

China and the West: Historical Interactions, Current Issues, and Future Challenges

Selected Remarks at the Session on
International Relations of the 2021 TCF



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U.S.-China Relations in a Globalized World

Susan Thornton



Senior Fellow, Paul Tsai China
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The main point I hope to address today is the error of major power competition. Some people are claiming that the great power competition or the rivalry of systems is going to be the dominant undercurrent of the 21st century. I think it feels very strange to talk about major power competition when we are here on a Zoom meeting because we cannot meet in person due to the pandemic that is raging in its latest more transmissible variant. In spite of our massive prevention and vaccination efforts, we are still here unable to meet in person.

I think it feels strange to talk about major power competition when the United Nations has just recently released its latest update on drastic climate change. This means we will all be facing catastrophic, natural disasters likely within our lifetime. And we have seen a lot of very strange weather patterns even recently that have been damaging and taken human lives.

I think that it is strange when we think about the potential catastrophic disaster that might come with the advent of humanity and society altering technologies that we can not or do not have the will to control, or from the fact that a small group, or an individual, with extreme ideas, now has more power than ever before to inflict massive harm.

I think it feels strange to focus on great power competition when it seems so obvious that the global economic system that has produced so much prosperity over the last several decades has so failed in policies to assure fair distribution of benefits of that system.

And I think in the face of these kinds of cataclysmic changes and challenges, the notion of competing blocks of countries or a contest over ideological systems seems rather

misdirected. I think the most important effort in this 21st century is going to be the one that governments will make toward actually addressing these major challenges. And whether or not governments succeed in adapting to these changes is the key determinant of whether people will continue to view their governments as legitimate and having the authority to lead and dictate what needs to be done.



Susan Thornton at the 2021 Taihe Civilizations Forum

Success in dealing with the real challenges that humanity will face in the future is going to depend on the ability of leaders and institutions to make major wrenching changes to current systems. In the process, we will have to convince a lot of vested interests that change is necessary and beneficial. We will have to convince them to work in concert with other capable entities in order to magnify that effort. And the good ideas and the solutions to these problems will not come from just one source or one country but will depend on a wide and diverse range of insights and experiences. Things like how to keep the workability of the solutions that we will come up with are going to depend on the resilience of societies to unify around these needed changes and to execute those changes even in the face of uncertainty and fear.

President Xi Jinping always talks about changes unseen in the current century and I have to believe that is not about great power competition but all of the obvious and sweeping changes that humanity is going to be grappling with. An obsession with great power competition will not only not foster the kind of effort needed to deal with these real challenges, but it is going to make those efforts to deal with real challenges impossible. I think people in the United States and China actually understand the importance of cooperation between the two of us on these issues.

So far, the two countries are still unpersuaded by the hawkish voices on both sides of the Pacific who are overhyping the threats posed by the other side in the service of their own narrow agendas or distractions from their own failings. But large countries like the U.S. and China have complex societies, and they are hard to unify. Therefore, we need compelling national narratives to mobilize people for common action. We need to mobilize people to deal with major challenges. This will not be easy. But we must not become prisoners of these narratives, particularly as the narratives often mask important realities. Of course, we have problems and differences between us.

However, these problems pale in comparison to the ones we face in common.

Both the United States and China will need to make major contributions to the solution of future global challenges. They are the two countries that have the resources, the influence, and the executive capacity to lead and try to meet these challenges. So far, it is fair to say that our work together on these challenges has fallen short. We have not been able to meet the high expectations that the global community has for cooperation between the two biggest and most consequential players on the global stage. There are a lot of reasons for this. Some blame it on power shifts or increasingly divergent interests. Some claim that China has changed, and some say that the U.S. has changed.

“...nothing can be done in the current climate of suspicion and mutual recriminations.”

What will it take for the two countries to work together on common challenges? First is an acknowledgment of the reality that the challenges we face are not caused by the other side. This will be hard for those who find it useful to play the blame game, which we have seen plenty of that, but nothing can be done in the current climate of suspicion and mutual recriminations. Second, we need confidence. People who lead change are going to be criticized. There will be people trying to undermine their efforts, and those people will need the confidence to tackle these challenges that we face. It is going to take some good and fair proposals that can register mutual progress toward a common goal. It will take encouragement from the rest of the world, who wants to see the U.S. and China cooperate, and does not want to be dragged into conflicts. But they should speak up more about their expectations for cooperation between the U.S. and China. Third, it is going to gonna take determined, consistent, and clear communication between the two countries, which has been very much lacking in the last five years.

What would a sensible agenda of a prioritized U.S.-China diplomacy look like? I think first, leaders from the two countries should meet and declare their determination and intention to work to solve international challenges, both by reforming problematic practices at home and by collaborating on the global stage.

