

Bajo la mirada de Oriente: Europa vista por el partido comunista chino. Análisis del discurso político chino contemporáneo sobre Europa

Under Eastern Eyes: Europe seen by the Chinese Communist Party. Analysis of the contemporary Chinese political discourse on Europe

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ABSTRACT

Defining the identity of the European Union, a completely new political entity on the international scene, is a topic that has drawn the attention of many scholars since the integration process took off more than sixty years ago. The present work aims to expand the knowledge about the question of today's "Communitarian European Identity". We shall do so by providing what the author considers a very relevant reference: the vision of Europe held by the Chinese political elite.

This paper focuses on the analysis of the contents and the evolution of the perception of Europe developed by the four historical leaders of the Chinese Communist Party: Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. This research covers a time scope of sixty years, since the proclamation of the Chinese People's Republic in 1949 to the first decade of the 21st Century. The public discourse on Europe coming from the Chinese political leaders has been summarized in accordance with the following issues: a description of the historic evolution of the Chinese perception of Europe; the Chinese political discourse on the European integration process; the Chinese perception of Europe as an "international actor"; and, finally, the Chinese understanding of the European values.

Keywords: Europe, Chinese Political Elite, International Relations.

JEL Classification: F5.

RESUMEN

La tarea de definir la identidad de la Unión Europea, una entidad política completamente nueva en la escena internacional, es una cuestión que ha atraído el interés de teóricos y académicos desde que arrancó el proceso integrador hace ya más de sesenta años. El objetivo de este trabajo es el de arrojar luz sobre la cuestión de la “identidad europea comunitaria”. Nos proponemos hacerlo con la aportación de lo que consideramos un referente de gran valor: la visión que de Europa tiene la élite política china.

Este artículo se centra en el análisis de la esencia y la evolución en la percepción de Europa de los cuatro líderes históricos del Partido Comunista Chino: Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. El presente trabajo de investigación abarca un periodo de sesenta años, desde la fundación de la República Popular hasta la primera década del siglo XXI. Hemos tratado de resumir el discurso público chino sobre Europa en los siguientes bloques de contenidos: una descripción de la evolución histórica que ha experimentado la percepción china de Europa; el discurso político chino sobre el proceso de integración europeo; la percepción china de Europa como “actor internacional”; y, finalmente, el concepto que China tiene de los valores europeos.

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Keywords: Europa, élite política china, relaciones internacionales.

Clasificación JEL: F5.



1. INTRODUCTION

The perception of Europe held by the four generations of Chinese leaders must be understood not only in terms of the current political discourse of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), but, moreover, in a much broader intellectual process. This process includes the effort of building or rebuilding China's modern identity and its relation to the world. It also deals with the consolidation of China's own path of modernization. A path that chose in 1949 the way of the Socialist Revolution but that did not spare, however, elements of the indigenous Chinese culture tradition. Despite the rigidity of its ideology, Chinese socialism has undergone a long and deep transformation from 1949 until the present day, and the vision of the outside world held by the leaders of the CCP has changed too.

Chinese socialism has been reformulated through every generation of the Chinese leaders, and each formulation has added new contents that made possible to see Europe from different perspectives. Mao Zedong beheld Europe through the eyes of a revolutionary leader. According to Mao, Europe was a force which was struggling the contradiction of belonging to the capitalist world, and had to endure at the same time the pressure to its territorial security imposed by the two superpowers, the United States of America and the Soviet Union. Deng Xiaoping successfully gave up the Maoist "war and revolution" perspective, and replaced it by the motto "peace and development". "Economic construction as the central task" became the new Chinese politics leitmotiv. This remarkable Chinese reformer set the grounds of a Chinese new diplomacy and changed the way China interacted with the world. Europe gained a new meaning in Chinese political discourse since it was understood that it could play a very important role in China's modernization. Jiang Zemin strictly observed the path of modernization envisaged by Deng as defined by the party as "Socialism with Chinese characteristics". He began to see Europe not only as an important economic partner, but also as a likeable new force in the new world order that emerged quite unexpectedly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. A force that could contribute decisively to create a future multipolar world.

The Chinese formulation of Socialism acquires a new meaning and a new international dimension with Hu Jintao and the group of leaders of the fourth generation of the CCP. Reaching a "harmonious society" became the main political slogan of the party in national affairs. Building a "harmonious world" was Hu's corresponding vow in international relations. This "new" meaning in China's foreign policy discourse is regarded nowadays as "old", since it draws back inspiration from the past, from the very roots of the Chinese tradition culture of "hehe wenhua" (和合文化), or the "culture of

harmony”. In Hu Jintao’s project of spreading “harmony” in international relations, Europe is invited to co-build a prosperous and peaceful world by holding what the Chinese leader name called “baorong jingshen” (包容精神), a “tolerant and magnanimous spirit”. This enouncement is certainly a new way to describe the performance between global forces; the moral element is stronger and it clearly goes beyond the line of international behaviour defended by China since the 50’s with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence¹. Ideology has vanished; morality, which is a universal category, has taken its place in the enouncement of Chinese foreign policy in the 21st Century.

This work analyses the different expressions of the PCC political discourse on Communitarian Europe since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Our research is aimed to give an answer to the following questions: how has the perception of Europe evolved since Mao Zedong until now? How have the four historical leaders of the CCP seen the historical process of European integration? To what extent have the four generations of Chinese leaders perceived the European Union as an international actor? And, how did they judge Europe’s global role? How does the Chinese political elite understand the values proclaimed by the European Union? By answering these questions the author hopes to contribute in deepening the knowledge about today’s communitarian identity of Europe, or at least to show new topics for self-reflection and discussion to those Europeans engaged in the search of a contemporary European identity.

