



China, the EU and the Netherlands – A Chinese Perspective

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¹ The idea for and form of this study were arrived at in consultation between both authors. The literature review and field research for this study were carried out by the first author, who also wrote the first drafts of this report. The two authors then further expanded several of the sections and jointly completed the report.

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Summary

This report contains the findings of a survey by the LeidenAsiaCentre of the policy visions and views of Chinese officials and observers in relation to the EU, EU-China cooperation and Sino-Dutch relations. The survey entailed a general analysis of published Chinese sources (including policy documents, official statements, academic articles and media reports) and a series of interviews with policy makers and diplomats held from September 2016 to May 2017. This study is part of the ‘China and the Netherlands’ project of the LeidenAsiaCentre.

Although much is written and said in the Netherlands and other European Member States about the rise of China, the Chinese perspective on developments in Europe is often curiously absent from these analyses. At a time when world events demand greater in-depth insight into the policy visions and perspectives of what is arguably the most important emerging player on the international stage, the public debate on China’s rise and Chinese ambitions thus remains plagued by a significant lack of information. This study aims to contribute to addressing this increasingly urgent demand.

One of our key findings is that the Chinese view of the EU, more so than ever before, is very grim. The refugee crisis, the recent terror attacks in several European cities and above all the trend for ever-increasing Euroscepticism, as embodied by the ‘Brexit’ vote, have highlighted fundamental problems of the EU. The general expectation in China seems to be that the EU will not succeed in reforming itself in the short term in such a way as to enable it to act as a united, effective global actor. The current EU leadership is considered insufficiently capable of bridging the growing divide between the Union and its citizens.

A second key finding of this survey is that, from a Chinese standpoint, the EU has lost much of its international credibility and influence as a ‘normative’ global actor. While China has always had its reservations about the EU’s insistent projection of its own values around the world, it now sees not only the moral justification for this lacking, but also the concomitant economic imperative falling away. According to Chinese observers, this reality has still been insufficiently recognised in Europe, meaning that, in their view, the EU is also suffering from a gap between its still over-inflated self-image and its diminishing real-world influence.

At the same time, this survey demonstrates that the EU – in spite of the recent crises – has not lost any of its basic strategic significance to China. This is due principally to the *relative* importance of the EU and EU-China relations within Chinese visions of the multi-polar world order. The strategic interest represented by the EU may even increase in the event of a rapprochement between the US and Russia or a deterioration of China’s relations with the US and with American allies in Asia. On several global issues, ranging from trade to climate change and security, China’s strategic interest in a sustainable partnership with the EU is becoming ever greater.

In spite of recent setbacks and hitches in EU-China relations, China’s willingness to cooperate with the EU remains consistently great. For political and economic reasons, the focus of Chinese policy is however shifting ever further from Brussels, towards the Member States or groups of Member States. This increasingly subregional approach is resulting in differentiated Chinese agendas for Central-Eastern, Southern, Northern and Western Europe,

respectively. Apart from challenges for the EU, Beijing also sees opportunities for cooperation in the varying or even diverging political-economic realities of these European subregions.

The Netherlands is seen by Chinese officials as an important, influential Member State within the original heart of the EU with a well-performing, open economy. Beijing cherishes the long tradition of good relations with the Netherlands and sees it as one of its potential allies in the international debate on the future of free trade and sustainable globalisation. In the wake of ‘Brexit’, it is China’s hope that the Netherlands, together with other Member States, will continue to push in Brussels for the protection of free and inclusive trade, and will put itself forward as a partner for China, including within the context of the ‘Belt & Road’ initiative.

The Chinese perceptions identified in this survey have significant implications for both Europe and the Netherlands. First and foremost, they make it clear that the time has come for a reality check in (Western) Europe. Although Chinese visions, of course, are not the end of the story, the strategic intentions of this up-and-coming world power constitute to an ever greater extent a part of reality for the rest of the world. A healthy realisation of this, along with a recalibration of its own self-image, are all the more important to EU now that Moscow appears to be deliberately and more and more openly undermining European values and integration, while permanent support from Washington can be less and less taken for granted.

This should not be taken to imply that the shaping of European or Dutch China policies should be dictated or determined by Chinese perceptions. It does, however, mean that the effectiveness of these policies will depend on the extent by which policymakers succeed in anticipating on and intelligently responding to Chinese policy objectives and visions, and the underlying ideas, which therefore firstly require calm and objective assessment.

The way China views its national interests – including the general stability of the Chinese political system – make it unequivocally clear that banking on fundamental democratisation in China is an illusion that could lead to dangerously wrong choices. Seeing the CCP not as a credible partner but as an obstacle to desired change is to set a course towards conflict or confrontation. It is precisely in this respect that a European approach could differentiate itself from the traditional American approach, which fundamentally sees China as a rival. In this context, Brussels and The Hague should ask themselves what they stand to achieve (and at what cost) by placing the projection of their own *core values* at the heart of their China policy, given that China considers one of its own ultimate *core interests* to be keeping out unwelcome external political influence.

In the light of the results of this research, both geopolitical and economic considerations argue in favour of further development of the EU-China partnership. As inhabitants of the same land mass, it is only natural, ultimately, for their mutual ties to be permanently strengthened. Within this context, the Chinese ‘Belt & Road’ initiative essentially offers a logical and welcome potential basis for the embedding of such cooperation. Alongside this, as a stepping-stone towards a future free trade agreement between the EU and China, the bilateral investment agreement currently being negotiated could help provide sustainable content for such a constructive, long-term partnership.

There are, however, many difficult obstacles still to overcome. Where China is profiling itself as an advocate of global free trade and globalisation, it may be primarily interested in boosting its own exports, relieving excess industrial capacity, and increasing access to resources and commodities. Securing reciprocity is of great importance to the EU – not only in relation to accessing the Chinese market, but also in terms of socially and environmentally responsible standards for incoming investments. In spite of the shared political-economic interest in strengthening existing ties, there are significant differences to overcome between China's network-based approach to inter-regional cooperation, and the rules-based approach of the EU.

To bridge this gap, both sides will have to demonstrate a preparedness to make concessions in their mutual engagement. For this, the EU will have to display flexibility, decisiveness and competitiveness to ensure that the 'win-win' cooperation being put forward by China really does add up to a positive outcome for Europe. In the final analysis, a successful political-economic China strategy will require a decisive and united EU capable of effectively holding its trading partners – including China – to their responsibilities and obligations. To realise this, the EU needs to be able to effectively manage, and finally overcome, its internal differences.

The results of this survey underline the complex duality that characterises EU-China relations. On the one hand, both actors are fated to work together owing to their mutual interconnectedness, their shared interests and contemporary geopolitical realities. On the other hand, essential differences in values and cultural traditions will remain, and it is precisely cooperation with China that is bringing the internal divisions and weaknesses within the EU to the surface. European leaders would do well to bear this bilateral relationship in mind when consulting on more, less or a differentiated Europe moving at different speeds. It is up to the EU to keep convincing China in word and especially in deed that relations with the EU as a whole nevertheless are and will remain more efficient than relations with the individual Member States, including the most powerful ones.

In many respects, the same applies to the Netherlands as to the EU as a whole. As a high-value, innovative trade and services-based country, the Netherlands stands to win more than it could lose from a fruitful partnership with China. For this reason, it is clearly in the Dutch interest to work in Brussels towards a strengthening of the partnership with China. Alongside this, however, the Netherlands should be ready, when necessary, to chart its own course. In view of this, the Netherlands must pursue a policy aimed at sustainable cooperation with China that can be implemented effectively both within and outside the context of the EU.

Since the recent exchange of state visits by president Xi Jinping and king Willem-Alexander, bilateral relations between China and the Netherlands are at a historic high. Presently, the Netherlands is in a position to seize upon this positive momentum and increased levels of aspiration to raise its 'open and pragmatic partnership' with China to a higher level, while at the same time helping to cement EU-China relations. Such efforts will only have the desired effect, however, if China regards the Netherlands as a partner, and vice versa. As is the case for the EU, this means that the Netherlands will have to adjust several expectations, assumptions and policy in relation to China. This report aims to put forward some specific recommendations on how this can be done.

Recommendations

The results of this research have a range of implications for the present Dutch China policy. The key recommendations that we have drawn from this research are summarised below. In view of the aims of this study, the original findings of our survey – in the form of Chinese perceptions and views – are perhaps even more important than the recommendations we have based on these. In this regard, we refer to the other sections of this report, in particular Sections 3 through 5.

Basic assumptions

The Dutch political establishment should view and approach China more as a partner. China's international ambitions are well-knowable, consistent and to date not excessive. Although China's national development and international rise will continue to give grounds for differences of opinion, conflicts of interest and tensions, neither China's historical nor its current policies give cause for concern as to an irresponsible future course. In several areas of relevance to the Netherlands and Europe, including trade and climate change, there is a growing convergence of views. This should be translated into modified, realistic policy assumptions and a firm political will for cooperation.

China policy

The Dutch China policy of 'investing in values and business' requires fundamental revision. Recent developments, both global and bilateral, justify a broader and more versatile strategic investment in cooperation and exchange across the entire scope of mutual relations. Cooperation in the areas of knowledge, culture and education should form a central pillar of this, and these areas of cooperation should be more effectively coordinated with one another. The position of the EU within the policy of the Netherlands towards China should also be more clearly defined in strategic terms. Various Dutch interests in relation to China are better served through efforts in Brussels than in Beijing.

Trade

The Netherlands will have to consider the question of how, following 'Brexit', it will be able (in concert with other Member States and alone) to continue to effectively espouse a liberal economic vision within the EU in the face of anti-globalisation sentiments. Within the EU, the Netherlands should actively build majorities with a view to reaching consensus on a joint policy that effectively encourages China to further open its markets to European goods and investments. At the same time, the Netherlands can strategically present itself to China as an advocate of balanced, inclusive, global free trade *as well as* an open trading and investment destination within the EU.

New Silk Roads

Building on the so far successful cooperation within the framework of the AIIB, the Netherlands should, in principle, openly welcome China's 'Belt & Road' initiative as a potential instrument for the consolidation of cooperation and strengthening of the European economy. Together with Germany and other Member States, the Netherlands could help lay the foundations for the responsible and sustainable implementation of this Eurasian project

within the EU through the formulation of a multilateral response that does justice to European wishes and interests. Attention could be devoted in this, for example, to guarantees of corporate social responsibility and the structural engagement of the small and medium-sized business sector.

Human rights

Dutch efforts to improve human rights in China should focus first and foremost on the promotion of consensus in Brussels and more effective EU diplomacy in this domain. Public references to human rights violations *outside* of an EU context are counterproductive and should be avoided. The bilateral dialogue with China should be aimed above all at the creation of realistic, effective stimuli that not just encourage, but intrinsically motivate China to pursue and implement structural improvements and reforms within China's national and regional political contexts. Dutch government funding of concrete projects should stimulate structured interaction with the relevant Chinese actors, including government agencies at the various levels.

Dialogue

Alongside EU-level dialogues, the Netherlands should instigate semi-formal or informal dialogues with China, in relation to specific initiatives or areas of cooperation, in order to feed and support the development of the bilateral 'open and pragmatic partnership for comprehensive cooperation' on a permanent basis and in a pro-active manner. Following the example of the Scandinavian countries, periodic round-table talks could be held, in cooperation with the network of diplomatic posts, between Dutch and Chinese think tanks, knowledge institutes and NGOs. Institutionalised dialogue at this level could make an ongoing contribution to a bottom-up approach and lessening the information gap that characterises public debate on China in the Netherlands.