The first area for collaboration is the pandemic. While it is still unclear what the far-reaching consequences of the pandemic are going to be, there will be permanent and sweeping changes in fields such as travel and tourism, hospitality and entertainment, international student exchange, retail business, and finance.

The second clear area for collaboration is climate change, developed and developing economies have to completely transform their energy, transportation, and building systems in the next decade or so. This in and of itself would normally require 100% of any government and any society's focus and resources.

The third area is on limiting the dangerous and catastrophic potential technology and technological changes. We have to prevent technological developments from veering off in the wrong direction while at the same time trying to make sure that we can benefit from its positive effects. China and the U.S. are the largest technology-intensive societies on the planet with cutting-edge scientific establishments. It is our joint responsibility to ensure that technological competition does not lead to destruction. I think this kind of agenda might sound unrealistic at the moment. But I think events in the world are likely to continue to remind us of the urgent priorities that we face and the need to devote our resources and our attention to these challenges. We can either leave the tide or be swamped by it. And I still believe that our leaders will make the right choice.



Greater awareness needed for transnational challenges such as environmental protection
Source: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/>

The Future Evolution of China-U.S. Relations

Guo Changlin



Senior Fellow, Taihe Institute

China-U.S. relations are entering a new era of uncertainty as China no longer “keeps a low profile” in its policy towards the United States while the United States has ended its engagement with China.

The period that has passed refers to the years from 1989 to 2017. In 1989, President George H. W. Bush first proposed the engagement policy towards China. In the same year, Deng Xiaoping proposed the phrase “hiding one’s capacity and biding one’s time” in his description of China’s foreign policy. This was a tacit response to the US policy of engagement. While divergence existed between the two, China and the U.S. forged an important alignment of policies that helped the two sustain a fine relationship until the Trump administration came to power in 2017. Now, this period has come to an end.

Washington has not only reached a consensus on denying the engagement policy towards China but has also agreed on the principles of how to deal with China. Many in the U.S. said that the China-U.S. relationship has entered an era of intense competition. Yet, for all the competitive elements, China-U.S. relations face a lot of uncertainties as well. This is based on three considerations.

“...for all the competitive elements, US-China relations face a lot of uncertainties as well.”

First, unlike the last period, there is no alignment of policies between the two countries. China proposes to build a new model of major power relations with the U.S. based on the principles of non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation. However, the American China policy under the Biden administration is contingent on three parameters. These are: be competitive where it should be, collaborative where it can be, and adversarial when it must be. Responding to this, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that China welcomes cooperation if there is the need, but

cooperation needs to take into account each other's concerns and mutual benefit. It cannot go in the fashion of one side unilaterally raising conditions and making lists. China will not evade competition if it is needed, but competition should be fair and just and abide by market rules, and refrain from setting obstacles, abusing power, and depriving others of their legitimate right to development. If there is still confrontation, China will deal with it calmly and face it fearlessly. It thus appears that other than

opposing each other, there is no alignment of policies on both sides at the moment, let alone to expect the two countries to walk towards each other in a joint effort to bridge the huge gulf of misunderstanding and skepticism between Washington and Beijing.



U.S.-China high level strategic dialogue, Anchorage, Alaska, Mar. 18, 2021
Source: <https://www.dw.com/zh/>

Second, there are uncertainties concerning the direction of China-U.S. relations under Biden's China policy. The above-mentioned three parameters are ill-defined. This complicates China-U.S. relations and creates great uncertainties for the future development of their bilateral ties. In other words, there can be endless frontier for competition, no substance for cooperation, and no bottom-line for confrontation. The China-U.S. high-level strategic dialogue held in Alaska on March 18 is a great illustration of this. Meanwhile, the Biden administration is also concerned about the possibility that continuous intense competition with China would eventually veer into outright confrontations. This can be reflected in Biden's visit to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence when he said that the U.S. must maintain a comparative advantage over China but should eschew from fueling an unnecessary escalation of conflict with China. Therefore, similar to us, Biden is also unsure about how his China policy will affect the future development of China-U.S. relations.

Third, American domestic politics has also created uncertainties for China-U.S. relations. America's domestic politics may have entered a phase where leadership turnover happens once every four years. This cycle started from the Trump administration and is likely to continue for a long period of time. This will inevitably affect China-U.S. relations. Although the Democratic and Republican parties have reached the so-called "Washington Consensus" concerning their stance toward China, they will compete to be tougher on China to gain political advantage. The development of China-U.S. relations is then likely to be caught in a vicious circle.

Where are China-U.S. relations heading to? We should not be too optimistic. But there is hope for improvement. The hope lies in people-to-people ties, in economic and trade relations, and in exchanges among experts and scholars seeking to bridge the massive gap and misunderstandings between the two countries.