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2. CHINESE POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON EUROPE

2.1. Evolution of the perception process in the Chinese leadership

It is obvious that the way Chinese leaders are going to address to Europe had to evolve and change following the trends of time. In the period covered by this study (1949-2010) the world has experimented impressive changes in terms of its geopolitical definition: from the stiff bipolarity of the cold war, where ideology divided the world in two sides, to the post -cold war era, where the globalization placed the economic issues on top of each country foreign policy agenda. The ideological factor has progressively faded; the modernization process has taken its place as the ultimate purpose of foreign policy. In the same way, international cooperation has replaced the spirit of confrontation that the two Cold War blocks held. This is a historical background that we cannot disregard when analyzing the perception of Europe by the Chinese political elite, a perception that has also evolved.

The transformation that has been operated in the way the Chinese leaders understood Europe during the last sixty years could be summarized in the following terms: The Chinese vision of Europe has gone from a subjective perception, based on a partial and



fragmentary knowledge of the European integration process, to an independent perception based on a much more objective and accurate understanding of the European reality. There are several factors that can help us to explain this evolution of the way the Chinese leaders have fashioned their vision of Europe.

2.1.1. From a personal to a collective form of Leadership

The first of these factors is the change in leadership style and way of governance that has taken place in China between the first two generations of leaders and the latter ones. Despite their deep differences concerning policy directions, the first and second generations of Chinese leaders, represented respectively by Mao and Deng, actually belonged to the same “biological” generation. Both of them were “revolutionary leaders”; both tried to fight back the Japanese aggression, fought against the troops of the nationalists’ Guomindang, and carried out the socialist revolution. Acclaimed as paramount leaders, they developed a leadership style and a way of governance based on a strong charisma, and a very personal way to understand politics. The “personality cult” to the leader, particularly prominent during Mao’s era, made virtually impossible any kind of disagreement within the party.

In contrast, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao who could be labeled as “post-revolutionary leaders” represent a much more “collective” way of governance as a result of a reinforcement and “normalization” of the political apparatus of the CCP. Revolutionaries have been replaced by technocrats, the number of army high officers has decreased notoriously within the Central committee, and in their place, highly educated members of the party, with much more awareness of the international situation, have gained much more political responsibility (MILLER; LIU, 2001: 123-150).

The Chinese public discourse on Europe during the 50’s and 60’s was no other than the personal vision held by the supreme leader, Mao Zedong. Mao’s personal way of leadership had two obvious implications in the way China perceived other powers and established its relations with the outside world. First, the fact of being the paramount leader, concentrating all the political power and possessing an exceptional charisma, embedded Mao Zedong with enough “authority” to enunciate “world theories”. Mao’s Theories automatically became the most feasible explanations for all the Chinese about the world’s reality. So, in a time when China was isolated from the world, the Chinese political class and the ordinary people could only understand Europe through the eyes of Mao Zedong.

During the 50’s and 60’s, Mao popularized the “Intermediate Zones” theory, a description of a world that emphasized the strategic importance of the countries and territories located (ideologically speaking) in the middle of what, using the Marxist rhetoric, was for Mao the biggest contradiction in the international scene: the

competition between the socialist and the capitalist sides. Led by the Soviet Union and followed by China, the socialist side had the historic mission of defeating the imperialistic attack led by the capitalist block. The reason of being of this heterogeneous amalgam of the countries that composed the “intermediate zone” was, for Mao, no other than to be attracted to become part of a “united front” against the capitalist imperialism. After the sino-soviet split of the 70’s, Mao devised his world theory in a version according to the new political circumstances. The “three worlds theory” described now the biggest contradiction between the “first world” represented by the two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the US (both considered by Mao now as “imperialist”) and the “third world”. Mao’s description of the “third world” included countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, all united in a continuous struggle against what Mao called the “capitalist” or “socialist” imperialism. The “second world”, a new category of countries in which Mao placed Europe, Japan and Canada, had the same strategic role for Mao that the former “intermediate zones”; the “third world” ought to attract them and get their support to create a united front against both forms of imperialism.

Despite its ideologically “capitalistic” nature, in the explanatory framework that Mao Zedong exposed for China’s international relations, Europe had consistently the role of being a potential member of the “united front” against imperialism. Communitarian Europe was first considered as an “intermediate zone” (MAO ZEDONG, 1994: 159, 487, 508), or later on, a member of the “second world” (MAO ZEDONG, 1998: 370-380).

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The second implication of Mao’s personal form of leadership was the high degree of subjectivity in the analysis and evaluation of the international affairs. In the specific case of Europe, Mao Zedong’s perception was “articulated” (SHAMBAUGH, 1992: 101-114; FRIEDRICH, 1997: 59-84) attending to his “feelings” or expectations about the international sphere more than about the reality of the incipient European Community. For example, Mao Zedong had a high consideration of the independent policy carried out by De Gaulle², a policy seen at that time as a proud answer from the French to the hegemonic power of the United States. This led Mao Zedong to believe that Western Europe -the same Europe that some years before benefited from the large and generous aid of the Marshall Plan- could also stand against the big power. And this was because Mao Zedong “wanted” to believe that Europe could be a likely member of the united front against American imperialism. A United front that was not devoid of a halo of romanticism emanated from Mao Zedong revolutionary spirit.

Mao’s division of the three worlds was precisely the conceptual framework used in foreign policy that inherited Deng Xiaoping, who also kept, although to a much lesser degree, the personal leadership style. The degree of subjectivity was also present in Deng’s first evaluation of Europe, when he went on with seeing the European Community during the 80’s as a possible military ally against the soviet expansionism.