1 Introduction

As in other parts of the world, feelings in Europe concerning the rise of China are mixed. Admiration for the speed and scale of the country's economic development and China's expanding share of the world economy is offset by mistrust of Chinese strategic intentions abroad and doubts concerning Beijing's readiness to adhere to the international values and standards on which the current world order is founded.

This ambivalent attitude also underpins the China policy of the European Union (EU). Last summer, the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy put forward a proposal that is to constitute the basis of the EU's new China strategy.¹ The strategy aims at intensifying the bilateral relationship with China and expanding this into a global partnership, albeit subject to the precondition that European values are at the heart of this and that China commits itself to international standards. The China policy of the Netherlands rests upon similar foundations.

The development of effective policy and concrete strategies for cooperation presupposes a minimum of understanding of the mutual interests, wishes and intentions involved. Although a great deal is thought, written and said in Europe and in the Netherlands concerning the rise of China, the Chinese perspective on international developments is seldom considered a significant component of the analysis. The public debate in Europe on China's rise and Chinese ambitions is generally characterised by a significant dearth of information. And this in spite of the fact that the transformation of the post-war world order that seems to be taking place at the present time demands keener insights into the points of view and policy strategies of one of the most important new key players on the international stage. This demand can only become more acute in the face of recent developments and shifts.

Aim of the research

This study makes up part of LeidenAsiaCentre's project 'China and the Netherlands', together with previous reports on the presentation of the Netherlands in the Chinese media, Chinese businesses in the Netherlands and the importance of China and Chinese students to Dutch universities.² This study presents the contemporary visions of Chinese policymakers, diplomats and regional specialists regarding the EU, cooperation between the EU and China and Dutch-Chinese relations. It therefore seeks to focus not so much on relations between China and the EU as such, but rather on general Chinese *perceptions* of these relations within the context of the broader Chinese views on the world and China's place within it. How does China see the EU as an institution, as a global actor and as a partner? How do Chinese officials see the development of relations between the EU and China? And what does Beijing hope to gain from its bilateral relationship with the Netherlands?

These expectations and perceptions are important for the EU and for the Netherlands for two reasons. Firstly, because – quite apart from their inherent merits – China's still growing influence on the global stage. Insight into Chinese perceptions enables us to better anticipate

¹ European Commission (2016).

² For these other reports, see: <http://www.leidenasiacentre.nl/publications>.

and respond to (existing and future) developments that are increasingly being shaped by China. Secondly, these perceptions are based on incomplete or inaccurate observations of ‘Chinese’ facts. A thorough analysis should redress this and, by supplementing, qualifying or correction of European perceptions, serve as a basis for more effective policies.

Put simply, a sounder understanding of Chinese thinking could enhance the dialogue between the EU and China, both at institutional level and at the level of individual Member States. This could lead to a better interpretation of recent Chinese initiatives such as the ‘Belt & Road’ initiative, which has in a very short time become a central tenet of Beijing’s foreign policy, and, consequently, to an effective, common response. And the same applies to the Dutch-Chinese relationship.

Both the EU and the Netherlands also stand to benefit from a better understanding of Chinese motivations from a multilateral perspective, particularly in an era of changing leadership. Whereas until recently European capitals frequently harmonized their attitudes towards China with the prevailing visions in Washington, this may be less so in the future. The recent univocal call from Brussels and Beijing to the US to respect the Paris Climate Agreement could herald such a shifting of alignments. Also, in the light of the EU’s complex relationship with Russia and potential uncertainty concerning the usual support from across the Atlantic in this respect, it would not hurt the EU to know how Moscow’s principal foreign partner sees the Eurasian continent.

Finally, quite apart from the sphere of (geo)political relations, the general public within the EU and the Member States is of course equally well served by a better understanding of Chinese thinking concerning the world of today and tomorrow and the positions China, Europe and the EU are adopting within this. Another important purpose of this research is therefore to inform the public debate within the Netherlands.

Place and structure of the research

Several useful studies already exist touching on Chinese perceptions of the EU and EU-China relations.³ The majority of these studies, however, are several years old and do not therefore take important recent events and shifts into account. In addition, many of these studies confine themselves strictly to the relationship between the EU and China, without including the broader context of Chinese visions of the changing world order and the role of China’s evolving foreign diplomacy in this. This survey intends, through study of the recent literature and field research, to both bring the existing picture up to date and place it within a broader context.

This study is underpinned by a broad analysis of recent literature, combined with several interviews. The survey of the literature focused principally on recent (largely Chinese) policy documents, official statements, news reports, commentaries in the relevant media and academic publications. The findings were then tested, updated and supplemented by interviews with some 30 policymakers, diplomats, academics and observers in China and in Europe. The research was carried out from September 2016 to April 2017.

³ See e.g. Men (2006), Holland (2007), Shambaugh et al. (2008), Song (2011), Chen (2012), Dong et al. (2013), Zhou et al. (2013b) and Z. Wang (2015).

This is therefore a general survey of Chinese perceptions of EU-China relations, and does not provide in-depth analyses of specific themes within these that may have been dominating the bilateral agenda at any particular moment. European perspectives on these mutual relations receive relatively less attention in view of the aim of this study and the extensive literature already available covering this. This report makes a clear distinction between the results of the research in relation to Chinese perceptions on the one hand, and the conclusions which, in the opinion of the researchers, can be drawn from these from a European perspective on the other. We will examine this distinction in greater detail later in the report.

This report is structured as follows below: Section 2 first gives a sketch of the broader contours of the themes explored by identifying in general terms who the relevant actors are within the Chinese diplomatic field and what the general principles underlying Chinese policy visions are. Section 3, the central section, then describes Chinese policy perspectives on the EU and on China-EU cooperation. Section 4 presents the major findings of this research in relation to the Netherlands and Dutch-Chinese bilateral relations. Our own reflections on the results of this research are then presented in Section 5, followed by a number of conclusions and recommendations which conclude the report.

Finally, a number of overviews are included of the bodies participating in this research, including an anonymised list of respondents and the principal literature consulted. In accordance with previous, comparable studies, the interviews took place subject to a condition of anonymity in order to promote respondents' participation and openness.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank all of those who participated in this research. Firstly, this concerns various officials from the Dutch embassy in China, who not only shared concrete insights and useful background information with us, but also made – successful – efforts to facilitate conversations with Chinese officials and colleagues from other diplomatic missions. We are also greatly indebted to all of the other people to whom we spoke and who provided us with commentary. Naturally, the findings of this research and the interpretations and conclusions drawn from this report are the sole responsibility of its authors.

2 General Context

2.1 Whose perspective?

In the light of the aims set out above, this research is interested principally in the visions and perceptions of national-level Chinese officials who (co-)determine the foreign agenda and help shape foreign policy. The first question therefore is, who are they? Owing to the large number of bodies and officials involved, as well as the constantly evolving discrepancies between the nominal and actual influence of the actors concerned and the opacity of the Chinese political system in general, it is impossible to find an accurate, lasting answer to this question.⁴ Within the context of this research, the general overview that follows should suffice.

Policy-shapers

The highest government position within the area of China's external relations is that of state councillor (国务委员) for foreign affairs, a rank just below that of vice premier yet above that of minister. At present, the office is held by the career diplomat Yang Jiechi (杨洁篪), who prior to taking up the position of China's top diplomat in 2013 had served as ambassador to the US and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Together with the current Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi (王毅), the former chair of the government agency the Taiwan Affairs Office and ambassador to Japan, he is formally responsible for the implementation of China's foreign policy.

This does not mean that these high-ranking diplomats determine China's foreign policy. As is usual in the Chinese model of government, the final say does not lie with the administrative bodies, but with the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and in particular the 25 members of the Politburo (中央政治局), headed by the Secretary General of the Party, president Xi Jinping. Since Xi took office at the end of 2012, he has repeatedly stressed the importance of central leadership at the highest level within the party to the success of national strategies and foreign policy: a position that has been publicly supported by state councillor Yang Jiechi.⁵

The principal organ of the Central Committee of the CCP involved with policy is the Policy Research Office (中共中央政策研究室). This agency is involved across the entire field of national policy, including international relations. The agency has been chaired since 2002 by Wang Huning (王沪宁), a former professor at the highly respected Fudan University specialized in international politics. Wang's institute is often seen as the brains behind the 'Chinese Dream' campaign, as well as previous, similar doctrines. Alongside Li Zhanshu (栗战书), a confidante of Xi Jinping who heads the Central Secretariat of the Central Committee of the CCP, Wang belongs to the Chinese president's regular entourage during his official foreign trips and state visits.⁶ Both are members of the Politburo and enjoy significantly

⁴ On this set of issues, see also: Jacobson & Knox (2010) and Rozman (2013).

⁵ For a major speech by Xi, see: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml. For Yang's view, see: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-08/16/c_132635189_2.htm (visited on 3 January 2017).

⁶ Both advisors accompanied President Xi Jinping during his state visit to the Netherlands in March 2014. See: https://www.eerstekamer.nl/nieuws/20140324/historisch_bezoek_president_van (visited on 3 January 2017).

higher political status than state councillor Yang Jiechi.⁷

Another party institute that should be mentioned here is the International Department of the Central Committee of the CCP (中共中央对外联络部). The core task of this department, chaired by the diplomat Song Tao (宋涛), is to maintain international relations with foreign political parties. In the early days, this meant maintaining contact solely with foreign Communist parties, but today the department states that it maintains relations with over 400 political parties and organisations worldwide.⁸ Alongside this liaison function, the institute is responsible for conducting research into international relations (including inter-party relations). For this purpose, the department manages eight research agencies, each of which is dedicated to a particular region.⁹

Mutual coordination and policy consultations between the party, administrative organs and the armed forces in the areas of national security and foreign affairs take place through the Central Foreign Affairs Leading Group (中共中央外事工作领导小组).¹⁰ This extremely important leading group, organized directly under the Politburo, has been chaired since 2013 by president Xi Jinping himself, who has put his personal stamp on the formation of China's foreign policy in a much more marked manner than his immediate predecessors. State councillor Yang Jiechi acts as secretary general of this group and also heads its (executive) office.¹¹ Song Tao is the day-to-day deputy head of the latter body.¹² Foreign Minister Wang Yi is also a member of the leading group.

Another important leading group at the central level is the one responsible for the development of the 'Belt & Road' initiative ("一带一路"建设工作领导小组). This initiative, which has taken on a central position within Chinese foreign policy since its announcement by president Xi Jinping in late 2013, aims to revive and reintegrate the economies along the old 'Silk Roads' into a modern network of transportation and communications connections. The central leading group, established in 2015, is chaired by first Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli (张高丽), who is responsible among other things for financial affairs and economic reform, and who is a member of the Politburo's 7-strong Standing Committee, the ultimate nexus of power in China. Together with two other Politburo members, including the abovementioned Wang Huning, Yang Jiechi acts as vice-chair of this group.¹³

⁷ On Wang Huning and Li Zhanshu, who tend to keep out of the spotlight, see: Jeremy Page, 'The wonk with the ear of Chinese president Xi Jinping', *The Wall Street Journal*, 4 June 2013, and Edward Wong, 'Xi Jinping's inner circle offers cold shoulder to Western officials', *New York Times*, 25 September 2015.

⁸ See: <http://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/inrelations/objectdomain/index.html> (visited on 3 January 2017).

