

## The Evolution of China's EU Policy: from Mao's intermediate zone to a strategic partnership based on non-shared values

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Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence"<sup>1</sup> have been acknowledged as programmatic foreign policy. Although China's diplomatic practice varied in strategies, instruments, forms and aims, according to the different periods, this basic principle of foreign policy has not substantially changed.<sup>2</sup> The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence could be classified as a defensive foreign policy.<sup>3</sup> With the enhancement of China's comprehensive national power, its foreign policy has become more active recently. The release of *China's EU Policy Paper* in 2003 was regarded as such a kind of diplomatic practice.<sup>4</sup> The present study aims to analyze China's European Policy over the past six decades, starting from the founding of the PRC and the beginning of European integration.

China is pursuing another policy towards Europe and the EU than towards great powers (e.g. US and Russia) and neighbourhood countries, as with Europe it concentrates on economy, culture and technology, not having to consider geopolitical restrictions or conflicts of fundamental interest. Over the past six decades, China's policy adjustment towards Europe has been influenced by four factors, namely, the global strategic balance, the process of European integration, the EU's policy towards China and China's changing role in the world economy. The "red thread" running through the evolution of China's policy towards the EU and Europe is going beyond differences in values and ideology. In the 1950s, influenced by the Soviet Union, China insisted on both ideological confrontation and Germany's unification, and therefore opposed the Western European integration movement. In the 1960s, Mao Zedong disregarded the restriction of the ideological confrontation during the Cold War and proposed the concept of a second intermediate zone. The purpose was to

1. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.
2. As it was pointed out in *China's EU Policy Paper*, China would continue to "pursue its independent foreign policy of peace and work closely with other countries for the establishment of a new international political and economic order based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, *China's EU Policy Paper*, 13.10.2003, available online at: <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics/ceupp/t27708.htm>).
3. According to Kuang-Sheng Liao, a Hongkong-based political scientist, defence was the core of China's foreign policy during the last 100 years. The defensive characteristics of China's foreign policy have not changed since the Qing dynasty, through Kuomintang China, to today's PRC, neither from the time of Mao Zedong to Deng Xiaoping. See K.S. LIAO, *Antiforeignism and Modernization in China: 1860-1980*, Chinese University Press, Hong Kong, 1984, Introduction.
4. Z.P. FENG, *An Analysis of China's EU Policy Paper*, in: *Journal of China Foreign Affairs University*, 75(January 2004), pp.49-53, here p.50.

seek the support of the Western European countries in order to counterbalance the hegemony of the United States and the Soviet Union. In the Deng Xiaoping era, China's policy towards the EU and Europe became more pragmatic. According to Deng, Sino-European relations should go beyond the disparities of social systems and ideologies, and focus instead on economic and trade cooperation. After the Cold War, China strengthened the cooperation with the EU in all fields. With the widening of European integration, Beijing attached more importance to the role of the EU in global affairs.

Policy-making is usually influenced by two kinds of ideologies: theoretical and practical ideology, both being also the source of China's foreign policy-making.<sup>5</sup> Theoretical ideology, or the conviction itself, is the belief in some ideals which determine one's daily activities; whereas practical ideology is the use of ideology as an instrument to determine the daily activities of others. The difference is that in the first case ideology is regarded as an end, and in the second case as a means. In the early years of the PRC, the theoretical ideology of its foreign policy was based on the theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marxism Leninism, as well as the thought of Mao and the thought of Deng, were practical ideologies which determined the political activities. The above-mentioned practical ideologies are empirical theories which derive from the historical practices and represent the interests of different development periods. Understanding the background of the practical ideologies could help to understand the true intentions of China's foreign policy towards Europe.<sup>6</sup>

## I. China's Policy towards Europe in the Mao Zedong Era

China's foreign policy towards Europe in the Mao era can be divided into two phases: first, during the period 1949-1960, China's foreign policy was mainly influenced by the ideology of the Cold War. Second, since the political split between China and the Soviet Union in the 1960s, China was internationally isolated and a blockade was imposed from both the United States and the Soviet Union. The existence of a powerful Europe could counterbalance the hegemony of the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup> It was against this historical background that the Second Intermediate Zone and the Three Worlds theory were put forward. The Second Intermediate Zone theory thus laid the basis for China's policy towards Europe.