This inadequate approach to Europe inevitably led Deng Xiaoping to feel a disappointment about European capabilities: the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe held in 1975 in Helsinki had a completely different result to what Deng had expected (for China). The power of the Soviet Union was not undermined; on the contrary, the Soviet Union was the great winner of the Helsinki Accords, and Europe didn't turn into a political opponent for the Soviet Union (as Deng would have liked); instead, Western Europe countries chose the way of dialogue and peaceful negotiation to pave the way for a future harmonious relation with the Soviet Union and the East European countries. This led Deng Xiaoping to affirm that The Helsinki Accords are just a written agreement. Its only use is to cover The Soviet Union's strategy to increase its armament and to get ready for war. The risk of war is growing (DENG XIAOPING, 1998: 101). Nevertheless, Deng's contribution to the change of perception was huge. The revolutionary rhetoric was progressively given up and alongside with it the world theories proclaimed by Mao.

No theoretical formulations have emerged from the post Mao leadership to provide an alternative framework for Chinese foreign policy. A much more collective consensus spirit has been imposed in the new political slogans of the post revolutionary generations of Chinese leaders: "Peace and development" and "Building a harmonious world" are much more ethereal and abstract formulations: this has brought much more adaptability and pragmatism in China's approach to Europe.

2.1.2. Institutionalization of China-EU relations

Another major factor that has helped towards the change in the Chinese perception of the European Community is the increasing process of China-Europe relations becoming institutionalized and the strong increase of channels of communication between them. During the 50's and 60's, relations between China and Western Europe were reduced to a minimum: only France (in a clear attempt to give the US a signal of its independent will) had established diplomatic ties with Mao's China, but not any other European Community member state had appointed a legation to China. Neither was the case of the European Community: it was not until 1975 when official diplomatic relations were established. The almost complete absence of diplomatic officials from Communitarian Europe in Chinese soil made impossible the possibility of being informed by an European about European affairs. The exchange of visions between European and Chinese politicians was basically non-existent. On the other hand, China did count with the presence of only one official in Western European soil, the Chinese government representative in London, in 1954, and just in order to be able to deal with the Hong Kong issue, China and Great Britain created the Office of Chargé d'Affaires. The position of Chargé d'Affaires was held between 1954 and 1963 by the Chinese diplomat Huan Xiang. He was the only Chinese diplomat present in European soil, and he did inform Mao Zedong about European matters (MAO ZEDONG, 1998: Vol. 7, 582-583), but his view of the European Community was a view shaped in Great Britain, a country

that had rejected to join the Community in 1957, a country with a high degree of skepticism among political and media circles about the European project, and a country that did not join the Community until 1973. Mao did even close the door to the only ideological allies that China could have had in Europe: the European Communist Parties, parties which Mao considered to be “revisionist” and no worthy of China’s attention. The information that Mao Zedong could have about the incipient European Community was extremely fragmentary, as so had to be his understanding of Europe as a whole.

With the Open and Reform Policy launched by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 the situation changed; China and the European Community opened their doors to each other and worked on the path to institutionalize the dialogue between them. Two Trade agreements (1978 and 1985) set the legal grounds for a long-term relationship. Deng Xiaoping was the first contemporary Chinese leader to visit Europe, thus starting a round of fruitful exchange of visits between European and Chinese leaders. In 1989 the European Community opened its delegation in China. In 1995 the European Union released its first paper to China, the first of a long series of seven policy papers in which the Union expressed in a formal way the main frame of its strategy towards China. Through these papers, for the first time the Chinese government could count with a comprehensive political document which described the EU political principles, exposed the main purposes of its policy regarding China and its periodical review. From 1998, China and the EU have held annual summits; the high political dialogue includes all range of issues, from trade and economy, energy cooperation, climate change, antiterrorist war, etc. China and Europe had also developed a wide range of “sectorial dialogues”; dialogues which consist of meetings of low-level officials who are experts in specific economic sectors or particular areas of social policy, concerning economic and social regulations. In sum, the degree of direct information of the European Union among China’s top leaders is huge, and this has made possible a high degree of accuracy in the perception of Europe held by the Chinese fourth generation leaders.

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2.1.3. Achievements of the European integration process

Finally, the evolution of the European community itself is also a decisive factor in the way Europe is perceived by the Chinese government. During a period of more than 50 years, the union has grown in political maturity, cohesion and number of member states. Following this trend, its relevance to international affairs and its capabilities to act as a global actor grew too, and so did the interest that China placed in its integration process. Nevertheless, we must point out here that China-EU relations have been always regarded as a “secondary relationship” during the period studied here (YAHUDA, 1994: 266-282). This relationship was derived from or intimately related to China and its interaction with the other two superpowers: America and the Soviet Union, considered by China much more important actors in the realm of world politics. This fact is constant, although to a different extent in all the four generations of leaders. Europe was



never considered as one of China's historical "external threats", like Japan, The US or the Soviet Union, and so it was not in the agenda of China's national security concerns; neither it belonged to the third world, with which China felt intimately identified. Europe only starts to mean something to China when its integration process proves that could serve China's interests. Only to this extent, the EU-China relationship becomes more and more relevant (or "less secondary").

Examples are as follows: In the 80's, once Europe had overcome the negative effects of the Oil economic crisis, the Community had grown bigger in trade volume; its level of technological development had proved to be one of the most advanced in the world, so it appeared to China as a relevant partner in China's modernization project. In the same way, at the beginning of the 21st Century, the Union had already gathered strength in its political structure and foreign policy apparatus, its (partial) rejection to the US intervention in Iraq made the Chinese leaders to cherish the idea of Europe as a "pole". And so, the idea that Europe could play an important role in a future multipolar world, one of the main objectives in the Chinese foreign policy agenda, gained prominence in the Chinese perception of the European Union. The perception of Europe for the Chinese leaders was increasingly acquiring new meanings and deepening in contents as well as the European Union evolved to a more mature and more perfect definition of itself as a political entity, and of course, as the Union proved to have more influence in international affairs.