China's Place in American Foreign Policy

Thomas Fingar



Shorenstein APARC Fellow, Freeman
Spogli Institute for International Studies,
Stanford University

Most China specialists and many Chinese friends who study the United States think that China plays a more central role in American foreign policy than it does. Despite this imputed centrality, many argue that China and the U.S.-China relationship should have even higher priority. Everyone in Washington recognizes that China is important, but opinions differ on the question of whether, or to what extent, “managing China” considerations should drive or derive from other policy decisions. Commentators cited by Chinese colleagues and many in the Trump administration argue that China poses a near-existential threat to American interests and must be countered with a comprehensive strategy that subordinates all other policy goals to confronting the China challenge. Such an approach evokes memories and policy prescriptions of the Cold War. Others, and what I assess to be both the majority of American foreign policy thinkers and the dominant view in the Biden administration, see China as a but not the most important challenge.

The Biden administration, like its predecessors, accords higher priority to many other issues than it does to China. China and U.S.-China relations are important, but they are not his top priority. Indeed, he seems to view the relationship primarily through instrumental lenses. In this respect, his approach is similar to that of all his predecessors. Repairing or improving the relationship is important to the extent that this would help to achieve other goals. But jeopardizing achievement of other objectives for the sake of a better relationship with Beijing is seen as not worth the risk and opportunity costs.

Those in or inclined toward the “China is the problem” school justify their position by proclaiming the return of great power competition. Many adherents of this view advocate something like “Containment 2.0” and insist that Washington should

resurrect policies and priorities that proved useful in the Cold War. Observers in China and elsewhere who see developments through great power competition lenses interpret US actions and policy decisions as proof that Washington seeks to contain China and bring about regime change analogous to what happened in the Soviet Union. Less extreme versions of this perspective argue that big power competition can be limited and must be managed to avoid the risks and costs of unbridled competition. One variant calls for a “new type” of big power relationship that recognizes spheres of interest and emphasizes cooperation to address common challenges. Both groups think that China should be the starting point for US policy.

Arguments for subordinating China-related decisions to other policy priorities depict the PRC as a competitor or rival but insist it is not the reincarnation of the Soviet Union or an existential threat to American interests and values. Problems that members of this school consider more important than the China challenge include rebuilding

America’s infrastructure, repairing our own political system, addressing social justice issues, improving education, fixing defects in our healthcare system, combating the causes, and mitigating the effects of climate change, and other domestic and global challenges.

“Although China has almost always been a secondary focus of US foreign policy, the reasons why have changed over time.”

Although China has almost always been a secondary focus of US foreign policy, the reasons why have changed over time. For most of the period since World War II, Europe was more important to the United States than was Asia or any other region. Washington’s initial post-1945 primary concern in East Asia was to prevent the resurgence of Japanese militarism. China was seen as providing a

partial counterbalance to Japan. By the time the PRC was established in 1949, US policy priority had shifted from constraining the former Axis powers to containing the Soviet Union.

Mao’s decision to align with Moscow and China’s entry into the Korean War caused Washington to subject the PRC to containment policies adopted to constrain the USSR and its allies. China’s Stalinist and Maoist self-reliant economic policies foreclosed economic opportunities and diminished incentives for engagement. Deterioration of PRC-USSR relations made China less threatening but the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution made it not worth the political costs and effort for the United States to seek better relations with the PRC. Better relations per se were not and are not an ultimate objective of US policy. To the contrary, an acceptable relationship is a means to achieve security, economic, and people-to-people objectives. When Nixon

and Mao began the decade-long process of normalization, they did so for security reasons. Neither side envisioned or sought economic, political, or societal engagement. The U.S. continued to pursue multiple foreign policy objectives around the globe, but China did not figure prominently in any of them. Washington did not expect or seek much from China and PRC policy and actions offered no inducements for policy change in Washington.

That changed after China moved toward what became known as reform and opening. US security, economic, political, and people-centered objectives remained much as they had been since the 19th century, but perceived possibilities for a fundamentally different relationship with China increased dramatically. The logic and policies Washington had developed during the Cold War continued to shape US perceptions of and policies toward China. The only real change in American foreign policy was to treat the PRC as a potential long-term comprehensive partner instead of as a limited strategic partner. This change in PRC status did not elevate China to the top of the US foreign policy agenda or result in adoption of new policies or policy instruments. To the contrary, it simply incorporated China into the comprehensive array of pre-existing policies developed by and for the “free world.”

For the next several decades, American policies toward China remained remarkably stable. This stability resulted from the extent to which relations with China were treated as a component of higher-priority objectives and policy mechanisms, the strength of interests that benefited from engagement, and always limited political bandwidth that made Washington unwilling to jeopardize higher priority goals by undertaking a major and certain to be politically costly adoption of significantly different China policies.

