strategic partnership may be damaged.

The EU and China share an understanding about the importance of maintaining international peace and stability. Such understanding constitutes an essential part of the strategic partnership. To gain an increasing influence in international affairs, each has learned that a multilateral framework is better than unilateralism. Nevertheless, when China promotes the multilateral approach internationally, its idea is to counterbalance American dominance and to frustrate the superpower status of the US globally. In contrast, the EU remains a close ally of the US in the post-Cold War era. Despite the differences between the US and some of the member states of the EU, the cooperative nature of the transatlantic relationship will not change. Between China and the US, relations are characterized by both competition and cooperation, with strategic competition as a major focus. Between the EU and China, both have become noticeably more independent in taking initiatives to strengthen their bilateral relations. However, the US remains the external power which exerts a visible influence on Brussels-Beijing

relations. The arms embargo issue is a typical example in EU-China relations that reveals how much influence the US has over both of them. With regard to the rapid rise of both the EU and China in international politics and the dominant position of the US; the EU, the US, and China may form a complicated triangular relationship in the 21st century. In the opinion of David Shambaugh, “The interaction of the United States, China, and the EU will be a defining feature of the international system in the years to come.”⁵⁵

Policy convergence and divergence between the EU and China will not be static. Following economic and political developments on each side and changes in international relations, the two sides will find both shared and conflicting interests on a wide range of issues. In particular, with “low politics” issues becoming more important in global affairs (for example, environmental protection, energy supply, and sustainable economic development), strengthened inter-governmental cooperation will be required, and the EU-China strategic partnership will face new challenges.

⁵⁵ David Shambaugh, “The New Strategic Triangle: US and European Reactions to China’s Rise,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 3, Summer 2005, p. 7.

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