2.2. Chinese political discourse on the European integration process

By European integration process we mean all the transformations undergone by the European Community since the creation of the European Economic Community by six European countries in 1957, to the present 27 countries that make up the European Union. During this historical process, Europe has reached a long list of economic and political achievements: it has created a free trade space with a monetary union; it has established a political entity which legal framework is well defined in the "Treaty of the European Union" (a consolidated version of a collection of previous treaties) and it has reached a high degree of institutionalization.

The main idea that the author wants to transmit in this section, which has already been discussed by other scholars (SCOTT, 2007: 217-233), is that the process of European Integration has been perceived by the four generations of Chinese leaders basically in the traditional terms of geopolitics and geostrategy. Our thesis is that the Chinese political elite has seen the integration process more or less -consciously or unconsciously- as a process leading to the creation of a "European State". A "European State" conceived to be a sovereign territorial unit, with the usual competences of the traditional national states. Or at least, China has expected the European Union to act as this kind of "super" national state.

The Chinese leaders highly praised and fully acknowledged the success of the European economic integration, especially after the advent of the Euro. But at the same time, they expected the achievements in the economic realm to be accompanied, in the same degree of success, by political and military integration as well as a strong presence of the Union in world affairs. This was the reason why in the 80's Deng Xiaoping was such an ardent supporter of European integration, as he stated in 1987: "We hope to see a united, strong and prosperous Europe. Only if Europe, including East and West Europe, don't bind to other side's rank then the war can be avoided, and therefore a fairly long time of peace could be reached" (DENG XIAOPING, 1993, Vol. 3, 233). Deng Xiaoping not only placed a big hope in Europe's integration, but also in the NATO. It was because China saw the NATO as the military extension of the European Community, and by supporting the European integration, the NATO would be thus reinforced, as it was therefore reinforced the chance to stop the Soviet Union advancement (SHAMBAUGH, 1992: 101-114). Apparently, the generation of leaders represented by Deng Xiaoping didn't clearly identify the exclusively economic nature that the Community had in the decades before Maastricht. The Union's difficulties to coordinate its external action (an essential tool in the geopolitical game) and to exert influence in world politics have been consistently a source of desperation for Chinese leaders.

2.2.1. A very different perspective of the concept of "sovereignty"

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Perceiving the European integration process mainly in geopolitical and geostrategic terms displays a certain degree of misperception about the Chinese view of Europe. And this has been the ultimate reason of China's delusions and frictions with Europe. We believe that the origin of this misperception is closely related to the different concepts of sovereignty that China and the European Union hold respectively³.

The traditional concept of national sovereignty was born in Europe some 500 years ago along with the European modernity, and it was consolidated in 1648 with the peace of Westphalia. A new political order was born in Central Europe, an order in which the principal actor was the "nation-state". The European integration project is in essence a challenge to the "national state" concept of sovereignty. It relies on the progressive release of part of the nation-states sovereignty to a supranational body, the Union, and vows to replace the "national" component by a new driving form of cohesion: a set of common values, norms, regulations and respect to supranational institutions. To this extent, it is fair to label it as a "postmodern" form of governance (KAGAN, 2003), since it challenges directly the modern concept of sovereignty. Actually, the European Union searches for a new model of global governance, a model in which the core concept is to achieve "good global citizenship". According to this model, the power of national states decreases at the same pace that the social representation gains prominence. Social representation is assured by strengthening the civil society and the development of a strong public opinion, or, in Habermas words, the development of the



“Public Sphere” (a space out of the state, integrated by private actors whose actions are aimed put pressure on the state in order to obtain benefits of public interest). The first conclusion we can draw from this new concept of sovereignty is the vanishing of the traditional forms of actions of a national state. And, more accurately, the vanishing of the traditional forms of the nation-state external action. The external action in the “postmodern” form of global governance is no longer that of a hard power, but a new form of soft power. A soft power that aims to develop new mechanisms of control and regulation concerning international relations rather than exerting constraints and thus creating confrontation.

This concept of sovereignty is directly confronted with China’s concept. From the creation of the People’s republic, each Chinese leader has made clear China’s firm commitment to a strong (traditional) concept of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, two questions that, in words of Deng Xiaoping, leave “no space to negotiation” (DENG XIAOPING, 1993, Vol 3: 2). No wonder then, since Chinese national independence had been dramatically forged after decades of struggle against imperialist powers and bloody civil wars. But these opposite concepts of sovereignty led China into serious difficulties when trying to coordinate any external action with the EU. For example, although China was willing to cooperate with the NATO, the cooperation in the field of security between China and Europe during the Deng era never went beyond the dialogue and never reached any actual action. Another and more recent example is the European Union failure to remove the Arms embargo to China, and its subsequent uneasiness for the Chinese (CHEN ZHIMIN, 2006). Removing the Arms embargo is a measure that would be quite simple to take if it was the case of a single national state, but this is extremely complex and troublesome when consensus has to be reached between 27 national governments, a Parliament, a Council and a Commission.

At present, China’s geopolitical interests are closer to those of Europe (multipolarity, multilateralism, compliance with the United Nations) than to those of the US (unilateralism and disregard for international organizations). However, China and the US share the same concept of sovereignty (GOSSET, 2005: 83-96): they believe in the importance of being a hard power for national security, and to have a “voice” in international affairs. This is why China has always regarded the US as its main partner in global politics. As Jiang Zemin said: “The overall influence of the European Union is growing, following its successful integration process and the launch of the euro, it has become in the economic realm a big rival for the US; politically, Europe is increasingly willing to become more politically independent of the US. However, the European Union has many internal problems, it hasn’t set up yet a common policy on security and foreign affairs” (JIANG ZEMIN, 2006: Vol. 1: 195). On the contrary, Chinese leaders have not fully understood the power of a “transformative” power⁴, that is the kind of power that has become the EU through its process of integration. A power able to attract

most of its neighbouring countries, countries of different political and social background that are willing to become part of this community, and share the same concept of global governance. In short, we could say that China highly praised European integration process, but considered it successful mainly in economic terms, and without reaching the same degree of success in terms of making the EU a “pole” in the international scene.