⁹ This concerns the following eight regions: (1) Southeast Asia; (2) Northeast Asia; (3) Western Asia and Northern Africa; (4) Sub-Saharan Africa; (5) South and Central America; (6) Eastern Europe; (7) North America and the United Kingdom; and (8) (continental) Western Europe. See: <http://www.idcpc.org.cn/gywb/jgsz> (visited on 3 January 2017).

¹⁰ Another name for this organ is the Central National Security Leading Group (中央国家安全工作领导小组).

¹¹ 'Guowu weiyuan Yang Jiechi ren Zhongyang waishi lingdao xiaozu bangongshi zhuren', *Guanchazhe*, 26 August 2013, see: http://www.guancha.cn/politics/2013_08_26_168286.shtml (visited on 3 January 2017).

¹² Chen Baocheng, 'Song Tao ren Zhongyang waishi bangongshi changwu fu zhuren', *Caixin*, 8 December 2014, see: <http://china.caixin.com/2014-12-08/100760544.html> (visited on 3 January 2017).

¹³ Jing Yue, "'Yi dai, yi lu" jianshe gongzuo lingdao xiaozu "yi zheng si fu" mingdan pilu', *People's Daily* website, 17 April

Unlike its counterparts in Western countries therefore, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (外交部) plays a relatively subordinate role in the formation of foreign policy. The ministry is more of a technical implementing body, restricted in its discretionary powers not only by the supremacy of the Party, but also by the substantial overlap of its duties with those of other actors with competencies in the area of China's foreign affairs, including (but not limited to) the foreign section of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, the foreign committees of the National People's Congress and the People's Political Consultative Conference, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank, the large state companies with overseas interests, and the decentral government authorities.¹⁴

As primarily an external point of contact, the Foreign Ministry does bear considerable responsibility, but can exercise little actual authority. Political loyalty and reliability have long been more valued in Chinese diplomats than their professional expertise or competence. This was expressed as early as 60 years ago in a 16-syllable adage by then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zhou Enlai, which today still serves as the motto of the department's major recruiting school, the China Foreign Affairs University (外交学院), and of which the sequence is particularly instructive: 'unswerving loyalty, mastery of policies, professional competency, observance of discipline' ('站稳立场、掌握政策、熟悉业务、严守纪律').¹⁵ The continuous emphasis on political loyalty throughout the recruitment, training and evaluation of Chinese diplomats naturally finds expression in their work approach and attitudes, and paradoxically enough may take its toll on their international orientation. In combination with their weak position within China's pluralistic administrative system, which is impenetrable even to them, this may explain why the Ministry is often seen by foreign diplomats as a buffer against external influence rather than as a gateway to the Chinese machinery of government.¹⁶

Given this background, Chinese policymakers seldom make public pronouncements, and their personal views on topics such as the relationship between China and the EU are unknown. What is made public however are the authorized official visions formulated by their bureaus, through policy documents, official statements and speeches. Large numbers of such documents can be found on the website of China's Foreign Ministry, along with reports from the daily press conferences it organises and statements from its spokespersons.¹⁷ President Xi Jinping himself, in 2014, had several of his speeches published in the book *The Governance of China*, while ahead of his state visits he tends to announce his goals in open letters submitted to influential media in the country concerned.¹⁸ Owing to their public nature,

2015, see: <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2015/0417/c1001-26862464.html> (visited on 17 March 2017).

¹⁴ On the decreasing influence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 1990, see: Zhao & Gao (2015).

¹⁵ 'Waijiao xueyuan zongwei shuji: Zhou zongli 16 zi waijiao yaoqiu cheng xiaoxun', *People's Daily Online*, 29 July 2014. See: <http://edu.people.com.cn/n/2014/0729/c1006-25365254.html> (visited on 3 January 2017).

¹⁶ Several European diplomats in China have referred to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs as 'difficult to access' or as a 'buffer'. Interviews 3, 8 and 12.

¹⁷ See: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng (visited on 3 January 2017).

¹⁸ On the eve of Xi Jinping's state visit to the Netherlands in March 2014, the Dutch daily newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* published such an open letter: 'Hoge verwachtingen van mijn staatsbezoek' ['Great Expectations for my State Visit'], *NRC*

such expressions naturally give only limited insight into the strategic objectives and deeper underlying motives of the Chinese leadership. Although they often contain valuable information and offer reliable insights into the policy aims being pursued, sometimes their correct interpretation only becomes clear afterwards. Partly for this reason, this study also turns to a second group of respondents, i.e. policy influencers and observers.

Think tanks, research centres and commentators

In recent years, a considerable increase has been noticeable in the number of think tanks and (policy) research centres in China. The annual ‘Global Go To Think Tank Index Report’ issued by the University of Pennsylvania put the number of Chinese think tanks for the year 2015 at 435, in second place after the US.¹⁹ According to the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS), there are some 300 think tanks currently active in China.²⁰ Other Chinese sources also include research groups at universities, which results in a total of some 2,000 think tanks and expertise centres. These can be sub-divided, in decreasing order of influence, into the following four groups: (1) institutes affiliated to the Party, state or army; (2) institutes belonging to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS); (3) academic research centres; and (4) private expertise centres.²¹

According to the research of the University of Pennsylvania and the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, the following Chinese semi-official think tanks exert the most influence in the area of international relations:

1. Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) (中国社会科学院), affiliated to the State Council (国务院);
2. China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) (中国国际问题研究院), affiliated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
3. China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) (中国现代国际关系研究院), affiliated to the Ministry of State Security (国安部);
4. Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS) (上海国际问题研究院), affiliated to the municipality of Shanghai and also informally to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The research carried out within these think tanks is organised by region and by significant key themes. Generally speaking, the emphasis in this is on global governance and (China’s

Handelsblad, 23 March 2014, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2014/03/23/ik-heb-hoge-verwachtingen-van-mijn-bezoek-aan-europa-a1426317> (visited on 3 January 2017).

¹⁹ McGann, James G., ‘2015 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report’ (2016). *TTCSP Global Go To Think Tank Index Reports*. Paper 10. See: http://repository.upenn.edu/think_tanks/10 (visited on 5 January 2017).

²⁰ Shanghai shehui kexueyuan (zhiku yanjiu zhongxin), *2015 nian Zhongguo zhiku baogao: yingxiangli paiming yu zhengce jianyi*, January 2016, <http://www.sass.stc.sh.cn/eWebEditor/UploadFile/00n/ull/20160128161350250.pdf> (visited on 5 January 2017).

²¹ Li Yang, ‘Chinese independent think tanks win support’, *China Daily*, 25 July 2014, see: http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2014-07/25/content_17924098.htm; Zhou Qijun, ‘Gov’t gives think tanks food for thought with supporting policies’, *Caixin* online, 17 July 2015; <http://english.caixin.com/2015-07-17/100830006.html> (visited on 5 January 2017).

relations with) the great powers and neighbouring countries. However, all four also have research centres specialising in Europe (欧洲研究所 or 欧洲研究中心). Often, these centres are the historical product of mergers of separate research departments for Eastern and Western Europe, whereby Eastern European studies traditionally came under Soviet studies.²² Research into the European Union and into EU-China relations generally takes place within the research centres for European studies; these institutions do not have separate research centres exclusively dedicated to this line of research.

International studies at Chinese universities likewise trace their roots to the Cold War era. During the 1960s, the Chinese government designated three leading universities in Beijing and Shanghai to develop this field: Renmin University (Beijing) was to focus on the ‘Socialist World’, Fudan University (Shanghai) on the ‘Capitalist World’ and Peking University on the ‘Third World’.²³ Although this strict allocation of areas of expertise is long gone, these three universities still lead the way in terms of international studies in China, albeit roughly speaking in reverse order of prominence. Other leading universities in this field are the China Foreign Affairs University (affiliated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Tsinghua University and Shanghai International Studies University (SISU).

All of these universities have specialist research centres in the area of European studies and/or Sino-European relations. Only SISU has a research centre focussing specifically on EU studies. Alongside these regional research centres, China also has a growing number of centres for country-specific research, including for example the German Studies Center at Peking University, the British Studies Center at SISU and the French Studies Center and the Dutch Studies Center at Fudan University. In addition to the realms of international relations and strategic studies, the international economic disciplines are also worth following – on the one hand owing to the interconnectedness of economic themes (including EU studies) with international relations studies, and on the other because in China this field is generally more suited to critical consideration than those within the social sciences. The European studies centres at Fudan University, for instance, formally part of the economics faculty and are headed by economists.

Completely independent research as it is practised in the West does not take place in China. This is true not only of the semi-official think tanks, but also of the academic research groups – although in the case of this last category more freedom is to be found the further the group or researcher concerned functions from the political centre. Leading researchers, however, often maintain close relationships with policymakers, and effectively fulfil a double role. On the one hand, they advise central policymakers on international relations, both in the form of written recommendations and regular reports and through personal consultations and participation in study sessions; on the other hand, they are expected to explain Chinese policy to the outside world and hence in fact to justify this. The dean of the School of International Studies at Peking University, Wang Jisi (王缉思), as well as for example CASS’ Europe specialist, Zhou Hong (周弘), among others, are regularly invited for consultation and

²² On the history of these institutions, see e.g. Shambaugh (1987).

²³ Dai (2008), p. 106.

discussions with China's central leadership.²⁴

Thanks to this dual role, Chinese researchers/advisors have access to current information on the formation of China's international policy. The same applies, to an even greater extent, to the leaders of the semi-official think tanks, who have partial access to internal documents such as the minutes of important discussions and embassy reports.²⁵ The fact that they do not play any formal role in the policy formation process makes them eminently suited, in theory, to answering questions on China's international ambitions. The significance of this should not be overestimated, however, in view of the strongly divergent opinions and visions, not only between the various political factions and theoretical schools, but also between individual institutes and leaders.²⁶ This plurality is further strengthened by the impact of public opinion in China, which is partly the product of systematic cultivation and manipulation by the government, but at the same time reflects keenly felt sentiments which Beijing is unable, thanks in part to the influence of new media, to simply ignore.²⁷ The spontaneous nationalist (for example anti-Japanese) protests that erupt with some regularity can be seen in this light.

Chinese journalists play a role somewhat similar to that of the researcher/advisor. On the one hand, the task of the foreign desks of the Chinese state media is to provide the home audience – including policymakers – with international news, but on the other they are expected to transmit the 'Chinese sound' to the international audience, thereby reinforcing Chinese 'soft power'.²⁸ Virtually all Chinese correspondents in Europe – estimated to number some 100-120 at present – work for the official media.²⁹ Approximately half work for the state press agency *Xinhua* (新华), which has its European regional office in Brussels and maintains one permanent correspondent in the Netherlands. Apart from the reporting by *Xinhua*, commentary in (English-language) media such as *China Daily* and *Global Times* also offers insights into Chinese ideas on the existing and future world order and China's place therein.³⁰ The image of Europe and the Netherlands in the Chinese media was recently the subject of research by the LeidenAsiaCentre of which reports can be found on its website.³¹

2.2 China and the world

Before taking a closer look at Chinese perceptions concerning the EU and EU-China relations, a minimal level of understanding of the broader context is necessary. After all, Chinese visions of the EU do not come about in a vacuum, but are part of wider perspectives on the ever-changing world order and China's own, evolving place within this. Although it is impossible owing to the plurality discussed above to define a uniform, fixed Chinese

²⁴ Jacobson & Knox (2010), pp. 34–6.

²⁵ Glaser (2013), p. 94.

²⁶ Jacobson & Knox (2010), pp. 40.

²⁷ Pieke (2016), p. 131; Callahan (2015), pp. 44–6, 64.