5. Kuang-Sheng Liao suggested that Chinese communist ideology might be divided into pure ideology and practical ideology. See K.S. LIAO, op.cit., p.111.

6. I would like to thank Jan van der Harst, the reviewers as well as the editors for helpful comments and suggestions. Thanks also to Maria Efstathiou and Geoffrey Harris for interesting discussions. The project is sponsored by MOE Humanities and Social Sciences Research Grant (12YJAGJW004) and Shanghai Pujiang Program. I gratefully acknowledge support for this paper from Fudan University 985-III research project (2011SHKXZD011, 2012SHKXYB010).

7. "We shall be glad to have Europe become powerful". See Z.D. MAO, *Talk with Edward Heath* (25.05.1974), in: *On Diplomacy*, Foreign Language Press, Beijing, 1998, p.456.

### 1. 1. 1949-1960: Purely ideological confrontation

In the first years of the PRC, the priority of its foreign policy was to seek national independence, fight against foreign interference in its internal affairs and seek international recognition for the new regime. During the international anti-communism period, Beijing adopted a “leaning to one side” foreign policy and emphasized the ideological debate and confrontation with the Western countries. Mao’s anti-imperialism theory provided a practical ideology for China’s foreign policy-making in this period. Beijing then considered the Soviet Union its best friend and focused on the relations with the USSR and other Eastern European countries; meanwhile, the United States was China’s number-one enemy. Although Britain, France and other Western European countries were allies of the US, Beijing thought the Europeans eventually as potential supporters of China.

During this period, the practice of China’s European policy had been influenced by the practical ideology of the Soviet Union’s policy towards Europe. Beijing opposed Germany’s division and had a negative attitude about the Western European integration movement which could hinder Germany’s reunification. On March 21, 1951, a commentary published in the *People’s Daily* wrote that the Schuman Plan was a “plot” to split Germany.<sup>8</sup> Another commentary in the same paper on April 13, 1951, was entitled “The Schuman Plan: Death Dealer Alliance”. It pointed out that the Schuman Plan was a tool of the United States to rearm Western Germany.<sup>9</sup> On April 7, 1955, Mao signed the “Order on Termination of the State of War between the People’s Republic of China and Germany”. The Order criticized the United States, Britain and France,

“... through the implementation of the Paris Protocol, to further obstruct the peaceful reunification of Germany and the conclusion of a peace treaty with Germany, thus gravely menacing the peace and security of Europe”.<sup>10</sup>

Although Mao advocated a “leaning to one side” foreign policy, he did not oppose the establishment of normal diplomatic relations with the “capitalist” countries. He pointed out that the Americans were using the anti-communism ideology as a pretext to attain their own interests: The true purpose of establishing US military bases in Germany and Japan was to control the economy of Europe and Eastern Asia.<sup>11</sup> Both China and Western Europe strove for a peaceful international environment to develop themselves. Mao hoped to get support from Britain and France and advocated diplomatic relations with the Western European countries. China established diplomatic relations at ambassadorial level with Sweden, Denmark as well as Switzerland in

8. *People’s Daily*, 21.03.1951.

9. *People’s Daily*, 13.04.1951.

10. Z.D. MAO, *Order on Termination of the State of War between the People’s Republic of China and Germany* (07.04.1955), in: op.cit., pp.154-155.

11. Z.D. MAO, *On the Intermediate Zone, Peaceful Coexistence, Sino-British and Sino-U.S. Relations* (24.08.1954), in: op.cit., p.123.

1950 and diplomatic relations at agency level with Britain and the Netherlands in 1954.