2.3. Chinese political discourse on Europe as an international actor: Europe’s “limited role” in the Chinese vision of a United Front and a multipolar world

The perception of the role of Europe as an international actor has experimented a dramatic transformation between Mao and Deng -the two leaders who belonged to the “revolutionary” generation and lived during the cold war era-, and Jiang and Hu -who represent the “post-revolutionary” generations of Chinese leaders, governing the country in the post-cold war world.

2.3.1. “United front” and the weight of Chinese culture

The main argument behind Mao’s and Deng’s vision of Europe as an international actor was the idea of a Europe capable of building a united front against the forces of imperialism. The forces of imperialism were identified with the US during the 50’s and 60’ s, and later with the Soviet Union during the 70’s and the 80’s. According to the Chinese geostrategic vision, Europe was regarded by Mao as an “intermediate zone” or as a member of the “Second world”. That is to say, Western Europe was a group of countries, not aligned politically to any superpower, but that was at the same time a potential target to American imperialism or Soviet expansionism. The role attributed to Europe by Mao and Deng (as a collaborator with China and the third world in a united front against imperialism) fell in a similar “misperception”. First, they overestimated the uniformity of Europe and its capacity to act as a whole. At that time, we must remember, the European Community had not set up yet an independent institution to carry out a communitarian foreign and security policy, something that only started to take shape after the Maastricht treaty in 1992. And secondly, both leaders did exaggerate the political and geostrategic differences that could exist between Western Europe and the United States. Differences that, even if they might occur, they could never evolve into a confrontation between the two traditional transatlantic allies.

This perception (or “misperception”) is intimately related to a sinocentric vision of the world, a view in which Chinese traditional culture patterns are powerful. China has been for centuries a大一统国家 “da yi tong” (a big, one and united country). The traditional Chinese perspective of 天下观 “tian Xia guan” (all under heaven) has held a vision of the world that places China in a central position and the rest of the world in peripheral circles, varying from “neighbours” or “minorities” to “barbarians” according to their (cultural) distance from China. Placed in the middle of this frame, China was considered as well as the highest peak of human civilization. This “sinocentric” worldview led Mao



Zedong to give an holistic explanation of the different actors in world affairs, dividing the world in simple and homogenous blocks. Either the “intermediate zones” or the “three worlds”, all of them are a simplification of a wide range of countries that embodied much more complex realities. Mao’s vision, although “simplistic” as it can seem, actually turned out to be very pragmatic. It was pragmatic because a “world of homogeneous blocks” made easier to establish the strategy of building a “united front”: Chinese tradition merged perfectly in this case with the Leninist concept.

Certainly, Europe at Mao’s times was not as homogeneous as it can be now. The relation between Great Britain and the continental countries of the European Community did not lack of upheavals, particularly when the Community had to define its position towards the US, a country Great Britain has held special ties with. There were also important political and ideological differences between the most conservative faction of the European Community and the Germany of Willy Brandt. The most important legacy of Brandt’s policy, his *Östopolitik*, was aimed at improving relations with East Germany, Poland, and the Soviet Union in order to make easier an eventual and peaceful reunification of Germany. Inevitably, this policy aroused a certain degree of suspicion among other European counterparts, particularly France, and was directly antagonistic with Deng’s idea of building a united front against the Soviet expansionism.

Although Deng Xiaoping’s rhetoric on foreign affairs disagrees to a great extent with that of Mao’s (it turns out more practical, objective and it is much less dogmatic) it becomes more practical, objective and deals with a much less ideologized, nevertheless, his perception of the world didn’t abandon the “holistic”, and, in a way, “simplified” vision of world’s reality. Deng Xiaoping speaks enthusiastically about “the need of a strong and united Europe as a means to safeguard the world peace and avoid a world war” (DENG XIAOPING, 1998: 1071). And not only Europe: in his diplomatic statements, he calls persistently to the Arab people and to the African people to be “strong and united”. A vow that might result a bit too naive if we take into account the enormous differences in political systems, degree of economic development and social structures that exist in countries as the likes of Morocco and Saudi Arabia, Senegal and South Africa.

2.3.2. “Multipolarity” and the US factor

By the beginning of the 90’s, it was a common assumption in China’s foreign policy that the world should evolve following the trend of multipolarity. Pursuing multipolarity is therefore the main intellectual framework in which should be understood Jiang’s and Hu’s perception of Europe as an international actor. The European Union was perceived as a possible “pole” in international affairs, and this view ranges from the more or less positive considerations, attending to the European Union capability to act as a “pole”. The main conclusion that we can highlight here is that the European capability of acting

as a pole was in direct proportion to the capability of the EU to distance itself from the US. The more the European Union came close to the US, the less was perceived by the Chinese leaders as a likeable pole. In the same way, the more the European International behaviour parted from that of the US, the more that Europe gained in Chinese leaders appraisal and recognition.

The Chinese perception of Europe playing an international role reached its lowest point during the Jiang Zemin rule (1992-2003). When Jiang Zemin took power in 1992, it was still very fresh the impact of the joint sanctions carried out by the US and Europe after the Tian'anmen bloody events. Europe had joined, to the eyes of Chinese leaders, the American side against China. Besides, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the deep transformation of East Europe had a deep impact of China's perception of the West; the West was clearly redefined as ideologically hostile 国际敌对势力 "guoji didui shili" (external enemy forces) (JIANG ZEMIN, 2006: 573) and was incarnated by Europe and America. To this extent, Europe's role as an international actor lost relevance to the Chinese leadership, who in turn concentrated its diplomatic efforts in America during the entire Jiang Zemin's mandate as the main interlocutor in international affairs.