²⁸ Van Pinxteren & Pieke (2017), p. 30.

²⁹ Van Pinxteren & Pieke (2017), p. 29.

³⁰ See: <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english>; <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn> and <http://www.globaltimes.cn>.

³¹ A report of the findings of this research appeared in March 2017 on the website of the LeidenAsiaCentre; see: <http://www.leidenasiacentre.nl/news/rapporten-china-en-nederland>. See also: Van Pinxteren & Pieke (2017), pp. 21–75.

worldview, the brief summary given below may help in picking out the contours of a Sinocentric view of global developments in the 21st century.

Global player

China still considers itself to be a developing country, but at the same time recognises its position as a regional superpower and an emerging global power. While this already gradually manifested itself during Hu Jintao's presidency, since Xi Jinping became president in 2012 Chinese national awareness has become unmistakably stronger and more openly pronounced. Beijing is increasingly taking on a leading role within the region, for example through the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, its plans to revive the ancient 'Silk Roads', and its campaign for a new security architecture 'for and by' Asians. On the world stage, China is no longer positioning itself only as a driver of global economic growth, but in addition as a trailblazer for G20 cooperation, a champion of international free trade and a leader in combatting climate change. Meanwhile, Beijing likes to refer to the country's bilateral relations with the US as a new type of '*great power relations*' (新兴大国关系), albeit between an established and an emerging great power.

As far as China is concerned, its rise will not lead to war. Although the opposite may at times seem to be the case, one of the top priorities of China's foreign policy strategies is to avoid conflict during its ongoing rise.³² A peaceful, stable environment is seen as an essential precondition for the prompt realisation of the 'Chinese dream', which Xi Jinping has equated to the 'great renewal of the Chinese nation'.³³ There is a timescale associated with this aspiration, marked by two upcoming centenaries. In 2021, when the CCP will celebrate its 100th birthday, a 'reasonably prosperous society' is to have been achieved. By 2049, marking the 100th birthday of the People's Republic, China should have become a 'strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious and modern socialist country' – or, freely translated, an economic, political and military superpower with Chinese characteristics.

China believes that it should have a say in regional and global affairs commensurate with its growing economic and financial weight. It is considered to be self-evident that in the process of its ascendancy it should stand up with increasing vigour for its own core interests. Beijing's policy priority of avoiding conflict ends where it believes that its core interests are coming under an external threat, be it from 'colour revolutions', expressions of independence from Taiwan or Tibet, threats to its borders or sovereignty, or military and economic containment. Beijing realises that, as an emerging power or disruptor of the status quo, it is extremely open to suspicions of harbouring aggressive intent. In line with geopolitical theory, however, China holds that it is only the established superpower that is served by a 'war of succession' and the setting of the necessary parameters for this with help from regional allies.

³² Although Beijing's intentions are not beyond doubt, international relations specialists generally recognise that, in spite of the tensions in the region and the large number of neighbouring countries with which peace must be maintained, China's rise from a historical point of view is proceeding remarkably peacefully. See for example Brzezinski (2000), pp. 19–20; Buzan (2010), p. 16.

³³ See for example: 'The central conference on work relating to foreign affairs was held in Beijing', website of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 November 2014, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml (visited on 10 March 2017).

Against this background, China sees the active American presence in the region as an attempt to restrict China in economic and military terms.³⁴ Consequently, it sees its own actions, for example in the South China Sea, as being principally of a defensive nature.³⁵

Global vision

China's rise requires a peaceful, stable international environment, and therefore acceptance from the established order. China therefore considers that its interests are not served by any overthrow of the existing international order, creation of a parallel system, or 'export' of the Chinese social system.³⁶ China recognises – at least for the foreseeable future – the US' hegemonic leadership role in the world, and has frequently stated that it has neither the ambition, nor the capabilities, to take over this role. It does however demand that the legitimate interests of other countries, including China, are respected. For this reason, China has declared itself a firm proponent of preservation of the current world order founded on the UN and has a great attachment to the modern Westphalian system of sovereignty, non-intervention and *consensus-based* inter-state cooperation. Supranational *rules-based* governance is seen as potentially threatening insofar as this opens up the possibility of external interference in its own affairs.³⁷

The above does not mean that China is satisfied with the existing (albeit evolving) international system. In certain regards China clearly adopts a revisionist stance, with the primary objective of adjusting existing international controlling relationships in line with the changing realities resulting from the emergence of new players. One example of reform *within existing multilateral institutions* is the recent realignment of power relations within the IMF, giving greater say to BRICS countries including China. Another way is the creation of *new multilateral institutions within the existing governance system*, such as the (BRICS) New Development Bank in Shanghai and the AIIB in Beijing, which serves to complement the existing system and operate in accordance with existing international standards. The institutionalisation of the G20 is also illustrative of attempts to reinforce the existing multilateral platform, thus 'democratising' the current international system.³⁸ In a similar way, Beijing seeks to increase its international influence through new subregional, plurilateral initiatives such as the 'Belt & Road' initiative.

What China envisages is a *multipolar* global order in which the hegemonic power of the US is balanced and mitigated by a rearranged *multilateral* system, which includes a greater role for the emerging 'poles', including China itself in the first place. In order to level the current

³⁴ See for example Yan (2001), p. 36.

³⁵ This report is not the place for a discussion of Chinese visions of the recent events in the South China Sea. On this, see *inter alia* Fu Ying & Wu Shicun, 'South China Sea: how we got to this stage', *The National Interest*, 9 May 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/south-china-sea-how-we-got-stage-16118> and 'Understanding China's position on the South China Sea disputes', Institute for Security and Development Policy, *Backgrounder*, June 2016, <http://isdip.eu/publication/understanding-chinas-position-south-china-sea-disputes> (visited on 31 March 2017).

³⁶ See for example Yang Wang (2014); Yi Wang (2016a). See also D. Wang (2015), pp. 78–9.

³⁷ Pan (2010), pp. 230–1; Etzioni (2011), p. 172; Chen (2016), p. 782.

³⁸ On the Chinese strategy of gradual 'supplementing' of multilateral institutions, see *inter alia*: Z. Wang (2015). On China's 'reformist revisionism', see: Buzan (2010). See also Chen (2016), pp. 780–2.

playing field and make this international ‘democratisation’ possible, according to Chinese leaders a ‘new type’ of international relations is needed – one which builds on the basic principles and aspirations of the UN Charter, but which places greater emphasis on inclusiveness, reciprocity (‘win-win cooperation’) and conflict solution through mutual dialogue and consultation.³⁹ This is intended as a direct contrast to the exclusivity, ‘zero-sum’ mentality and military problem-solving approaches Beijing ascribes to the American way of exercising its power. An example of this exclusivity is the Trans-Pacific Partnership (until recently) promoted by the US, which strategically excluded Chinese participation, thereby representing a considerable step backwards for China in relation to the open, global trade system of the WTO.⁴⁰ According to this view, it was Obama, and not China, who was undermining the existing international system. The US withdrawal from TPP was welcomed in China insofar as it signified the abortion of an attempt to strategically corner it with a regional trade pact that ‘lacks inclusiveness’ and hence ‘violates basic economic rules’.⁴¹

This ‘Chinese’ globalisation clearly does have its limits. While it is true that China embraces (at least in an instrumental sense) the international market economy and global free trade, it at the same time powerfully resists the dominant influence and projection of Western liberal values in the political sphere, which it views not only as a threat to its own political model and party legitimacy, but also as fundamentally unsound. Leading Chinese political strategist Yan Xuetong, for example, questions what he refers to as the ‘American values of equality, freedom and democracy’ currently underpinning international standards: in practice, equality almost never exists; unlimited individual freedom by definition clashes with that of the other; and while democracy can be useful as a means, it cannot serve as an ultimate moral objective. According to Yan, pursuing such imperfect, absolute values, which take insufficient account of human *interaction*, in practice leads to double standards and therefore arbitrariness.

Looking back to traditional Confucian virtues such as ‘benevolence’ (仁), ‘righteousness’ (义) and ‘ritual’ (礼), Yan argues for ‘fairness’ (公平), ‘justice’ (正义) and ‘civilization’ (文明) as potential base values upon which universally applicable standards could be based.⁴²

Chinese intellectuals have debated for years the underlying principles of a potential *Chinese* theory of international relations, the existence of which is seen as essential for a ‘returning’ great power able to draw on such a rich cultural tradition as China. This quest is not confined purely to the academic domain. As with domestic policy making, China’s foreign diplomacy is also showing more and more instances of ‘reconnecting’ with Chinese traditional culture. For example, the ‘new type’ of international relations proposed by China under Xi Jinping is stated to continue directly in line with ‘the rich cultural traditions of the Chinese nation and

³⁹ Yi Wang (2015, 2016a, 2016b).

⁴⁰ Mei Xinyu, ‘China and TPP are not made for each other’, *China Daily*, 16 March 2017, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2017-03/16/content_28581351.htm (visited on 31 March 2017).

⁴¹ *Ibidem*. See also Liu Chang, ‘Commentary: Trump’s trade policy shift sheer short-sighted move’, *Xinhuanet*, 25 January 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/25/c_136011495.htm; Amitendu Palit, ‘US withdrawal from TPP creates new challenges’, *China Daily*, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2017-02/07/content_28125624.htm (visited on 31 March 2017).

⁴² See Yan (2013).

the ideas passed down by the forefathers'.⁴³ And although certainly not all aspects of Yan Xuetong's ideas resonate with Chinese government policy, in 2015 during his speech to the UN General Assembly the Chinese president did in fact call for (among other things) 'fairness' and 'justice' to be recognised as universal principles that could underlie a 'win-win partnership for the whole of humanity'.⁴⁴

It remains to be seen whether China will in fact be able to 'lead by example' – a Confucian virtue Chinese commentators are fond of citing when talking about international relations. Controversial, yet wholly utopian theories, harking back to China's pre-modern tribute system, in which the 'Middle Kingdom' assigned itself a natural, moral leadership role 'All under Heaven' ('天下'), are popular among the Chinese general public and certain groups of intellectuals and philosophers, but are not achieving any concrete resonance within the field of international studies in China, much less in current Chinese foreign policy.⁴⁵ If and when this situation may change is difficult even for Chinese observers to predict. It is certainly true though that, under Xi, there is greater scope for triumphalist nationalist sentiments than under his predecessor. Examples of this include the controversial reflections by military intellectuals such as the former Chinese officer Liu Mingfu, who attracted international attention with his bestseller *The China Dream*, in which he posits that apart from pursuing economic dominance, China should also become a military superpower which is capable to resist American containment and thus to secure its own 'peaceful rise'.⁴⁶

Diplomatic strategy

The essence of China's diplomatic strategies has remained largely unchanged in recent decades. Nevertheless, a number of shifts have become noticeable recently in line with the developments outlined above. The most striking change is that in recent years – and particularly since Xi Jinping took office – China has adopted a more self-assured, assertive attitude. This is no incidental development, but rather the result of a calculated policy decision to upgrade Deng Xiaoping's old motto of 'trying to achieve something without being noticed' ('韬光养晦，有所作为') with a more ambitious element, namely 'actively striving to achieve results' ('奋发有为'). Although this by no means amounts to 'baring the sword' ('亮剑') as has been recommended by Chinese security officials, there are indeed clear signs that China is prepared to stand up more powerfully for what it sees as its 'core

⁴³ Wang Yi (2015). See also 'Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China at UNESCO headquarters', website of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 28 March 2014, see: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1142560.shtml (visited on 9 January 2017).