According to Mao, peace and trade were two basic conditions for cooperation between China and Western Europe. He appealed for the disarmament of all countries and suggested that different social systems could coexist peacefully.<sup>12</sup>

## ***1. 2. 1960-1976: Europe as the intermediate zone of China's foreign policy***

In the 1960s, as a result of ideological divergences, the Sino-Soviet relations worsened. While reexamining its “leaning to one side” foreign policy, the Chinese government successively put forward “the Second Intermediate Zone” and “the Three Worlds” theory. Beijing hoped to counterbalance the superpowers with the rise of a powerful Europe. The concept of the second intermediate zone eliminated the absolute ideological confrontation between China and the Western European countries and paved the way for the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the European Community in 1975. In 1971, China joined the United Nations. The priority of its foreign policy had shifted from the Third World to the Second World, and especially to the Western European countries.

In 1962, the Sino-Indian War broke out. Both the Soviet Union and the United States came out in support of India and provided it with substantial economic and military assistance. Confronted with three powerful opponents, China was urged to mitigate the tense relations with the United States. During this period, China's foreign policy deviated from the strategic objective against US imperialism and shifted to confrontation with the hegemony of the Soviet Union.

In the early 1960s, in order to improve the relations with Europe, especially with Western European countries, Mao put forward the intermediate zone theory. The intermediate zone as a concept was first brought up by Mao in a talk with the American correspondent Anna Louise Strong in 1946. Regarding the possibility of a US-Soviet war, Mao pointed out that an attack on the Soviet Union would not be easy, since the United States and the Soviet Union were separated by a vast zone which included Europe, Asia and Africa.<sup>13</sup> In the 1960s, Mao put the intermediate zone concept in concrete terms. In his view, there should be two intermediate zones: Asia, Africa and Latin America made up the first; the developed capitalist countries represented by Western Europe constituted the second one. Although these countries varied by their social systems, Beijing wanted to develop relations with them and work together against the hegemony of the United States and the Soviet Union. According to Mao, the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe, such as Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and so on, possessed powerful capital, yet they were in

12. Ibid., pp.123-124.

13. Z.D. MAO, *Talk with the American Correspondent Anna Louise Strong* (06.08.1946), in: op.cit., p. 46.

conflict with the United States and the Soviet Union; West Germany, with its economic rise, would inevitably confront the United States in the future.<sup>14</sup>

The second intermediate zone theory broke through the ideological restrictions in international relations during the Cold War. China then changed its attitude towards the Western European countries (the European Community). Beijing emphasized common interests and cooperation, as well as the promotion of commercial and cultural exchanges between China and Europe.<sup>15</sup> In 1964, China and France established diplomatic relations. In 1965, in a meeting with André Malraux, the French Minister for Cultural Affairs, Mao pointed out that, if China wanted to become a powerful nation, it needed Europe as a friend.<sup>16</sup> From 1970 to 1973, China established diplomatic relations with Italy, Austria, Belgium, Iceland, Cyprus, Malta, Greece, West Germany, Luxembourg and Spain successively. In 1975, China started diplomatic relations with the European Economic Community (EEC). Beijing welcomed Britain's accession to the EEC in 1972 and regarded it as a weakening of American influence in Europe and a strengthening of Europe's independence.<sup>17</sup>

In the 1970s, on the basis of the intermediate zone theory, Mao put forward the differentiation of the Three Worlds: the United States and the Soviet Union belonged to the First World; Europe, Japan, Australia and Canada belonged to the Second World; the developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America belonged to the Third World. Mao felt that the Second World and the Third World had been exploited by the First World and ought to work together against the hegemony of the First World.<sup>18</sup> In April 1974, at the 6<sup>th</sup> special session of the UN General Assembly, Deng Xiaoping expounded the Three Worlds theory. From 1974 to 1992, the Three Worlds theory would be the major practical ideology of China's foreign policy.