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There are other geopolitical factors that can also help to explain Jiang's apparent "disregard" for Europe. First, the end of the Soviet expansionism threat in 1989 had an immediate consequence in China's perception of Europe: Europe lost the strategic value that it had for China in order to hold back this threat; the European Union role thus vanished from China's national security agenda. The other factor is the huge transformation that took place in Europe after 1992, and the immense amount of work and energy that the European Union had to put to set up the path for the integration of East Europe. This made the Union diplomacy to be focused mainly in the European affairs, something that brought about a lessening of its international capacity to deal with other global issues (like China).

At the beginning of the 21st Century there is a significant shift in the Chinese perception of Europe as an international actor. The fourth generation of Chinese leaders did answer promptly to the divergences arisen between the European Union and the US after the military intervention in Iraq. The first years of the 21st century witnessed a new political atmosphere in which seemed to have had place the rise of an "emerging axis" centered in China and Europe (SHAMBAUGH, 2004).

Both the Chinese and European leaders emphasized each other side's importance in global affairs, and vowed for a higher level of international cooperation between them. Again, the distance between Europe and the US was suitable for the rapprochement between China and Europe. In 2003, right after the 6th China-EU Summit, a strategic partnership between Europe and China was formalized. The European Union



international role had never before been praised so highly by the Chinese leaders. Europe was considered by China to have “a very important role in the creation of a multipolar world”. President Hu Jintao summarized the Chinese expectations on Europe as follows:

We have always considered the development of China-EU relations from the highest strategic and long-term perspective; we endorse the European proposal of the creation of a comprehensive strategic partnership between China and the European Union. We are willing to push forward the healthy and stable development of China-Europe political relations in conformity with the principles of self-respect and self-confidence and to seek a common ground while accepting existing differences.

We are willing too, according to the principles of equality and consultation and a mutually beneficial spirit, to promote the comprehensive cooperation in every field. We are willing to expand exchanges and enhance the mutual knowledge and friendship between the people of Europe and China, on the basis of a mutual learning from each other and trying to draw on the other’s strong points to offset our own weaknesses. I believe that with the common effort of both sides, the relation between Europe and China will undoubtedly grow and deeper⁵.

However, this “honeymoon” between China and Europe didn’t last much since mutual expectations of the strategic partnership were not completely fulfilled. A change of European Leaders didn’t help to improve the image of Europe as an international actor. The critical attitude towards the US foreign policy held by Schroeder and Chirac came to an end with the arrival of new European leaders such as Merkel and Sarkozy, both holding a vision of foreign affairs in which Atlanticism was to be newly reinforced.

2.4. Chinese political discourse of/on the European Union values: the weight of history

2.4.1. The political dimension of European values

Since the creation of the European Union, the community has identified itself as a “value-based community”. The Treaty of Lisbon, the latest consolidated version of the Treaty of the European Union, in its article 2 sums up these values as follows:

The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.

In 1992, the Treaty of Maastricht upgraded the values of Human Rights, Democracy and Liberty to the core of the EU's foreign policy. And consequently, in every one of the seven papers released by the EU to China from 1995 to 2006, there was indeed a specific mention to the importance of these values, considered the guiding principles in designing the EU's strategy to China. EU's strategy to China is summarized as follows:

- To engage China further both bilaterally and on the world stage, through an upgraded political dialogue.
- To support China's transition to an open society based upon the rule of law and respect for human rights.
- To encourage the integration of China in the world economy through bringing it fully into the world trading system, and supporting the process of economic and social reform that it is continuing in China.
- To raise the EU's profile in China. (DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO CHINA, Website).

These values are intimately related to the development of the European civilization and nowadays are commonly understood in Western culture as holding universal value. The belief in the "universal" nature of the values promoted by the EU led the Union to state in its Policy Document to China of 1998 that:

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A commitment to universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms lies at the heart of the EU's policy worldwide. Full respect for these principles is inextricably linked to economic development and prosperity, as well as the long term social and political stability of any country (COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, 1998).

We can conclude from this statement that the recognition of and abiding to these values is the only way to achieve peace, prosperity and social development, and, at the same time, a moral duty for all countries. This interpretation seems to be far from being the Chinese leaders understanding of European values. In the contemporary Chinese political discourse, the European promotion of these values has been seen as a new form of interventionism, or "cultural imperialism" or just a simple pretext used by the European Union to achieve its ultimate goals in world politics and world economy. Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin labelled the European values as a 一套搞动乱 "yi tao guo dongluan" (an instrument to beget disturbances) (DENG XIAOPING, 1998: 1324) and 政治毒药 "zhengzhi duyao" (political poison) (JIANG ZEMIN, 2006, Vol. 2: 371) and in recent years, the expression "normative power" (CUI HONGWEI, 2007) has been popularized to describe the European Union when acting as a vehicle for these values, bringing back the vision of a Europe that exerts power politics, in an obvious remembrance of its colonial era. These expressions provide us grounds to conclude that the perception of the European Union as embodying a common set of values is the



outstanding issue less appreciated by the contemporary Chinese leadership. Let's examine the intellectual and cultural parameters of the contents of the Chinese perception of European values.

2.4.2. Post-cold war and post colonialism paradigms

The European values came abruptly in contact with the People's Republic of China after the Tian'anmen events in 1989. The European Community, along with Japan and other Western countries, imposed to China a list of sanctions that were justified in the name of an alleged China's government violation of human rights, freedom and democracy (THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL, 1989). From then on, the European Community, along with the United States, assumed the role of being China's human rights situation "watcher" for the following decades.