⁴⁴ 'China's President urges UN General Assembly to put new development agenda into action', website UN News Centre, see <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=52014#.WHN9yIWcGhc> (visited on 9 January 2017).

⁴⁵ Zhao Tingyang's book *Tianxia sitong* (The Tianxia System) was published in 2005. One year later, he published his ideas in the form of an English-language academic article. See Zhao (2006) and, on his work, inter alia Callahan (2008).

⁴⁶ Liu Mingfu (2015). On this work, which was published in Chinese in 2009, see inter alia Kissinger (2011), pp. 504–7, 521; Callahan (2015), 58–65. The book was recalled at that time for fear of damaging relations with the US, but was then reprinted after Xi Jinping launched his 'Chinese dream' ideology; Jeremy Page, 'For Xi, a "China Dream" of military power', *Wall Street Journal*, 13 March 2013, see: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324128504578348774040546346> (visited on 31 March 2017).

interests' (核心利益), i.e. national security and the general stability of its political system and society (国家政治制度和社会大局稳定, 国家安全), territorial sovereignty and 'national unification' (国家主权、领土完整、国家统一), as well as sustainable economic and social development (经济社会的持续稳定发展).⁴⁷

As mentioned, China's foreign strategy aims to secure a stable environment for its own long-term development. Beijing's prioritisation of international themes can be understood in general terms on the basis of the line set out in 2002 and holding that, in China's foreign policy, 'great powers [are] crucial, neighbouring countries a priority, developing countries the basis, and multilateral institutions an important platform' ('大国是关键, 周边是首要, 发展中国家是基础, 多边是重要舞台').⁴⁸ For relations with the great powers, considered primarily to be the US and Russia, as well as the European Union, in 2013 Xi formulated the starting point of 'no conflict and no confrontation, mutual respect and mutually beneficial cooperation' ('不冲突、不对抗, 相互尊重, 合作共赢').⁴⁹ In its neighbour diplomacy, which is of the utmost importance to China, there is a further emphasis on mutual kinship (亲) and the importance of sincerity (诚), mutual benefit (惠) and inclusiveness and tolerance (容).⁵⁰ Next, China sees its traditional friendship (and solidarity) with developing countries as a strategic basis for the strengthening of its global position and multilateral diplomacy.⁵¹ Lastly, as we have seen above, China uses participation in multilateral fora to exercise international influence and position itself as a global power.

In its outward actions and the maintenance of its relations with other countries, China has long embraced the familiar Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (和平共处五项原则), which are clearly reflected in the positions described above.⁵² An important implication of the conflict-averse non-intervention politics is the strong emphasis in China's foreign policy on economic diplomacy. In addition, the Chinese 'neutrality policy' has long resulted in an avoidance of alliances, which explains why China's global network today consists of so many strategic partners, but hardly any allies.⁵³ Although this is often seen as a symptom of weakness, this also has a positive effect – namely that China also has few enemies. Alliances

⁴⁷ On the baring of the sword, see: 'Zhuanjia: Zhongguo jundui yao ganyu liang jian, shaoyou luohou bian hui ai da' (Expert: The Chinese army should dare to bare its sword – if we fall even slightly behind, we will be beaten), see <http://mil.huanqiu.com/observation/2013-07/4182321.html> (visited on 9 January 2017). On China's core interests, see e.g.: Chen (2012), p. 17.

⁴⁸ Yizhou Wang (2011), p. 6.

⁴⁹ Yi Wang (2013).

⁵⁰ 'Xi Jinping: China to further friendly relations with neighboring countries', *Xinhuanet*, 26 October 2013, see: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-10/26/c_125601680.htm (visited on 9 January 2017); Yang Jiemian, p. 12.

⁵¹ Sun (2014), p. 13.

⁵² The five principles are: (1) mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity (互相尊重主权和领土完整); (2) non-aggression (互不侵犯); (3) no interference in the internal affairs of other countries (互不干涉内政); (4) cooperation on the basis of equality and mutual advantage (平等互利); and (5) peaceful coexistence (和平共处).

⁵³ North Korea is still formally a Chinese ally, but in recent years the relationship has cooled significantly. Pakistan, an 'all-weather strategic partner of cooperation', is seen as an ally, however. See Yufang Huang, 'Q. and A.: Yan Xuetong urges China to adopt a more assertive foreign policy', *New York Times*, 9 February 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/10/world/asia/china-foreign-policy-yan-xuetong.html?_r=0 (visited on 9 January 2017).

flourish under the (latent) threat of conflict and thus serve to perpetuate or even feed existing tensions. However, the Chinese policy of staying on the side-lines means that Beijing in principle maintains a distance from problems between its partners, striving for neutral relations with such mutual rivals as Iran and Saudi Arabia, Israel and Palestine, and North and South Korea.⁵⁴

The major reason for the Chinese leadership originally to embrace the idea of non-intervention was to safeguard the fledgling, vulnerable People's Republic against external attempts to undermine the new regime. Now that China feels in a stronger position, and the scope of its overseas investment and security interests are expanding by the day, voices are increasingly raised in China in favour of re-evaluating the traditional non-alliance policy.⁵⁵ Gradually, a consensus has been emerging among Chinese academics that the non-interference policy should be applied in a more flexible manner if and when China's national interest or international responsibility so requires.⁵⁶ According to some Chinese observers, China is already applying such a policy of 'creative engagement' or 'constructive engagement' in practice.⁵⁷ The need for this will increase with the development of the 'Belt and Road' initiative, whereby Beijing will likely have to rely on (de facto) alliances to protect its emerging 'spheres of influence'. It is, however, premature to proclaim the actual end of Beijing's non-interference policy; nor is a formal change of course anticipated in the near future.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ For example, Chinese leaders do not shrink from combining official visits to rival states during a single foreign trip. Early in 2016, President Xi Jinping travelled to the Middle East for state visits to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iran. See: <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/cnleaders/201601xjp> (visited on 15 March 2017).

⁵⁵ See e.g. Yufang Huang, 'Q. and A.: Yan Xuetong urges China to adopt a more assertive foreign policy', *New York Times*, 9 February 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/10/world/asia/china-foreign-policy-yan-xuetong.html?_r=0 (visited on 9 January 2017).

⁵⁶ For a recent overview, see C. Zheng (2016) and also Connolly (2016).

⁵⁷ C. Zheng (2016), pp. 372–3; Connolly (2016).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* See also: 'Expert: China will maintain its diplomatic strategy until 2050', *People's Daily Online*, 5 January 2015, <http://en.people.cn/n/2015/0105/c98649-8831603.html> (visited on 9 January 2017).

3 Chinese Visions of the EU and China Relations

This section describes the findings of this survey concerning Chinese views of the European Union and EU-China relations. As stated above, these are principally the views of Chinese policymakers, diplomats and observers. These points of view are presented here from the ‘Sinocentric’ perspective, without commentary or qualification. Analysis of their implications and conclusions that may in the opinion of the researchers be drawn from these findings are presented separately in Section 5.

3.1 Visions of the EU

The EU as a regional body

The general public in China is relatively unfamiliar with the EU. The average Chinese citizen has only vague notions of what the Union stands for, and tends to conflate terms such as ‘the EU’ and ‘Europe’. This is in part a consequence of a long-standing paucity of attention for the EU in the Chinese media. Europe is far from China, and unlike regional or global actors such as Japan or the US, no great tensions exist between China and the EU. For the same reason, the image of the EU in China was very positive until recently.⁵⁹ This was further reinforced by rapid growth in Chinese tourism in Europe. Along with the Schengen visa, the Euro – the major tangible embodiment of the EU – makes Europe an attractive and comfortable travel destination. This image has however recently been substantially tarnished, firstly by the deadly wave of terrorist attacks in Western Europe – prompting a notable reduction in the numbers of Chinese tourists visiting Europe – as well as by other recent crises, such as the refugee crisis and the ‘Brexit’ referendum.⁶⁰ Whereas previously the EU received little press coverage in China, it is now suffering from predominately negative reporting.⁶¹

The view of the EU by Chinese policymakers is neither much better informed, nor much more positive. A survey carried out in 2010 revealed that 70% of 200 Chinese government officials interviewed themselves considered their knowledge of the EU to be insufficient, particularly in relation to matters such as decision-making within the EU and the implications of membership of the EU.⁶² The chances of this situation having changed significantly since 2010 are slim, even if only because the field of European studies in China, which received a significant boost around the turn of the millennium, has seen a marked decline in recent years. In contrast to the ‘white bread years’ of the EU-China strategic partnership (see below), when the EU made generous funds available for research in China, today Chinese EU specialists

⁵⁹ For an early study, carried out in 2006, see Dai & Zhang (2007). Even after the credit crisis of 2007/’08 and the Eurozone crisis that followed shortly afterwards, the image remained largely positive; see e.g. Zhang & Yu (2013).

⁶⁰ Alice Yan and Laura Zhou, ‘Chinese tourists shun western Europe in wake of violence as travel to France drops 15 per cent’, *South China Morning Post*, 28 July 2016, see:

<http://www.scmp.com/news/china/money-wealth/article/1995731/terrorist-attacks-deter-chinese-tourists-top-european> (visited on 11 January 2017).

⁶¹ Interviews 16, 24.

⁶² Dong (2011), paragraphs 2.3 and 2.5.

have difficulty finding finance for their studies.⁶³ One researcher spoke of ‘marginalisation’ of this discipline in China since the Eurozone crisis.⁶⁴ Generally speaking, Chinese officials – like the general public in China – get their information from the Chinese state media and Chinese social media.⁶⁵ The dominant impression given in these media since Brexit is one of a failure of the EU, of European integration and of Western-style democracy in general.⁶⁶ Despite this, Chinese officials continue to express support for the EU project, as well as for further integration, and also see new opportunities for the EU in the recent crises.⁶⁷

Prior to the Eurozone crisis, the EU was seen by Chinese observers as an exemplary case of regional integration; a success model from which lessons could be learned for regional economic integration in Asia and China’s role in multilateral bodies.⁶⁸ The first blot on the EU’s copybook was the failure of the European Constitution in 2005 – but this was largely dismissed as an isolated incident.⁶⁹ From 2011, a shift took place however, and the debate fell into broadly two camps. Europe specialists and economists in China, brought up on the historical success story of the EU, continued to believe in the economic ‘logic’ of the EU, which they would push a gradual recovery. Financial experts in China on the other hand, often basing their views on sombre American analyses, and in their wake the more ideological Chinese political scientists, saw the crisis principally as the result of structural, internal problems within the EU which it was not capable of addressing.⁷⁰ Although the state media initially seemed to reflect the latter view through their negative reporting, the Chinese government finally took up residence in the former camp. In September 2011, during the ‘Summer Davos’ in Dalian, then premier Wen Jiabao on behalf of the Chinese government publicly expressed confidence in the EU and – in spite of resistance from the Chinese Ministry of Finance – pledged further investment.⁷¹

Since the Brexit vote, however, the remaining optimists in China have also grown sombre concerning the European project. Virtually all the Chinese respondents in our survey, including long-serving EU specialists and economists, are now expressing serious doubts about the EU’s capacity to overcome the current political crisis. Never before has the Chinese view of the EU been so sombre. This may (again) be partly related to the role of the English-speaking media.⁷² Chinese commentaries consistently list three factors that stand in the way

⁶³ On European studies in China and finance from the EU, see: Dai (2008), p. 108; Chen (2012), p. 10.

⁶⁴ Interview 18.