Rhetoric and the choice of policy instruments changed during the Trump administration but calls to make China the centerpiece of an “all of government” strategy was not matched by changes in policy or the behavior of government and non-governmental instruments of engagement. The clearest example of this dichotomy is the behavior of the business community. Biden has left most of Trump’s tariffs and other punitive measures in place because they respond to specific complaints from important US constituencies. As importantly,



Professor Thomas Fingar at the Forum

he does not wish to use political capital or divert attention from his own priorities to making adjustments in China policy. The opportunity cost of focusing on China is seen as too high when measured against the prospects for a significantly different relationship.

Current American foreign policy gives rhetorical emphasis to rivalry with China but rejects Cold War models subordinating “everything” else to competition with the PRC. The rhetorical emphasis on China resembles the post-Sputnik period of US-USSR relations by using the “China threat” to justify contentious and costly policy actions across a wide spectrum of issue areas. For example, rivalry with China is used to justify the need for increased investment in infrastructure, research and development, and pre-kindergarten education. Harsh rhetoric also has more narrowly political motivations.

Biden seems to reject the idea that bilateral relations must improve before cooperation on other issues will be possible. US policy toward China will be shaped by recognition that both need a stable and peaceful international environment to achieve higher priority and largely domestic goals, and a judgment that Beijing will not take actions that seriously jeopardize the rules-based international order or act in ways that are dangerously inconsistent with US interests and objectives. Washington will seek to cooperate when it appears necessary and feasible but devote little effort to placating China for the sake of improving the relationship.

Examining China-U.S. Relations within the Context of Great Power Competition

Wang Xiangsui



Senior Fellow, Taihe Institute
Director, Center for Strategic Studies,
Beijing University of Aeronautics and
Astronautics

The current state of relations between China and the United States is one that's defined by major power competition. Within this parameter, seeking to constrain the malign aspects of competition is a realistic and rational approach to China-U.S. relations. The topic I hope to address today is "sustaining benign competition and achieving the co-existence of China and the United States."

Both China and the U.S. admit that the two are in a competitive relationship. But neither admits or believes that the bilateral competition is aimed at completely "wiping out" each other. China still hopes to maintain a major power relationship with the U.S. that is characterized by non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation. During a recent talk with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that China and the U.S. should work together to find a path to peaceful coexistence. Blinken agreed.

What, then, is benign competition? The most important factor that differentiates a benign competition from a malicious one is contingent on the two sides' objectives, or what each of them wants to achieve out of their competition. U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan noted that the American goal is for the two to achieve a "competitive coexistence" rather than to undermine China or seek mutual destruction. This stance laid the ground for the two to engage in a competition that is constructive because the goal, which is to outperform rather than topple the rival from its existing position, will generate positive effects in a way that spurs both countries to do better for the benefit of the world in areas of mutual concern.

"The most important factor that differentiates a benign competition from a malicious one is contingent on the two sides' objectives, or what each of them wants to achieve out of their competition."



Professor Wang Xiangsui at the Forum

Additional to the goal, China and the U.S. should also adhere to the following four principles to ensure that the two are not bound in a lose-lose situation:

First, they must make it clear that China and the U.S. are not adversaries. President Biden has repeatedly stressed that China is not an enemy of the U.S. I think the rhetoric is crucial to China-U.S. relations. But at the same time, and more importantly, the U.S. should take concrete actions to prove that the two are competitors, not enemies, which means they may try to counter each other, but not impede or strangle each other.

Second, China and the U.S. should be more inclusive of each other's values and interests. In a competition, it is normal for the two parties to preserve their own values and prioritize their own interests. This should be acknowledged and recognized. The U.S. upholds liberal democracy

while China espouses its people-centered philosophy. For all differences, safe and security, and sustained development remain the common interests of both countries. And neither China nor the U.S. should be demonized.

Third, the two countries should compete in a constructive way. Competition should be carried out based on rules and regulations. China and the U.S. can compete in a way that resembles a ping-pong game, where the players play against each other at the ends of the table. Or they could engage in an American football game, where collisions are allowed as long as they comply with the rules. However, these rules must be agreed upon by both countries. Competition does not necessarily involve confrontation. In fact, competition should be fundamentally about honing the competitive edges of the countries themselves rather than plotting against one another.

Fourth, China and the U.S. should stick to the bottom-line of non-violence. Competition does not translate to war. To seek coexistence, the two countries should avoid taking violent actions against each other and establish conduits through which to manage tensions and control areas where hybrid warfare may happen. The desire to win is

understandable, but wicked attempt to destroy the other party involved in order to win is not. In a benign competition, both sides should avoid using violence against each other as much as possible.