Mao used the differentiation of the three worlds to replace the purely ideological confrontation between "capitalism" and "socialism" and tried to break through the East-West confrontation during the Cold War. The Three Worlds theory enriched China's diplomatic strategies. Three different diplomatic strategies could be derived from this theory:

A. The diplomatic strategy towards superpowers (the First World): focusing on defence against superpowers;

14. Z.D. MAO, *There are two Intermediate Zones* (09.1963; 01.1964 and 07.1964), in: op.cit., pp.388-389.
15. Z.D. MAO, *China and France Share Common Ground* (30.01.1964), in: op.cit., p.398.
16. Z.D. MAO, *Talk with the French Minister for Cultural Affairs Andre Malraux* (03.08.1965), in: *Long Live Mao Zedong's Thought*, Japan Kokura Version, 1969, p.619.
17. Mao Zedong's talk with the French Foreign Minister Maurice Schumann (Z.D. MAO, *Soviet Policy is a Feint to the East and Attack in the West* (10.07.1972), in: op.cit., p.452); K. MÖLLER, *Die Außenpolitik der Volksrepublik China 1949-2004*, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden, 2005, p.229.
18. Z.D. MAO, *On the Question of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds* (22.02.1974), in: op.cit., p.454.

B. The diplomatic strategy towards developed countries (the Second World): strive for their support and cooperation to counterbalance the superpowers of the First World;

C. The diplomatic strategy towards developing countries (the Third World): supply appropriate aid to the developing countries and oppose hegemonic expansion of the superpowers.

The Three Worlds theory facilitated the political and economic cooperation between China and the Western European countries.

Both the Intermediate Zone theory and the Three Worlds theory are based on a vision for a multi-polar world. Due to the weakness of its national power, China's European policy in the era of Mao focused on national security and geopolitical perspectives. Beijing hoped that a united Western Europe could become an independent power and constrain the dominance of the United States and the Soviet Union.

## II. China's Policy towards the EU in the Deng Xiaoping Era

After the Cultural Revolution, China's domestic politics shifted from "class struggle" to "economic construction". Both domestic stability and a peaceful international environment were prerequisites for China's economic and social development. Peace and development were the main objectives of Deng's diplomatic thinking. Deng repeatedly stressed that modernization was China's core issue, as well as the key for solving domestic and international problems.<sup>19</sup>

During this period, China's foreign policy focused on establishing a new international political and economic order on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. According to Deng, multi-polarity was a political basis for the creation of a new international order, and the non-interference in internal affairs was the most basic principle.<sup>20</sup> The development of relations with Europe was considered as one of the prerequisites for China's 'independent' foreign policy. As Deng pointed out in a talk with the Belgian Prime Minister Wilfried Martens in 1985, a strong and independent Europe could help China to adhere to its independent diplomatic strategy.<sup>21</sup> Beijing hoped that Western Europe could maintain a certain distance from the United States and carry out a relatively independent foreign policy. In the Deng era China's foreign policy was more pragmatic and emphasized on national interests. Strengthening Sino-EU economic relations was the priority of China's policy towards Europe.

19. X.P. DENG, *Speech at an Enlarged Meeting of the Military Commission of the Central Committee of Chinese Communist Party*" (04.06.1985), in: *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping III*, People's Publishing House, Beijing, 1993, pp.128-129.

20. X.P. DENG, *The International Situation and Economic Problems* (03.03.1990), in: op.cit., p.353.

21. Z.C. YE, *China's Diplomatic Thinking: from Mao Zedong to Deng Xiaoping*, Beijing University Press, Beijing, 2001, p.253.

## ***II. 1. 1976-1989: Economic Construction as Central Task***

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations with China in 1975, the European Community (EC) had always held an “intermediate” position on China’s foreign policy. From a geopolitical point of view, the EC could restrain the Soviet Union; concerning the international financial system and world economy, the EC was regarded as a potential rival to the United States. China’s development required a stable and peaceful international environment. A powerful Europe should not only be conducive to the maintenance of world peace and stability, but also, to a certain extent, meet China’s demands on economic, political and technological development. In April 1978, China and the EEC signed the Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement. They granted each other a most-favoured nation treatment. In 1985, on the basis of the above agreement, China and the EC signed another trade and economic cooperation agreement. Both sides agreed to promote further cooperation in industry, agriculture, science and technology, energy, transportation, environmental protection and development assistance. In 1988, China and the EC mutually established diplomatic missions.