⁶⁵ Dong (2011), paragraph 2.4.

⁶⁶ Gong et al. (2016). See also Justyna Szczudlik, ‘China-EU Relations: Post-Summit Perspectives’, Bulletin of The Polish Institute of International Affairs PISM, No. 45 (895), 27 July 2016, see http://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=22145 (visited on 11 January 2017).

⁶⁷ ‘China voices support for European integration’, *Xinhuanet*, 8 March 2017, see: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-03/08/c_136112382.htm (visited on 25 March 2017); interviews 14, 17, 21, 29.

⁶⁸ H. Wang (2008), 12–14; Song (2011), pp. 238–9; Chen (2012), p. 13.

⁶⁹ Chen (2012), p. 10; Interview 26.

⁷⁰ Interviews 1, 19, 21. See also Chen (2012), p. 13.

⁷¹ Interview 1.

⁷² Interview 30.

of a solution.⁷³ Firstly, the divisions between the Member States are too strong, they are insufficiently prepared to look for common ground, and consequently insufficiently able to reach political compromises. Secondly, the EU lacks the required institutional effectiveness and flexibility: the European bureaucracy is inefficient and coordination is difficult and slow. Thirdly, the EU is suffering from an expanding internal communications and legitimacy ‘gap’, as it is less and less able to successfully reach and convince its citizens. Overcoming these problems demands progressive and pragmatic political leadership – a quality not ascribed to the present Commission, which is often seen as too federalist and unable to reduce the internal deficit.⁷⁴

Chinese commentators are aware that the underlying problems are not limited to Europe. In other parts of the Western world – especially in the US – they see populist/nationalist tendencies that are leading to inward-looking attitudes. This sharply contrasts with developing and emerging countries, which are increasingly outward-looking and embrace globalisation as a means of achieving progress. According to Chinese observers, this feeds the perception in the developed West of a ‘threat’ from a rising country like China, which is seen as a ‘winner from globalisation’ – and therefore effectively as a culprit. From a Chinese perspective, this impression is unfair and unproductive. It is deemed unfair because China is also paying the price for the uneven globalisation process, including in the form of great social inequality and enormous environmental pollution in a country that for decades served as ‘the world’s factory’. It is considered unproductive because the solution does not lie in reversing the globalisation process. What is needed, from a Chinese perspective, is good regional institutions and sound socio-economic policy in order to modify the globalisation process and mitigate its negative effects. These are currently lacking, while it is precisely the EU – thanks to its decades of experience of integration and social value-traditions – that could be a world leader in this respect. The EU should therefore show more confidence and, with the Member States, do more for internal and external cooperation in this area.⁷⁵

The EU as a global player

The recent events in Europe have affected the Chinese perception of the EU as a ‘pole’ within the multipolar Chinese worldview. At the beginning of this century, the EU was seen as a promising economic power and strongly *emerging* world power – not so much in traditional geopolitical terms (owing to the lack of a defence force and unitary foreign policy), but as a progressive, ‘social’ power *sui generis*, with growing influence in global issues such as climate, sustainable development and the international rule of law.⁷⁶ The Lisbon Treaty and the expansion of the powers of the Union’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security contained therein was seen as a positive step forwards in the direction of a more effective, independent European foreign policy and reduced dependence upon NATO.⁷⁷ Recently, this optimism has made way for much more sombre expectations and a growing

⁷³ For example Chen (2012), pp. 11–12; interviews 21, 24.

⁷⁴ Interviews 16, 21, 24.

⁷⁵ Interviews 21, 24.

⁷⁶ See for example Song (2011), pp. 238–9; Chen (2012), p. 7.

⁷⁷ Interview 26.

realisation that the EU will not succeed in the short term in reforming itself and becoming an economically sound and politically effective global actor.

This change was the result, firstly, of the Eurozone crisis, which revealed the structural problem of an economic union without a uniform monetary policy. As a result of this crisis, the Chinese view of the EU as an economic superpower was effectively downgraded to that of a regional trading block. With ‘Brexit’, this trading block is now losing a major member – the fifth-largest economy in the world – weakening it further. But ‘Brexit’ is also leading to a revision of the Chinese view of the EU in a political sense. For the departure of Great Britain leaves only France as a permanent European member of the UN and so the (indirect) influence of the EU in this forum has therefore in effect been halved. More damaging still is the fact that the political credibility of the EU has been jeopardised. After all, as an embodiment of the broader ‘renationalising’ tendency within Europe, ‘Brexit’ could have a dangerous spill-over effect on the other EU Member States. In addition, these uncertainties are being further fuelled by the inauguration and actions of American president Donald Trump, who has publicly expressed support to Brexit proponents and the fiercest critics of the EU, and has raised questions for Europe about the American security umbrella under NATO.⁷⁸

A major outcome of this survey is therefore that, from a Chinese perspective, all that is currently left of the once so promising emerging world player is the pale impression of a weakened, internally divided trading block with an uncertain future in economic, political and security terms. As a result, for China, the EU has also virtually lost its credibility as a ‘normative’ global power. Whereas China has always been sceptical about the EU’s ‘post-sovereign’ normative mission, with its imperative emphasis on Eurocentric values considered to be universal, now not only is the moral justification for this missing from a Chinese perspective, but the underlying economic basis too.⁷⁹ ‘Put your own house in order before telling others what to do’, is now the undertone of Chinese commentaries and interviews. In Chinese eyes: with its normative interventionism, the EU failed to bring peace to the Middle East or build constructive relationships with neighbouring Turkey and Russia; it has lost much of its goodwill in Africa; it has been rapidly losing the confidence of its own population; and is now not even taken seriously in Washington anymore. These changed ‘realities’ have’, however, not yet been adequately recognised in Europe. Chinese observers therefore see a second growing gulf – between an inflated self-image and the actually waning influence of Europe in the world.⁸⁰ Taking heed of the example of the failed Copenhagen Climate Conference in 2009, the EU should take care that it does not become merely a commentator on the side-lines with no convincing authority.⁸¹

From the Chinese perspective, the credibility of the EU as a normative power is being further eroded by the double standards it is guilty of applying. One example of this is that European politicians often treat terrorism and the influx of refugees into Europe as external threats,

⁷⁸ See inter alia Song (2011), p. 240; interview 26.

⁷⁹ See inter alia Chen (2012), pp. 12–16, Chen (2016), p. 782.

⁸⁰ See Chen (2012), pp. 12–16, interviews 16, 24.

⁸¹ See Chen (2012), p. 24.

thereby failing to recognise their own contribution to the root causes, while terrorist attacks by minorities in China – for example Tibetans or Uyghurs – are typically presented in European commentaries as a logical response to fallacious Chinese government actions.⁸² In this context, the Chinese have little good to say about the EU's supportive stance to humanitarian interventions aimed at regime change in Northern Africa and the Middle East. Even if such operations succeed from a military viewpoint, one dictatorship simply makes way for another, or years of power struggle or civil war ensue that the EU is incapable of stopping. If the intervention fails, the existing dictatorship is able to tighten its grip. In both cases, failure is assured from the start, with the foreseeable consequences varying from highly adverse to disproportionately disruptive.⁸³ In this way, from the Chinese viewpoint, Europe is guilty of paving the way for large-scale violations of economic, social and political human rights in the world, and lacks the political or moral authority to criticize China for its domestic human rights situation and individual violations. China considers the double, improper standards applied by the EU structurally in the field of human rights as insincere and basically hostile toward it.⁸⁴

The Chinese government recognises the duty of protecting human rights and has incorporated this into its constitution in 2004.⁸⁵ However, China sees the implementation of human rights as a long-term, gradual process that cannot be separated from the socio-economic development of a country. In the light of China's present level of development and requirements, Beijing is currently placing the emphasis on social and economic rights, with political civil rights taking second place. Social and political stability are considered essential to guarantee basic nationwide development. It is against this background that the Chinese government propagates the view that civil rights are accompanied by obligations, and that individual rights cannot simply be claimed to the detriment of this common interest.⁸⁶ Although in principle subscribing to the universality of human rights, China also believes it is a matter of course that notions concerning and interpretations of norms – including 'universal human rights' – vary according to the level of economic development, the social system and the cultural traditions and values of a country.⁸⁷ Seen from the Chinese point of view, Europe fails to accept this inevitable pluriformity and dynamism in the discourse on human rights, claiming the sole right to interpret universal rights, and using its own, static standards, to interfere with the national affairs of other countries.⁸⁸

⁸² Liu & Dai (2016), p. 136.

⁸³ Yan (2016); interviews 16, 21, 24.

⁸⁴ Interview 21.

⁸⁵ For Chinese views on human rights, see inter alia Pieke (2016), pp. 84–6.

⁸⁶ In this regard, see for example 'Human rights can be manifested differently', *China Daily*, 12 December 2005, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2005-12/12/content_3908887.htm (visited on 25 March 2017); interviews 21, 29.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ A Chinese observer put it like this: 'In terms of human rights, Europe only supports the minority interest, and supports Chinese political dissidents. For China, it is the majority interest that counts, i.e. the stable social and economic development of the country.' Interview 21.

The EU as a strategic partner

In spite of its hard-pressed condition and reduced international credibility, however, the EU has not lost its strategic interest to China *in principle*.⁸⁹ This is a matter mainly of the *relative* interest the EU and the EU-China relationship represent in the Chinese perspective on the multipolar world order, and its present imperfect shape. On the one hand, China hopes that a united, independent EU will act as a counterbalance to US hegemony, while on the other many Chinese – contrary to what Beijing projects externally – harbour a deep-rooted historical mistrust of their northerly neighbour, Russia.⁹⁰ The strategic importance of the EU will therefore increase in the event of a rapprochement between the US and Russia, as appeared to be impending after Trump's election, or in the event of a deterioration of China's relations with the US and with American allies in Asia.⁹¹ From an economic standpoint, the EU will continue to fulfil an essential role for China as the largest global economy (even after Brexit) and its most important trading partner and investment destination. This interest is also increasing as the US under Trump threatens to raise trade barriers and Beijing is looking for allies in the international debate on the future of globalisation and global free trade.⁹² After all, economic development remains a major precondition for political and social stability in China, and for the legitimacy of the CCP's rule.⁹³

Notwithstanding the reservations described above, and several setbacks in mutual relations during the past year, Chinese readiness to cooperate with the EU therefore remains great. Chinese leaders and the Chinese state media have in the recent period adopted a strikingly positive and favourable tone with regard to Europe and the EU.⁹⁴ That the EU has not been marginalised within Chinese policy thinking is shown by the warm interest China has consistently shown to the EU in recent years. While the US made its 'pivot' to Asia, China's national leaders made a record number of visits to Europe, including a visit by Xi Jinping to the EU's headquarters in Brussels in 2014 and eight state visits to Member States. The Chinese proposal for a partnership with the EU for 'peace, growth, reform and progress of civilization' (see Section 3.2) reveals China's desire for a relationship of significantly more depth and ambition than its current strategic partnership with Russia or its (strategically ignored) proposition for a stable working relationship with the US 'without conflict, without

⁸⁹ Interviews 1, 14, 16, 21, 26, 29.

⁹⁰ Y. Fu (2016), pp. 2, 5; interview 1.

⁹¹ Interview 26.

⁹² See for example Jing Fu, EU trade chief backs China in fight against protectionism. *China Daily*, 7 February 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017-02/07/content_28120020.htm; Jing Fu and Xueqing Jiang, EU confidence in China ties grows. *China Daily*, 26 January 2017, http://www.chinadailyasia.com/nation/2017-01/26/content_15564129.html (visited on 14 February 2017); interview 29.