In view of the current situation, China and the U.S. have basically reached a consensus on the goals and principles of their competition. And this is a good starting point for the positive development of the bilateral relationship. However, there are also elements that have negatively impacted China-U.S. relations in recent years. Most prominently, whenever the two countries reached a consensus on certain issue area, the Trump administration would thereafter reverse course and stoke a full-scale confrontation with China, leading to great uncertainties and distrust that still persists on the Chinese side. Moreover, the U.S. Congress recently passed a number of bills to contain China's rise. This has greatly restrained the Biden administration from engaging in a benign competition with China. In short, managing the competition between China and the U.S. is not something that can be achieved by a single party alone but will require great efforts from both sides.



Source: <https://www.scmp.com/>

Highlight Quotes

2021 Taihe Civilizations Forum Session on International Relations *China-U.S. Relations*



Cui Liru

President, China Institutes of Contemporary
International Relations (2005-2013)

Predictably, as long as decision-makers in Washington hold on to mainstream views about the evolution of international relations and China's peaceful rise, and the Biden administration remains to be constrained by the upcoming elections in 2022 and 2024, U.S. policy on China will be fraught with challenges. The prevailing state of Sino-U.S. relations will be the norm in the coming years.



Wu Hailong

President, China Public Diplomacy Association

The current state of Sino-U.S. relations can be attributed to America's flawed judgment about China. The U.S. should change its attitude toward China if the two want to improve their bilateral relations and avoid conflict and confrontations. Washington should adopt an objective and practical attitude toward China's development. It should re-examine Sino-U.S. relations, and re-evaluate the interests of both countries. And it should readjust its China policy.



Susan Thornton

Senior Fellow, Paul Tsai China Center, Yale Law School

At present, China and the United States should strive to arrange a meeting between its leaders. This will help ease tensions and promote cooperation between the two countries. In particular, China and the United States should strengthen cooperation in response to the pandemic and climate change, and strive to avoid possible negative spillover effects caused by technological competition. It is believed that the leaders of China and the United States can make responsible choices on issues of bilateral relations and global cooperation.



Guo Changlin

Senior Fellow, Taihe Institute

How would Sino-U.S. relations evolve? I suggest that China should not set high expectations. However, there is still hope for improvement, which can be achieved through people-to-people ties, economic and trade relations, and exchanges among experts and scholars who can bridge Sino-U.S. relations. This hope is a form of strength. So let us rebuild the bridge that connects China and the United States.



Wang Wen

Executive Dean, Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies
Vice President, Silk Road School, Renmin University of China

China and the United States should not compete mainly through military means as they did in the 18th and 19th centuries. Competition needs to be conducted in a more civilized and progressive manner. Both countries should compete to solve the world's development dilemma, to cope with the global climate change, and to promote worldwide technological innovation. In short, China and the United States should compete to make the world a better place.



Li Cheng

Director, John L. Thornton China Center
Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Program, Brookings
Institution

The middle class is a potential stabilizing force in Sino-U.S. relations. People-to-people exchanges can help enhance mutual understanding between the middle-class in China and in the U.S. They can help avoid mutual “demonization” and misunderstanding, enhance empathy, and encourage both countries to abandon the zero-sum mindset and respect each other’s ambitions and interests.



Cliff Kupchan

Chairman, Eurasia Group

The national strength of China and the United States far exceeds that of the others in the world. Actions toward achieving “external balance” such as forming alliances are not as transparent, reliable, and predictable as the steps taken to ensure “internal balance.” Bi-polarity is more stable than multi-polarity. China and the U.S. can focus on each other, rather than on other third-party countries.



Zhou Bo

Senior Fellow, Center for International Security
and Strategy, Tsinghua University

The dialogue between the Chinese and the American navy forces was beneficial. However, the outcome was not significant. In October 2020, the Defense Department of China and the U.S. discussed the issue of crisis management through a video conference, which is worthy of recognition. In 2014, 2015, and 2016, Chinese and the American navies held joint maritime trainings. Such engagements should continue in the future.



Stephen Orlins

President, National Committee on
United States-China Relations

Many of the problems that lead to conflict between China and the U.S. cannot be easily solved, not to mention the sensitive political issues facing the two countries. Only by taking incremental, specific, realistic, and sometimes unilateral measures can the two re-establish trust. This is best captured in the saying, “A journey of a thousand miles cannot be achieved without the accumulation of each single step, just as an enormous ocean cannot be formed without gathering every brook or stream.”