The reaction of Deng Xiaoping government to the sanctions imposed in 1989 was of categorical rejection, and his political statements regarding this issue would lay the foundations for the Chinese political discourse on Western values for the following generations of leaders; blaming China was a sign of "arrogance", and imposing sanctions an expression of "power politics". This was exactly the same attitude that, more than one hundred years ago, the European Great Powers held to China. The echoes of the "century of humiliation"⁶ came back immediately to the mind of the Chinese leader:

I am a Chinese man; I know the history of foreign aggressions to China. Once I heard that the Seven Western countries leaders Conference decided to impose sanctions to China, the memory of the Eight-Power Allied Forces of 1900 came immediately to my mind. From these seven countries, except for Canada, the remaining six, along with the Czarist Russia and Austria, all of them were members of the allied forces at that time. We have to be aware of Chinese history; it's the spiritual engine of China development (DENG XIAOPING, 1993, Vol. 3: 359).

To understand both Europe and China reactions in 1989, we must refer them to two different paradigms used to explain contemporary international relations: the post cold war paradigm and the post colonialism paradigm. These two concepts have been outstandingly described by Professor Golden (GOLDEN, 2003); here, we would like to further develop his ideas by adding our own conclusions.

The post-Cold War paradigm helps us to understand Europe's reaction after the events that took place in June 1989 in Tian'anmen Square. During the whole cold war the "phantom of Communism" embodied in the Soviet Union was the main threat to the values of the Enlightenment defended by America and Western Europe. Once the Soviet threat disappeared, China remained as the only one country that could embody this threat. The European leaders had held a somehow "orientalist" vision of the narrative of

the Cold war, a narrative in which China was not present, while the main contenders were the US and Western Europe against the Soviet Union. In the 80's Europe remained largely ignorant about the reality of China, about the suffering and losses that caused the decade of the cultural revolution and also about the problems that Deng Xiaoping had to overcome to put into practice the crucial Reform and Open up Policy. Europe's reaction to the events of Tian'anmen was that of puzzlement and fear: the fear that China would become a new Soviet Union and the fear of a revival of a new cold war era. So Europe condemned China.

On the other hand, most of the conception of China's attitude to Western values must be understood within the intellectual parameters of the Post-colonialism paradigm. The Post colonialism paradigm basically maintains that "European modernism was introduced in China's history by the force of arms, provoking a traumatic experience that has lasted for more than a century and a half, and it would be impossible to understand the Chinese reaction to "modernism" without bearing this fact in mind. The resistance to accepting the paradigms of European Modernity as being "universal" is one of the consequences of Asia's colonial's past, and of Asia's postcolonial relationship with past imperial powers. From the Asian point of view, the universality bestowed upon Enlightenment values by their authors became a justification of imperialism and its catastrophic consequences. As a result, a critical stance towards Enlightenment values has become a standard component of current Asian thinking" (GOLDEN, 2006.).

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The particular way in which Europe "promoted" these values in China forced the Chinese leaders to reject openly its validity (Deng and Jiang). The fourth generations of Chinese leaders has gone even further in China's critical position. The 21st century has witnessed China's clear attempt to enunciate an "alternative" to the Western universalism, a new moral discourse based exclusively on Chinese tradition.

Besides the political discourse, the rejection of the universalism of Western values has also had its echoes in Chinese intellectual circles that are independent from the political power. That is the case of the rise of the New Confucianism in China and other Asian countries⁷, or the case of the Chinese scholar Zhao Tingyang and the Chinese intellectual school of 新天下主义 "xin tianxiazhuayi" (New Tianxia thinking)⁸. Both are examples of intellectual attempts to build or rebuild an indigenous Chinese "universal" theory in a clear attempt to provide an alternative to the western Universalism.

In short, the conclusion we infer from these reflections is that the EU should probably think over the way its so-called "universal" values should be expanded in China. These values are precisely the same that had driven the EU to engage in extensive humanitarian aid campaigns, poverty alleviation programs, education and funding for China's domestic transition to a modern society. But at the same time, they have also



been used (or misused) as instruments of the justification for sanctions or as the ultimate expression of a European moral superiority. This has been the main reason why Chinese leaders have not recognized the legitimacy of these values, basically because they don't recognize the authority of their origin.

The European Union should certainly improve the way it promotes and spreads its system of moral and politic values in China. This could be done by stressing EU's rhetoric on mutuality and reciprocity instead of speaking only of "what China is expected to do" (GOLDEN, 2006). We believe that this shift on rhetoric would help to create a much more receptive political atmosphere in Chinese public discourse about the EU's value system. Values that are the essence of EU's cohesion, the core of its foreign policy, and values that we Europeans believe can help to build a much more tolerant, equal and human world. These values brought peace and prosperity to the countries of Europe, a continent that has written with blood the pages of its history and now shares the same wish of peace and harmony that its far-off neighbour, the old and wise China, vows for the world.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Along the journey that took us from Mao's "war and revolution" to Hu's "harmonious world", we have examined the differences in understanding Europe of the four generations of Chinese leaders. However, there is also a common background in the perception of Europe that we would like to summarize in two aspects.

3.1. "Europeism" of Chinese leaders

The first one is the determined and consistently stated support from the Chinese leaders to the process of integration as the only feasible way for the future development of Europe. This fact is of a particular interest considering the huge amount of criticism that the European project drew from the Europeans themselves. Until the beginning of the 90's the "eurocepticism" was a quite common feeling in Europe, and it was quite common not only in traditional "euroceptic" countries like the United Kingdom, but also in large opinion groups and political parties of countries like France, Germany, Italy or Spain. As the integration process matured, the eurocepticism feeling was progressively lessened and replaced adopting a different theory of integration. In opposition to the open "federalism" of the europeanists, the former euroceptics were keener on a light model of integration of "intergovernmental" nature. China, however, proved to be resolutely "Europeanist", an attitude that would have surely pleased the "fathers" of Europe like Kalergi, Monet or Briand...