## ***II. 2. 1989-1994: Surmount Ideological Differences***

In 1989, the relations between China and the EU came to twists and turns. Since the Tiananmen incident on June 4, 1989, the EC terminated its diplomatic relations with China and implemented a series of sanctions including an arms embargo. Even under these circumstances, Deng concentrated on domestic stability and development rather than worry about the Western sanctions and blockade. Faced with these sanctions, Deng’s foreign policy remained flexible: on the one hand, Beijing was firmly opposed to any Western interference in its internal affairs; on the other hand, Beijing strove to break the blockades and sanctions and improve relations with these countries.<sup>22</sup> After short-term tense relations between China and the EC, the latter decided in October 1990 to rebuild bilateral relations step-by-step. Since 1992, relations between China and the EU have returned to normal, and the China-EU Environment Dialogue started in the same year. In 1994, China and the EU launched a new bilateral political dialogue, the bilateral relations entering thus a new stage. But the arms embargo has not yet been lifted.

Compared with the foreign policy in the Mao era, Deng’s policy line was more flexible and inclusive: focusing on national interests, going beyond the disparities of social systems and ideology, seeking common dialogue and cooperation. On the issue of Europe, Deng held that a powerful Europe would meet China’s interests. In his

22. X.P. DENG, *China will never Allow other Countries to Interfere in its Internal Affairs* (11.07.1990), in: op.cit., p.361.

view, a powerful Europe would be conducive to build a new world order.<sup>23</sup> However, due to the geopolitical constellation and historical alliance factors, in comparison with the relations between China and the US, Russia or Japan, as well as the Korean Peninsula, China's foreign policy never considered the EU-China relations a priority. Strengthening economic cooperation between China and the EU has always been the main target in bilateral relations. During Deng's period, technology transfer, attracting foreign investment and promoting bilateral trade were three key words in the economic and trade relations between China and the EU. Using foreign intelligence and expanding China's opening-up were considered by Deng as a strategic issue. He thought about the difficult economic situation in the Western European countries as an opportunity and suggested that China should strengthen technological cooperation with Europe in order to promote domestic technological transformation.<sup>24</sup>

### III. China's EU Policy after the Cold War

Since the release of *A Long Term Policy for China-Europe Relations* by the EU in 1995, these relations had entered a new stage. Due to China's rapid economic growth, the EU attached more importance to its China policy and became more involved than in the past. With the development of European integration, the role and influence of the EU on the whole in regional and international affairs also received more attention from China. In 2003, Beijing released China's EU Policy Paper. In the same year, the EU and China announced the establishment of a "comprehensive strategic partnership". However, without shared values as a basis, it is difficult for both sides to achieve real strategic convergence. Compared with China's great power and neighbourhood policy, the EU is rather a subordinate than a "strategic" partner in China's foreign policy.

#### III. 1. China's EU Policy Paper

In 2003, China issued its first EU Policy paper.<sup>25</sup> The significance of the paper release itself was far greater than its contents. First, its release was regarded as a positive response to the EU's China Policy. From 1995 to 2003, the EU had issued five policy

23. X.P. DENG, *Strengthen the Economic Relations with Europe* (08.04.1985), in: op.cit., p.119.

24. X.P. DENG, *Using Foreign Intelligence and Expanding the Opening-up* (08.07.1983), in: op.cit., p.32.

25. *China's EU Policy Paper* is China's first foreign policy paper since its founding in 1949. Beijing issued *China's Africa Policy Paper* in 2006.



papers on China.<sup>26</sup> In 1998, the European Commission adopted a report entitled “Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China”. The Commission is in charge of regularly evaluating the policy implementation and making new recommendations. Second, the paper indicated that China should attach more importance to the EU as a whole. The release of the policy paper coincided with a series of significant advances achieved within European integration.<sup>27</sup> As a global actor, the EU played an increasingly important role in international economy, politics and security. Third, China's EU Policy Paper was interpreted as an adjustment of China's foreign policy.<sup>28</sup> With the enhancement of its comprehensive national power, China was more likely to play an active role rather than that of a passive defender of regional and global affairs.