⁹³ Song (2009), p. 120.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* See also 'Highlights of Chinese President Xi Jinping's previous visits to Europe', *Xinhua*, 13 January 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/13/c_135980738.htm; Jing Fu, 'Trump can learn lesson from European leaders', *China Daily*, 20 January 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2016-12/20/content_27716125.htm; 'China coherently backs European integration: FM', *China Daily*, 19 February 2017: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017-02/19/content_28254672.htm; 'Xi's historic role in bringing China-EU closer', *China Daily*, 24 February 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/cn_eu/2017-02/24/content_28338683.htm (visited on 27 February 2017).

confrontation, based on mutual respect and win-win cooperation'. The modern revival of the old 'Silk Roads' across the Eurasian continent envisaged by Beijing underlines the significant place of Europe and the EU in Chinese thought.

The shift in Chinese attention from the strengths of the EU to its vulnerabilities has nevertheless also pushed the centre of gravity of this relationship ever further away from Brussels, towards the level of the individual Member States.⁹⁵ This bilateral focus allows China to benefit from differences and competition between Member States, giving rise to accusations of 'divide and rule' strategies by Beijing.⁹⁶ Chinese observers admit that China is not averse to using its influence among the Member States to its own advantage, which at times brings to light the existing divisions within the EU in a painful manner.⁹⁷ However, they see believe China is neither to blame for these underlying divisions, nor intent on structurally undermining the EU – a fundamental difference with Russia. Still it is true that the EU-China relationship illustrates the fundamental vulnerability of the EU as a global actor, where China – exactly like many Member States themselves for that matter – allows its own interests, including short-term interests, to take precedence over the long-term interest (duly acknowledged by Beijing) of a strong and united EU. At the same time, Beijing experiences clear disadvantages from the dual EU structure, and for this reason alone would welcome greater internal coordination and unity within the EU.⁹⁸

3.2 Visions of EU-China relations

The previous paragraph discussed the EU's strategic position within the Chinese view of the existing and future world order in general terms. In this section, we will analyse prevailing Chinese views of the present EU-China relationship, of existing bottlenecks and of opportunities for future development.

The strategic partnership

In 2003, China and the EU formalized their ambitions for long-term cooperation by entering into a 'comprehensive strategic partnership'. During a speech at the China-EU Investment and Trade Forum in Brussels, then Chinese premier Wen Jiabao explained what the Chinese government understands by this. According to Wen, 'comprehensive' refers to an all-dimensional, wide-ranging, multi-layered cooperation, be it bilateral or multilateral, by governments and non-governmental groups in the economic, scientific, technological, political or cultural area. 'Strategic' means that the cooperation is aimed at the overarching interest of stable relations in the longer term, transcending differences in ideology and social systems, and unaffected by incidental setbacks. 'Partnership' refers to cooperation that is equal-footed, reciprocal and 'win-win', based on mutual respect and mutual trust, and aimed at expanding converging interests by seeking common ground on major issues and shelving

⁹⁵ Chen (2012), p. 12; interviews 16, 27. See also paragraph 3.2 below.

⁹⁶ See inter alia Godement et al. (2011); Meunier (2014); Justyna Szczudlik, China-EU Relations: Post-summit perspectives, Bulletin no. 45 of the Polish Institute of International Affairs, 27 July 2016; <http://www.pism.pl/publications/bulletin/no-45-895> (visited on 27 February 2017).

⁹⁷ Y. Ding (2009), p. 32; Chen (2012), p. 12; Shi (2012).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

differences on minor ones.⁹⁹ In October 2003, the Chinese government published a document outlining its EU policy in further detail – something that had never been done before, for any country or any other region.¹⁰⁰

The optimism of 2003-2004 proved premature, however, and not long thereafter the ambitious expectations turned to disappointment. From a Chinese perspective, the deeper cause of this lay principally in the stagnation in European integration since the failure of the EU constitution and the Eurozone crisis that soon followed, leading to China being increasingly seen in Europe as a competitor and as a threat to European prosperity.¹⁰¹ A ‘China-friendly’ generation of European leaders (including Schröder and Chirac) made way for ‘more assertive’ politicians, who openly slighted Beijing by personally meeting the Dalai Lama; the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing were tainted by strident protests in Paris and London during the procession of the Olympic flame and calls for a boycott; the Galileo project for the development of satellite navigation systems floundered, and the lifting of the weapons embargo and acquisition of market economy status that had been in the making failed to materialise.¹⁰² Though China – unlike, for example, the US – continued to support the struggling Eurozone, from Beijing’s perspective this help was insufficiently appreciated by the EU, where stepped-up Chinese investments were dismissed as attempts to play ‘divide and rule’.¹⁰³ Shortly before the end of his final term, the pro-European premier Wen Jiabao made a last attempt to give a positive impulse to China-EU relations by proposing to look into the possibilities of a free trade agreement and the launch of a cooperation platform between China and countries in Central and Eastern Europe.¹⁰⁴ His farewell visit to Brussels was not a success, however. Chinese sources claim that Wen returned home frustrated after the Commission rejected his proposals and referred him to the Member States in relation to his agenda items – but then turned around and presented him with a long list of wishes on behalf of the same Member States.¹⁰⁵

Following the emergence of the current leadership generation in China in late 2012, new attempts have been made to boost EU-China relations. Negotiations on a bilateral investment

⁹⁹ See ‘Vigorously promoting the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and the European Union’, speech by premier Wen Jiabao at the China-EU Investment and Trade Forum, Brussels, 6 May 2004, website of the Chinese delegation to the EU, <http://www.chinamission.be/eng/zt/t101949.htm> (visited on 16 February 2017). For the Chinese text, see: ‘Jiji fazhan Zhongguo tong Oumeng de quanmian zhanlüe huoban guanxi’, *People’s Daily*, <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/1024/2481360.html> (visited on 16 February 2017).

¹⁰⁰ See http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/ceupp_665916/t27708.shtml (visited on 16 February 2017).

¹⁰¹ Shi (2012).

¹⁰² For in-depth analyses of the historical development of the EU-China strategic partnership from a European and Dutch perspective, see *inter alia* d’Hooghe (2007); Gaenssmantel (2010); Van der Putten & Verlare (2014); Casarini (2015); Smith (2016) and Maher (2016).

¹⁰³ Chen (2011); Godement et al. (2011); Jeremy Fleming, ‘Crisis allows China to “divide and rule” Europe: Report’, *EurActiv*, 30 June 2011, <http://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/crisis-allows-china-to-divide-and-rule-europe-report> (visited on 17 February 2017); Chen Zhimin (2012), p. 14; interview 27.

¹⁰⁴ Interview 1.

¹⁰⁵ Interview 16.

agreement were entered into at the EU-China summit in Beijing in November 2013. A common joint strategic agenda was also adopted for cooperation in the areas of peace and security, prosperity, sustainable development and interpersonal exchanges.¹⁰⁶ In March 2014, Xi Jinping travelled to Europe for the nuclear summit in The Hague, combined with a series of state visits to the Netherlands, France, Belgium and Germany and an official visit to the EU in Brussels. During a speech at the College of Europe in Bruges, the Chinese leader argued for deepening mutual ties through four ‘bridges’ (or four areas of partnership), i.e. ‘peace’, ‘growth’, ‘reform’ and ‘progress of civilization’.¹⁰⁷ Days later, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a document on its website in which it set out the Chinese visions for cooperation with the EU – ten years after the first EU policy document.¹⁰⁸ According to Chinese observers, Xi’s ‘four partnerships’ constitute an outreached hand to the EU that goes substantially beyond Chinese overtures to either the US or Russia, and so underlines the long-term importance of the EU in Chinese thinking.¹⁰⁹

The year 2015 marked the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the EU and China. At the 17th EU-China summit in Brussels in June, Premier Li Keqiang together with his European hosts reviewed recent developments, underlining the importance of the strategic agenda for 2020 and the ‘four partnerships’. Both sides expressed support for one another’s ‘flagship’ projects, the ‘Belt & Road’ initiative and the Investment Plan for Europe (‘Juncker Plan’) respectively, and agreed to seek synergies and develop practical avenues for cooperation.¹¹⁰ An important issue for Beijing was the EU’s confirmation of its support for and its willingness to cooperate with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) initiated by China.¹¹¹ The success of the AIIB, which attracted 14 EU Member States as founding members, was principally a result of the British response which, together with the historic state visit to the United Kingdom by Xi Jinping in October 2015, was hailed as the beginning of a ‘golden age’ of British-Chinese relations. Previously that year, Xi Jinping had already made state visits to the Czech Republic, Poland and candidate Member State Serbia.¹¹²

China-EU relations during 2016 were largely dominated by disappointments and setbacks.¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ ‘16th EU-China Summit (Beijing 21 November 2013)’, press release of the European Commission, 23 November 2013, see: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-1099_en.htm (visited on 17 February 2017).

¹⁰⁷ The speech can be consulted here: <http://english.cntv.cn/2014/04/02/VIDE1396377718737154.shtml> (visited on 17 February 2017).

¹⁰⁸ See: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wjzcs/t1143406.shtml (visited on 17 February 2017).

¹⁰⁹ Interviews 1, 16.

¹¹⁰ ‘The way forward after forty years of EU-China cooperation’, joint declaration following the EU-China summit, 29 June 2015, see https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eu-china_summit_2015_joint_statement.pdf (visited on 17 February 2017), item 5.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, item 7. The fourteen EU Member States are Denmark, Germany, France, Finland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom and Sweden. Greece is expected to join this year. The non-EU countries Iceland, Norway and Switzerland are also founding members.

¹¹² ‘Highlights of Chinese president Xi Jinping’s previous visits to Europe’, *New China*, 13 January 2017, see http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/13/c_135980738.htm (visited on 17 February 2017).

¹¹³ Li Gang, ‘Economic ties stabilize China-EU relations’, *China Today*, 5 January 2017, see

The outcome of the ‘Brexit’ referendum, followed by the British cabinet reshuffle, was disappointing to Beijing, as it signified the loss of a valued partner within the EU and a strong proponent of more intensive cooperation in the areas of trade and investment. Then came disappointment concerning the cool – from a Chinese viewpoint – reception of the ‘Belt & Road’ initiative in Europe. On top of all this, there were several concrete setbacks in EU-China bilateral ties, including the collective EU statement at the UN Human Rights Council on Chinese human rights violations in March; the Hague arbitration panel’s ruling on the South China Sea and related EU statements in March and July; the Dalai Lama’s visit to the European parliament in September; EU import tariffs on Chinese steel in October; tensions surrounding Chinese takeovers in Germany in October and November; and then in December to top it all off the EU’s refusal to grant China market economy status. From the EU side, there was dissatisfaction about the lack of effective measures on China’s part to promote market access, legal protection and a level playing field in China. Yet, despite all this, as the EU remains important to China – and China’s relationship with the EU better than that with the US – Chinese state media will continue to present a positive picture of the EU and EU-China relations.¹¹⁴

The first months of 2017 were dominated by Donald Trump’s election as president of the United States, and the uncertainties his presidency presents to the rest of the world – in particular in view of the vehemently anti-Chinese rhetoric, openly pro-Russian statements and lukewarm attitude towards the EU displayed by Trump during his campaign and the early days of his administration. While the brand new American president marked his taking of office by pulling out of the TPP trade deal and effectively silencing American environmental agencies, in Davos his Chinese counterpart presented a diametrically opposed worldview: whereas Washington threatened to turn inwards and retreat behind walls, Beijing presented itself as a champion of globalisation and global free trade, and in fact as a guardian of the present international order.¹¹⁵ Although this may seem surprising at first glance, it fits well with China’s acquired position as the world’s second largest (and fast-growing) economy, and its increasing dependence on imported raw materials and foreign sales markets.¹¹⁶ In this context, it was no coincidence that, on the way to his recent first meeting with Trump, Xi made a stopover in Finland for a state visit to a country with a strong tradition of free trade.¹¹⁷

http://www.china.org.cn/business/2017-01/19/content_40138701.htm (visited on 20 February 2017).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*; see also footnotes 92 and 94 above.