3.2. Expectations not fulfilled

Another common attitude towards Europe was the fact that, in every different historical period each Chinese generation of leaders was “expecting” or “hoping” to get something from Europe. Chinese expectations, naturally vary depending on the needs of China at a very specific time: from becoming part of the Imperialism contention side, to act as technology and investment source, to finally become an equal partner in a globalized world. All these expectations ended up only being of only a “partial” satisfaction to China. Europe was not seen like the US, a country that during the last decades has given China big “satisfactions” and big “dissatisfactions”. The US has been all along a partner with a strong economic dependence and, at the same time, a country with a very different cultural, political and security interests. So China always held towards the US this kind of “love-hate” feeling, and can’t help to be jilted now and then when his loved-and-hated US act disappointingly. Europe is rather like an “acquaintance”, a not so very close type of friend, but in any case, a friend who is distinguished, cultured, wealthy and therefore, respected. A friend with whom China holds important and political differences, but most of time these ones are handled subtly with the know-how that centuries of history and civilization have brought to these two friends. A friend who has an unquestionable appeal, a nice dialogue that reveals common interests and good will, but is not exempt either of a keen arrogance that unveils a complex of superiority hard to hide. At the very end, the expectations placed in Europe by the Chinese side didn’t get the same degree of good feedback from this European “friend”.

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It might appear a commonplace to say that China and Europe would definitely improve their relations “by strengthening the mutual knowledge and understanding between them” (these are the key words to put an end to any work about contemporary China and Europe relations). But “strengthening the mutual knowledge and understanding” happens to be exactly the best way for “acquaintances” to become real friends, to gain mutual respect through acts, to attain common goals, and to develop a common global project for a better world.

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- 1 Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were announced by Chinese premier Zhou Enlai in 1953 to India and later reasserted in the Bandung Conference in 1954.
- 2 In Mao Zedong words: "Once De Gaulle is in power he is going to oppress the French Communist Party and the French people; however, this should have some both internal and external benefits.



Under Eastern Eyes: Europe seen by the Chinese Communist Party. Analysis of the contemporary Chinese Political discourse on Europe

In foreign policy, this man likes to be at odds with Great Britain and America: he likes to argue. He had a hard time in the past, he wrote a book of Memoirs criticizing Great Britain and America and praising the Soviet Union. Now it seems that he still wants to argue. To be at odds with both Great Britain and America is very beneficial” (September 5, 1958). (Mao Zedong, 1998: 387.)

- 3 For an interesting analysis of the different meaning of the Chinese and European concept of sovereignty, see Zhongqi PAN (2010): “Managing the conceptual gap on sovereignty in China-EU relations”, *Asia Europe Journal*, 8, pp. 227-243.
- 4 Far from the concepts “hard power” or “soft power”, the European Union has been labeled by Mark Leonard, the director of the European Council of Foreign Relations, as a “transformative power”. A kind of power that works in a long term and is about reshaping the world rather than gaining prominence in the international sphere through coercion. The power of the European Union, captured in treaties, constitutions and laws, acts as an invisible hand through the shell of traditional structures, creating common standards to be implemented through national institutions. Through this way, the EU can “transform” countries without becoming a target for hostility and without compromising their independence. The ability to spread its influence without provocation lies at the bottom of the “transformative power” concept. LEONARD, Mark (2005): *Why Europe will run the 21st Century*. Public Affairs, New York.
- 5 HU Jintao (2003): 《胡锦涛见欧盟领导人赞成全面战略伙伴关系》，新华社 http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2003-10/30/content_1152197.htm (Hu Jintao praises the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and the European Union, Xinhua News, October 30th, 2003). [Consulted on April 2009].
- 6 The expression “Century of Humiliation” has been commonly used by Chinese scholarship and politicians to describe the historical period of external aggressions committed by foreign powers to China since mid 19th Century. It includes the First Opium War (1839-42), the Second Opium War (1856-60) that ended with the sacking and burning of the Summer Palace in Beijing, the Sino-French War (1884-85), the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) and the British invasion of Tibet (1903-1904). China’s defeats in these military conflicts and the signing of the subsequent “unequal treaties” resulted in an important loss of territorial and political sovereignty for China. The defeat of the Japanese in the Second World War and the triumph of the Mao’s Communist Revolution in 1949 against the Nationalist government of the Guomindang represented, by the Chinese historiography, the end of the “Century of Humiliation”.
- 7 The 新儒家 “Xinrujia” or New Confucianism is a neoconservative school of thought that has gained importance during the last decades among political and intellectual circles not only in mainland China, but also Hong Kong, Taiwan and other Asian countries. This intellectual trend pleads for the rejuvenation of the traditional Chinese culture, a tradition that is considered as intimately linked to the Confucian moral. The New Confucianism aims to recover the traditional Chinese concept of “harmony” to be applied in politics, public life and the environment. Even if the New Confucianism recognizes and successfully adapts some elements of the traditional Western thought like the rationalism and humanism, it defends at the same time the universal validity of the Confucian values.
- 8 The New “Tianxia system” envisaged by the Chinese philosopher Zhao Tingyang in 2005 has had a deep impact among Chinese intellectual circles. In his book *The Tianxia System: a philosophic introduction to the World System*, Zhao tingyang reelaborates the traditional Chinese world vision of “Tianxia”. Zhao presents a new, Chinese-coined, formulation of International Relations Theory,

a field that has been historically a strict domain of the Western thought. Although Zhao's "New Tianxia System" has been criticized by many for the high degree of utopia in his theory, nevertheless it includes inspiring ideas about the concept of "internationality" or the vows to build a "non-other world".