China's EU Policy Paper can be regarded as a kind of re-positioning after the Cold War. It consisted of a preface and a main text which included three parts: part one, status and role of the European Union; part two, China's EU policy; part three, the strengthening of China-EU cooperation in all fields – the core of the paper, part two, making up only about 10% of the whole paper. The policy objectives could be summarized as “seeking common ground while reserving differences”. The core content is consistent with the “four principles for the development of the relationship between China and Western Europe”<sup>29</sup> which was presented by Jiang Zemin in Paris in 1994.

After the Cold War, both China and the EU attached more importance to each other in their foreign policies. From 1995 to 2003 the EU-China relationship had developed rapidly. The former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, the President of the European Council in 2003, spoke of a “quantum leap” in the EU-China relations during this period.<sup>30</sup> In 2004 American scholars predicted even the emerging of a “Europe-China axis” in a multi-polar world order.<sup>31</sup> The release of China's EU Policy Paper indicated that Beijing's expectations in the EU-China relations were getting

26. Communication of the Commission of the European Communities, *A Long-Term Policy for China-Europe Relations*, COM(1995) 279 final, Brussels, 05.07.1995; COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, *Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China*, COM(1998) 181 final, Brussels, 25.03.1998; COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, *Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the Implementation of the Communication “Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China”*, COM(2000) 552 final, Brussels, 08.09.2000; COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, *EU Strategy towards China: Implementation of the 1998 Communication and Future Steps for a More Effective EU Policy*, COM(2001) 265 final, Brussels, 15.05.2001; COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, *A Maturing Partnership – Shared Interests and Challenges in EU-China Relations*, COM(2003) 533 final, Brussels, 10.09.2003.
27. The Treaty of Nice was signed in 2001; Euro coins and banknotes entered circulation in 2002 and the EU's enlargement took place in 2004.
28. Z.P. FENG, op.cit., pp.49-50.
29. The four principles are: first, development of long-term and stable relations and cooperation with a view to the 21<sup>st</sup> century; second, mutual respect and seeking common ground while reserving differences; third, mutual complementarities, mutual benefit and common development; fourth, resolution of international problems through consultation and cooperation.
30. K. MÖLLER, op.cit., p.237.
31. D. SHAMBAUGH, *China and Europe: The Emerging Axis*, in: *Current History*, September 2004, pp.243-248, here p.243.

higher. Beijing hoped that the EU could play an independent global role and promote democracy in international relations. It now appears that this view might have been too optimistic.

### III. 2. China-EU Relations in the Context of China's Diplomatic Strategy

Since 2004, the EU has surpassed Japan and the United States to become China's most important trading partner. From January to September 2011, the trade volume between China and the EU totalled 317.0 billion Euros, while the volume of EU-US trade was 328.5 billion.<sup>32</sup> China is likely to replace the United States and become the EU's largest trading partner in the near future.<sup>33</sup> Thus, China and the EU are becoming each other's most important trading partner. Trade and economic cooperation are the basis of the China-EU comprehensive strategic partnership. Compared with China-EU trade and economic relations, the position of the EU in China's foreign policy needs to be strengthened. In the report *Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China*, the EU proposed to make its relation with China commensurable with other major partners such as the US, Japan and Russia.<sup>34</sup> In China's EU Policy Paper it was also pointed out that the strengthening of China-EU relations was an important component of China's foreign policy.<sup>35</sup> However, compared to Sino-US, Sino-Japanese and Sino-Russian relationships, the EU-China relations have played rather a subordinate role.

The press conference by the Minister of Foreign Affairs during the annual National People's Congress in March uses to be acknowledged as a trend indicator for China's foreign policy. From 1996 to 2011, the four foreign ministers have held 16 press conferences,<sup>36</sup> in which Sino-Japan relations have been referred to 15 times, Sino-US relations 14 times, Sino-Russian relations 14 times, China and Korean Peninsula relations 12 times, whereas China-EU relations have been discussed only 8 times.<sup>37</sup> Reference was also made to some EU member states, such as Great Britain, France

32. EUROSTAT, *The monthly bulletin on external and intra-European Union trade*, 12(2011), p.25.

33. According to government figures released in January 2012, the trade volume between China and the EU-27 from January to November 2011 totalled \$ 517.1 billion; the total number is expected to reach \$ 570 billion in 2011. In the second half of 2011, China surpassed the US to become the largest trade partner of the EU-27, and the EU-27 surpassed Japan to become the largest source of China's imports (State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, available online at: <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zhzc/1/2/201201/t1076718.htm>).