Wang Xiangsui

Senior Fellow, Taihe Institute
Director, Center for Strategic Studies,
Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics

Both China and the U.S. recognize that they are in a competitive relationship, but neither acknowledges nor believes that their competition aims to completely eliminate the other side. Seeking “competitive co-existence” is the basis for healthy competition between China and the U.S. To this end, both sides must ensure that the other’s intention is not hostile, recognize the legitimacy of each other’s values and interests, compete in a constructive way, and more importantly, adhere to non-violence.

Strategic Partners or Systemic Rivals?

-An Interpretation of China-EU Relations

Ma Keqing



Executive Vice Chair, China National Committee for Pacific Economic Cooperation
Chinese Ambassador to the Czech Republic (2014-2018)

China and the European Union (EU) formed a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2003. As the then Deputy Director-General of the Department of European Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I engaged in and witnessed the whole process. I clearly remembered that China and the EU caught the world's attention by showing great coherence in strategies, complementary economic ties, and eagerness in cooperating with each other in various areas. Since then, their comprehensive strategic partnerships produced fruitful results, which not only benefited both sides, but also contributed to the stability and development of the entire world.

However, in March 2019, the EU adjusted its China policy and positioned China as a partner, an economic competitor, and a "systemic rival." This new stance no longer highlights the comprehensive strategic partnership but instead underlines the competitive elements between the two sides. In particular, the EU referred to China as a "systemic rival" for the first time. This sharp turn reflects the EU's misperception of China, its concern and anxiety about China's rise, and its lack of rational judgment on the problems in China-EU collaboration. More importantly, it shows that the EU has been greatly affected by the US policies towards China since the Trump administration. This



Source: <https://www.ie.edu/>

new stance has led to the incongruity of policies towards China between the EU and its member states. And the emphasis on “competition” and “rival” has greatly disturbed China-EU relations.

The EU has introduced a slew of policy tools that are not conducive to China-EU cooperation. It has taken actions, which have harmed China’s interests over the Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Taiwan issues, and even imposed unilateral sanctions against China based on misstatements that challenge China’s national sovereignty and dignity. These acts are unacceptable to the Chinese people. The Chinese government has every right to make justified and necessary responses. Amidst numerous difficulties and challenges, China and the EU concluded negotiations over the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment. But that hard won momentum had to fade away. The China-EU relationship has fallen into a dilemma, making it difficult to advance major agendas for cooperation between the two sides. This has broken the hearts of those who care about and support China-EU cooperation.

The current world is undergoing profound changes unprecedented in a century, which are characterized by a complex international landscape, the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic, and difficult economic recovery. The world is pressing for China and the EU to strengthen cooperation and work with the international community to tide over these difficulties. This is also in the interests of the two sides. How will the China-EU relationship evolve in the future? The two sides must size up the situation to give a responsible answer.

China’s answer is clear and firm. China believes that China-EU relations are based on their broad common interests and similar strategic demands. There are no major conflict of interests or geopolitical disputes between China and the EU. For them, cooperation and consensus far outweigh competition and divergence. Therefore, China believes that the two sides should view each other as comprehensive strategic partners. This has been a mutual perception that had stood the test of time. China has repeatedly shown its sincerity to further the relationship with the EU. It is willing to work with the EU to push ahead with the major agendas in the next stage, continue to deepen pragmatic cooperation, and enhance communication, coordination, and cooperation in issues of mutual concern, such as pandemic management, economic recovery, climate change, WTO reform, and multilateralism. In the meantime, China will firmly safeguard its sovereignty, security, and development interests.

“The world is pressing for China and the EU to strengthen cooperation and work with the international community to tide over these difficulties.”

“We hope that the EU could adhere to mutual respect, dispel the outdated prejudices against China and refrain from taking actions that may harm China’s interests and the bilateral relations as a whole.”

Based on my observation, the EU has yet to take a positive attitude in its approach to China. Recently, some of its member states and certain forces in the European Parliament violated the “One-China principle” regarding the Taiwan issue, which has sent a wrong message to the rest of the world. We hope that the EU institutions and member states could view China’s development objectively and rationally, so that they can see how China’s deepening reform, further opening-up, and growing strength benefit and present new opportunities to China-EU cooperation. We hope that the EU could adhere to mutual respect, dispel the outdated prejudices against China and refrain from taking actions that may harm China’s interests and the bilateral relations as a whole. By upholding its “strategic autonomy,” the EU side should also show political courage, make policy decisions based on its own interests, and take joint efforts with China to get rid of the prevailing dilemma as soon as possible.

In general, the relationship between China and the EU is vital to both sides and the entire world. The two should draw lessons from their earlier experiences, adhere to the original aspirations, enhance mutual understanding, and always manage their relations from a strategic and broad perspective so as to promote a stable and sustainable development of their bilateral ties.