34. Communication of the Commission of the European Communities, *Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China*, p.5.

35. *China's EU Policy Paper*, p.3.

36. The four Foreign Ministers are: Qian Qichen (1996-1998); Tang Jiaxuan (1999-2003); Li Zhaoxing (2004-2007); Yang Jiechi (2008-2011).

37. Human rights issues, protectionism, arm embargo and Tibet have been discussed 6 times, and EU's role in international affairs twice.

and Portugal, which were mentioned 6 times.<sup>38</sup> From 2000 to 2004, at five press conferences held by the Ministers Tang Jiaxuan and Li Zhaoxing, China-EU relations had not been mentioned at all, although just during this period, European integration had made great achievements because of the launch of the Euro in 2002 and the EU enlargement in 2004. In these five years (2000-2004), China-EU relations had entered a stage of rapid development: the EU issued three policy papers on China (2000, 2001, 2003), and Beijing released its very first policy paper on the EU (2003); at the China-EU summit held in 2003, both parties agreed to establish a comprehensive strategic partnership.

It is worth noticing that in the past decade China's foreign policy attached high importance to Sino-US relations. The last two Foreign Ministers were former Chinese Ambassadors to the United States, namely Li Zhaoxing (2003-2007) and Yang Jiechi (2007-2012). At the four press conferences held by Li Zhaoxing from 2004 to 2007, EU-China relations have been mentioned in a rather negative context only one time. Li Zhaoxing criticized that the EU's arms embargo against China was political discrimination, disproportionate in comparison to the comprehensive strategic partnership.<sup>39</sup> The EU has never achieved a commensurable position in China's foreign policy as the great powers such as the United States, Russia and Japan. In comparison, during this period, the Chinese-African relations have developed rapidly. They have been referred to at the Foreign Minister Press Conference every year since the release of China's Africa Policy in 2006. For both the EU and China the so-called comprehensive strategic partnership is just an expectation.

With the deepening and widening of the cooperation in all fields, frictions between the EU and China on the issue of trade, economy and values are on steady increase. The main problems in the field of trade and economy are protectionism and anti-dumping policies, whereas the value disparities concern human rights issues, Tibet and the arms embargo. China's *EU Policy Paper* in 2003 outlined the cooperation areas and related measures between the EU and China for the next five years, which should be evaluated regularly and updated in the next period. However, a new policy paper on the EU has not yet been launched. Since 2005, China and the EU have shown many disagreements on human rights issues, Tibet, Africa issues and environmental responsibilities. The EU-China relations have been affected by overemphasizing val-

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38. China-Britain relations have been discussed twice (the return of Hong Kong); China-Portugal relations once (the return of Macao); China-France relations three times (arms sales to Taiwan, Tibet, etc.).
  39. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, *Li Zhaoxing Answers Questions on China's Diplomacy and International Affairs*, 06.03.2005, available online at: <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics/TwoSessions/t186024.htm>.

ue debates. Beijing was dissatisfied with EU's criticism on China's domestic and foreign policy,<sup>40</sup> and so China-EU relations came again in twists and turns.<sup>41</sup>

There are several reasons why China does not grant the same importance to the EU relations as to the US or Japan. First, there is the factor of the geopolitical importance and geographic proximity. As the US shifted its global strategy focus from Europe towards the Asia-Pacific region, China's diplomacy with its neighbouring countries carries more weight. Second, Beijing is relatively disappointed with the role of the EU as an independent global actor. The EU tends to express its political concerns through dialogue. Beijing appreciates this consultative approach. However, due to internal problems of the CFSP mechanism, it is hard for the EU to play a role of a credible strategic actor. So far, the role of the EU in international affairs had mainly concentrated on its surrounding area.<sup>42</sup> In recent years, there have appeared vital political differences between the EU and China on the issues of Zimbabwe, Sudan, Myanmar, Libya, Iran and Syria etc. In dealing with international issues, the EU remains an ally of the US.

Since the European sovereign debt crisis in 2011, China's policy towards the EU stays on the fence as regards the uncertainties and scepticism of European integration, and needs further adjustment. Recently, it has been discussed in China whether Beijing should pay more attention to the EU member states as they tend to a pragmatic foreign policy.<sup>43</sup> The position of the EU in China's foreign policy has been marginalized and does not get the necessary attention.<sup>44</sup>

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40. From 2006 to 2008 the European Parliament adopted a series of resolutions and reports on China which provoked negative response from Beijing: European Parliament, *Resolution on EU-China Relations* (2005/2161(INI)), 07.09.2006; European Parliament, *Resolution on Tibet*, (2008/2557(RSP)), 10.04.2008; European Parliament, *China's Policy and Its Effects on Africa* (2007/2255(INI)), 23.04.2008, etc.
  41. China cancelled the annual EU-China summit in November 2008.
  42. Z.M. CHEN, *China-EU Relations in a New Multi-polar and Multi-partnership World*, in: *Chinese Journal of European Studies*, 1(2010), pp.1-16, here p.9.
  43. Z.P. FENG, *Reflections on China's EU policy*, in: *Contemporary International Relation*, November 2010, pp.16-17, here p.17.
  44. After the cancellation of the EU-China summit in 2008, China was presented in Europe as not attaching importance to the EU (*How China sees the world?* in: *The Economist*, 19.03.2009; T. BARBER, *China sees EU as mere pawn in global game*, in: *Financial Times*, 23.04.2009, etc.). In Beijing's view, Sarkozy's meeting with the Dalai Lama during France's rotating EU presidency undermined China's core interest, and sabotaged the political basis of China-EU relations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, *He Yafei Lodges a Strong Protest to Sarkozy's Meeting with the Dalai Lama*, 10.12.2008, available online at: <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjlb/zjzg/xos/gjlb/3291/3293/t525570.htm>).

## Conclusion

The multi-polar vision has been an important element of China's EU policy over the past six decades. A united and strong Europe as a credible global actor has been considered a positive factor for the implementation of China's independent foreign policy. During the Cold War, China improved its relations with Europe to counter-balance the dominance of the United States and the Soviet Union. In the post-Cold War era, the EU has been regarded as China's important partner in the promotion of multi-polarity. China continues to constrain US unilateralism through the construction of a multi-polar world, unlike the EU which follows on multilateralism.<sup>45</sup> Beijing's multi-polar strategy is built on a strong sense of sovereignty and the principle of non-interference in internal affairs. According to Beijing, sovereignty and security are the most important national interests which are associated with domestic stability.

The emergence of the EU as a global actor and normative power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century coincided with the economic rise of China. With the deepening of China-EU economic interdependence, their value differences came into the foreground. Unlike the strategic partnership with other global players, the EU-China comprehensive strategic partnership is based on non-shared values. The EU pursues a value-oriented foreign policy.<sup>46</sup> Common values provide the basis for the EU's position as a normative power, and also contribute to upholding the coherence and consistency within the EU. For a domestic sustainable development, it is necessary for Beijing to establish and strengthen a "core value system" to uphold cohesion and stability within China. In regional and global affairs, Beijing pursues an interest-oriented rather than a value-oriented foreign policy. Common interests are regarded as the basis of the China-EU strategic partnership, whereas value disparities remain a constraint. The disputes between the EU and China on the issues of democracy, the rule of law, human rights, sovereignty etc., could undermine the basis of a functional multilateralism. If the value disparities can not be resolved and surmounted, the so-called China-EU comprehensive strategic partnership will remain only on paper.

45. In dealing with some international issues, Beijing does not like to solve bilateral problems through a multilateral approach. On the issue of Africa, Beijing adopted a relatively passive stance towards the initiative of the trilateral dialogue between the EU, China and Africa.

46. A. de VASCONCELOS (eds.), *A strategy for EU foreign policy*, EUISS, Paris, 2010, p.15.