Approaching the China-EU Relations from a Cultural Perspective

Ding Yifan



Senior Fellow, Taihe Institute

China-EU relations are, in essence, a dialogue between two civilizations. This dialogue has not only benefited both sides greatly but has also brought a wealth of knowledge to human society and human civilization. However, in light of the recent development of China-EU relations, it appears that greater tolerance and a higher level of mutual understanding are needed between China and the EU. In other words, the two should be more empathetic with each other in order to sustain constructive dialogues between the two civilizations.

Interactions between our civilizations can be traced back to the imperial time, when the Chinese Han Dynasty, as well as the Tang Dynasty, were engaged in extensive trade exchanges and civilizational dialogues with the Roman Empire. Marco Polo, a Venetian merchant who visited China in the latter half of the 13th century, cultivated a special bond with Kublai Khan, Emperor of the Yuan Dynasty. After Marco Polo returned to Europe, he was then captured as a war prisoner by the Genoans. While in prison, he told what he saw and heard in China to his cellmates, and one of them, who happened to be a writer, wrote these tales into a travelogue, which was thereafter widely circulated in Europe. That was the time when Eastern civilization and Eastern culture started to hold great appeal for the Europeans.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Pope became interested in China and dispatched the first



Sculpture of Marco Polo, Rome, Italy
Source: <https://unsplash.com>

missionaries there. When they arrived, they were deeply attracted to the Chinese culture. They were supposed to spread Roman Catholic Christianity to the Chinese. But they did something else: translating the Chinese canons, including the Four Books and Five Classics, into Latin, and spreading the Chinese cultural values and ethics to Europe. These Chinese classics had a great impact on European civilization and greatly influenced the Enlightenment philosophers at the time. These philosophers were very keen to talk about China. “Chinoiserie” was a force to be reckoned with during the Age of Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries.

These cultural exchanges were mutually beneficial. Chinese culture influenced Europe. Conversely, scientific knowledge such as mathematics and astronomy was brought to China through European missionaries like Matteo Ricci. This exchange had

a great impact on China. It was the first time that the Chinese imperial court and the general population realized the existence of other civilizations in the world, and by interacting with these civilizations, the Chinese civilization became further expanded and enriched.



Matteo Ricci

Source: <https://www.amdgchinese.org/>

Notably, however, interactions between China and Europe were then based on what was called the “rules of Matteo Ricci,” namely that missionaries should not interfere with the social customs and habits of the local Chinese people. Instead, when preaching, they should respect Chinese traditional and cultural values, particularly the one about revering their ancestors. Matteo Ricci said that although these traditions differed greatly from the European and Catholic ones, they should be respected. Thanks to the Matteo

Ricci rules, the Catholic faith, and the European culture were accepted in China and later thrived on this land.

This changed in the early Qing period when Pope Clement XI became much less tolerant in regard to Chinese culture and values. Charles-Thomas Maillard de Tournon, the cardinal sent to China, ordered the European missionaries to forsake the “backward” local customs and forbade the Chinese Catholics to practice ancestor worships. Emperor Kangxi was furious about this. He denounced the missionaries for violating the “Ricci rules” and interfering with Chinese cultural traditions. Thereafter, the spread of Catholicism was prohibited and missionaries disrespectful to Chinese traditions, including Cardinal Doro dispatched by the Pope, were dispelled to Macau. Exchanges and mutual learning between China and Europe were brought to a standstill for a long

period of time. This was a lesson for both sides.

As the “reform and opening-up” started, interactions between the People’s Republic and Europe were resumed and became increasingly regularized. Through their exchanges, China imported a lot of modern knowledge from Europe, including models of state governance and business management. In the early years of the reform period, China hired a number of European experts to help modernize the Chinese business industry. Several state-owned enterprises even had Germans as their directors. Thus, it is arguably true that exchanges between the two sides have contributed greatly to the post-reform China’s modernization drive and that they have played a significant role in the improvement of China’s modern governance. Meanwhile, through their exchanges with China, European countries have also felt the influence of Chinese traditional culture on China’s modern society, and have begun to reassess the role of historical traditions. They began to comment on China’s model of social governance and make irresponsible remarks, complaining that China’s human rights have not developed in accordance with the European pattern. These criticisms and accusations have naturally caused a backlash from Beijing and the Chinese society. As a result, the two sides began to blame each other and approach the other side in a tit-for-tat fashion.

We need to draw some lessons from history. If today’s Europe believes that it is capable of transforming China’s traditional culture and China’s social governance model, then the exchanges between the two sides will fall into a stalemate as they once did in the past under Pope Clement XI’s reign. This development will not be conducive to mutual learning. If the two civilizations fail to strengthen exchanges and stand in each other’s shoes for mutual understanding, they will become increasingly inward-looking and eventually move towards isolation. By the time that the two close their doors on each other, the progress of human civilization will slow down.

China and Europe do have different views on social governance and human rights standards. The pandemic offers a good case in point. A few days ago, there were large-scale mass protests in Europe demanding the lifting of the safety measures in force. In response, the governments had to deploy massive police force to maintain order. This, in the eyes of the Chinese people, is hard to comprehend because the actions are simply unacceptable according to Chinese traditions and social customs. On the

“If today’s Europe believes that it is capable of transforming China’s traditional culture and China’s social governance model, then the exchanges between the two sides will fall into a stalemate as they once did in the past...”



Source: <https://www.ifri.org/>

contrary, European people do not uphold the same social values with their peers in China because they grew up in different backgrounds. Therefore, it is natural that they fail to understand China's pandemic management measures as well. This is not to say that it is impossible for the two to transcend difference. If China and Europe can be more tolerant with each other and more willing to facilitate mutual understanding about the other party's social and cultural background, it will be

easier to bridge the gulf of divergence and misperception.

Unlike the "Pax Americana," both China and Europe advocate "diversity of civilizations," "multi-polar world order," and "cross-cultural communication and development." The problem is that while promoting the European integration process under the banner of "diversity of civilizations," Europeans demanded that China develop in the direction that Europe hoped and designed. I think Europeans should be more consistent in their words and deeds on this issue and adopt a more tolerant and empathetic mentality about China's unique development path. Only in this way can the two sides join their hands and take efforts to tackle the global problems facing all mankind.

Highlight Quotes

2021 Taihe Civilizations Forum Session on International Relations *China-EU Relations*



Li Ruiyu

Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
Chinese Ambassador to the Republic of Italy and the Republic of San Marino (2013-2019)

China and the EU need to view the development of Sino-EU relations from a strategic perspective, actively promote long-term ties between China and the EU, resolve contradictions and differences, and jointly respond to various global challenges.



Nicolas Chapuis

Ambassador of the European Union to China

Is the EU against the rise of China?
I don't think so. On the contrary, the EU is for the rise of China because China's modernization and prosperity are vital to global economic growth.



Wu Hailong

President, China Public Diplomacy Association

The current status of Sino-EU relations is mainly influenced by Europe's closeness with the United States in terms of China policy. China does not consider Europe as its opponent, and China does not wish for Europe to treat it as an opponent. Now, more than ever, the world needs more partners than opponents. China has been, is now, and will always be a partner of Europe. If Europe decides to treat China as an equal partner, Sino-EU relations will have great potential in the future.



Wim Geerts

Ambassador of the Netherlands to China

The driving force for Sino-EU relations remains strong. Despite many challenges, China and the EU remain important partners to each other and the international community. The Sino-EU cooperative relationship is vital to the common prosperity of both sides and in the face of global challenges.



Ma Keqing

Executive Vice Chair, China National Committee for Pacific Economic Cooperation
Chinese Ambassador to the Czech Republic (2014-2018)

Sino-EU relations are of great importance to both the two sides and the world. Both should learn from the historical development of Sino-EU relations, cherish their original aspirations, enhance mutual understanding, and promote Sino-EU relations with strategic consideration and a big picture in mind, thus ensuring a stable and sustainable development of Sino-EU relations.



Sven Biscop

Director, Europe in the World Programme,
Egmont-Royal Institute for International Relations
Professor, Ghent University

China and the EU must abandon their prejudices and misconceptions. They should not regard each other as rivals who compete to become the world's political leader. Rather, they should distinguish between hostility and competition, the former being malicious and deliberate, while the latter is inevitable as long as each side strives to safeguard their own legitimate rights.



Sun Yongfu

Senior Fellow, Taihe Institute
Director, European Affairs Department, Chinese
Ministry of Commerce (2003-2015)

The current state of Sino-EU bilateral relations is at a low level since the establishment of formal diplomatic relations, and the China-EU Comprehensive Agreement on Investment has been suspended. However, darkness will eventually disappear, and soon the dawn will come. Bilateral economic trade has grown despite the economic recession in the past year, which shows that pragmatic cooperation between China and the EU has a solid foundation and win-win cooperation is still the goal of bilateral relations.



Ding Yifan

Senior Fellow, Taihe Institute

If today's Europe, like the Pope in the early years of the Qing Dynasty, seeks to forcefully transform China's traditional culture and social governance model, then engagement between China and Europe would be in a deadlock as in the past, and undermine future cultural exchanges.



Ahcene Boukhelfa

Ambassador of Algeria to China

The world needs China as an active participant in international affairs, with its commitment to uphold the values of international relations and ensure that these relations are more balanced and diverse.



Alexander Kulitz

Member, German Bundestag

We hope to build mutual understanding in our cultural communication and people-to-people exchanges to strengthen Sino-German relations and Sino-EU relations in the future.

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