¹¹⁵ See ‘President Xi’s speech to Davos in full’ at the website of the World Economic Forum, 17 January 2017, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/full-text-of-xi-jinping-keynote-at-the-world-economic-forum> (visited on 17 February 2017). See also Yang Sheng, ‘Xi defends globalization at Davos’, *Global Times*, 18 January 2017, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1029340.shtml> (visited on 17 February 2017); interview 29.

¹¹⁶ According to some economists, the wealthiest countries (including the US, the UK, Korea) owe their success from a historical perspective to the gradual, selective opening up of their economies, as well as a protectionist trade policy. Contrary to a common assumption, they only started to implement liberal trade policies *after* establishing their positions as leading economies – they were then able to retain these thanks to an active free trade policy, at the expense of the developing countries. See Ha-Joon Chang (2008), who refers inter alia to the German economist Friedrich List.

¹¹⁷ Raine Tiessalo & Ting Shi, ‘Xi’s Nordic stopover on his way to US reveals a global trade shift’, *Bloomberg*, 3 April 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2017-04-03/xi-s-nordic-stopover-on-way-to-trump-reveals-global-trade-shift>;

The Xi-Trump summit in April was marked by heightened tensions in several parts of the world. The two Koreas carried out rocket launch tests, the Philippines directed troops to disputed islands and reefs in the South China Sea, and, in Florida, Trump surprised his Chinese guest over dinner with a missile strike on Syrian government targets. Despite the cordiality accorded one another by the two leaders, these events highlight the wide-reaching implications of the tensions and differences that characterize the US-China relationship. These contradictions range from international politics, where China opposed American unilateralism, to global trade – where Beijing’s newfound profession of free trade clashes with Washington’s equally recent protectionist push, to climate change – where Xi claims to fight a global problem whose very existence Trump has denied. Although the meetings, were concluded with little sign of confrontation, and the two leaders even appeared to have built a reasonable basis for further engagement, they could contribute little to bridging the fundamental fault lines between US and Chinese policy objectives.

In May, the international ‘Belt & Road’ forum was held in Beijing, the highest profile Chinese diplomatic event of 2017 and, at least from China’s and its key partners’ point of view, also the world’s most comprehensive diplomatic engagement of the year.¹¹⁸ During the two-day summit, President Xi Jinping welcomed more than a thousand representative from 130 countries, including 29 heads of state and government leaders, to confer on the ‘Belt & Road’ initiative and five central aspects of it.¹¹⁹ European participation at the conference, however, was characterized by ambivalence. While several Southern and Eastern European Member States – including Greece, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic – were represented on the level of state or government leaders, Western European leaders were notably absent. Germany and Britain sent minister-level delegates, France a former vice premier, and the Netherlands two mid-level officials. Much to the surprise of EU diplomats, China had apparently extended formal invitations to the EU and the Member States on varying seniority levels, possibly after it had become clear to Beijing that leaders of the major Western Member States would not attend.¹²⁰ And although Commission Vice President Katainen expressed support in principle for the initiative on behalf of the EU, the summit ended on a down beat in terms of EU-China relations, as concerns over the lack of commitment to social and environmental sustainability and transparency barred the Member States from endorsing a Beijing-prepared joint statement on trade.¹²¹

‘Full text of Chinese president’s signed article in Finnish newspaper’, *Xinhua*, 3 April 2017: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-04/03/c_136180174.htm (visited on 4 April 2017).

¹¹⁸ See, for example, the website of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, 22 May 2017, <http://www.cpecinfo.com/cpec-news-detail?id=MzA5OA==> (visited on 25 May 2017).

¹¹⁹ Alongside general ‘round-table talks’ and plenary sessions, separate panel discussions were held on five central aspects of interrelatedness (五通), i.e. policy, infrastructure, trade, finance and people-to-people relations. *Xinhuanet*, 10 May 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/10/c_136272150.htm; ‘Full text: List of deliverables of Belt and Road forum’, *Xinhuanet*, 15 May 2017; http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/10/c_136272150.htm. See about attendants of the forum: ‘Belt and Road Attendees List’, *The Diplomat*, 12 May 2017, <http://thediplomat.com/2017/05/belt-and-road-attendees-list> (visited on 17 May 2017).

¹²⁰ Interview 30.

¹²¹ ‘Germany wants more guarantees from China over ‘Silk Road’ trade plan’, *DW*, 14 May 2017,

Against the background of recent international developments and new uncertainties, Beijing seems to be adopting a wait-and-see attitude, albeit an alert one. No more large-scale Chinese diplomatic initiatives are expected for this year, particularly as the Chinese leadership is currently preparing for the important 19th National Party Congress of the CCP. By far the most important diplomatic event of this year for China was the recently concluded ‘Belt & Road’ forum. Another important event is the upcoming BRICS summit in September in Xiamen, to be chaired by China and with topics on the agenda including security cooperation and the modalities of potential extension of the partnership of growing countries into a ‘BRICS plus’.¹²² Within the context of EU-China relations, the upcoming edition of the annual bilateral summit is of prime importance, and the timing was brought forward following a request from Beijing.¹²³ In the face of ‘increasing global uncertainty’, China hopes that Premier Li Keqiang’s visits to Brussels and Berlin will help inject fresh impetus into the EU-China strategic partnership, even though no actual breakthroughs are expected.¹²⁴

Bilateral and subregional focus

China’s approach to the EU has always been a dual one: at institutional level and at the level of the individual Member States. Following a period of increased optimism and (with hindsight) wishful thinking about the EU as an powerful economic and political actor, the Eurozone crisis brought about a realisation in China that the EU and the Member States in fact often function independently of one another. As a former Chinese ambassador once put it: ‘Whenever a problem arises between China and an EU Member State – even an influential Member State – this does not mean that the China-EU relationship comes under pressure; and vice versa, whenever there is a difficulty in the sphere of China-EU relations, this does not suggest that China has a problem with all the Member States.’¹²⁵ This simple but revealing observation explains why, in fact, Beijing always placed the centre of gravity of its relations, both economic and political, back at the level of the Member States. Chinese strategists even tend to explicitly put the interests of the Member States before those of the EU bodies: ‘it may be difficult to achieve anything without the EU bodies, but without the Member States nothing can be achieved’.¹²⁶ To date, this has resulted in a priority focus on the ‘triumvirate’ of Germany, France and the United Kingdom, referred to in Chinese as the ‘troika’ (三驾马车) of the EU.¹²⁷ Only in these three Member States have Chinese ambassadors traditionally

<http://www.dw.com/en/germany-wants-more-guarantees-from-china-over-silk-road-trade-plan/a-38833936>; ‘EU backs away from trade statement in blow to China’s ‘modern Silk Road’ plan, *The Guardian*, 15 May 2017; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/15/eu-china-summit-beijing-xi-jinping-belt-and-road> (visited on 17 May 2017).

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Robin Emmott and Gabriele Baczynska, ‘Exclusive: EU preparing early China summit in message to Trump – sources’, *Reuters*, 15 February 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-china-idUSKBN15U1SQ> (visited on 3 March 2017).

¹²⁴ ‘Spotlight: With Premier Li in Europe, China set to deepen, enrich ties with EU’, *People’s Daily Online*, 29 May 2017 (visited on 29 May 2017).

¹²⁵ Ma (2009), p. 12.

¹²⁶ Feng (2009), pp. 66–7.

¹²⁷ See for example ‘Ouzhou “san jia mache” de Zhongguo qingjie’, *Lingdao wencui*, No. 12 (2016), pp. 35–6.

had the high political rank of vice-minister (副部级).¹²⁸ Following ‘Brexit’, only two such high-ranking envoys will remain at the Member States’ level.

More important than political ranking is the diplomatic practice through which this duality in China’s dealing with the EU and the Member States is often expressed. As stated above, China is not averse to taking advantage of mutual competition between Member States, even at the expense of the greater interests of the EU.¹²⁹ Chinese observers do not see this as a calculating strategy on the part of Beijing, however, but rather as a normal and inevitable consequence of the Member States’ incongruous foreign policies, which reveal their differing economic and political interests.¹³⁰ This incongruity is reinforced, however, by the effect of direct Chinese investments in Europe, which in recent years have taken off spectacularly.¹³¹ Thus, the conflicting interests of capital-importing and capital-exporting Member States further complicate the already complex economic dossiers within EU-China relations – such as the ongoing negotiations on the bilateral investment agreement.¹³² Trickier still is the fact that these economic realities easily translate into political disunity, as was revealed in July 2016 when the Member States could only agree with the utmost difficulty on a pared-down joint statement on the South China Sea arbitration ruling.¹³³ China actually also sees the internal divisions with the EU as an undesirable handicap, which is at times conveniently used by Brussels as an excuse to turn down Chinese requests.¹³⁴

This picture is further complicated by the differentiated, subregional focus of Chinese foreign policy, which varies according to the strategic location and economic realities of the various regions.¹³⁵ In relation to Europe, this geo-economic approach is expressed in a differentiated focus which roughly follows the continent’s old sub-divisions. In Central and Eastern Europe, for example, China launched the ‘16+1’ CEE platform, within which it seeks to coordinate its bilateral contacts with 11 Member States and 5 candidate Member States and to investigate the opportunities for bilateral and plurilateral cooperation in areas such as infrastructure and industrial capacity.¹³⁶ With the Nordic countries, China is in discussion through semi-official dialogues at think tank level on globalisation, subregional cooperation and the development and security of the Northern Sea Route, possibly as a precursor to a future ‘‘5+1’’ consultation platform along the lines of the China-CEE framework.¹³⁷ Meanwhile, semi-formal dialogues

¹²⁸ The same rank is granted to the heads of the Chinese diplomatic missions to the EU, the UN, the WTO, the US, Russia, Japan, India, North Korea and Brazil. Ambassadors in other Member States generally have a rank comparable to that of Director-General or acting DG (正司级/副司级).

¹²⁹ Shi (2012).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*; Ding (2009), p. 32; Chen (2012), p. 12.

¹³¹ On the recent increase in Chinese investments in Europe, see inter alia Hanemann & Huotari (2016).

¹³² Meunier (2014), p. 1011.

¹³³ Robin Emmott, ‘EU’s statement on South China Sea reflects divisions’, *Reuters*, 15 July 2016, see: <http://www.reuters.com/article/southchinasea-ruling-eu-idUSL8N1A130Y> (visited on 19 February 2017).

¹³⁴ Ding (2009), p. 32; interview 16.

¹³⁵ Zhou (2016), pp. 6–7; Hu (2015); interview 16.

¹³⁶ For Chinese perspectives on the 16+1 CEE initiative, see inter alia Long (2014, 2016) and Jin (2015b); interviews 16, 24.

¹³⁷ See inter alia Zhang Zhenchao, ‘The fourth Sino-Nordic Think Tank Roundtable Held at CIIS’, website China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), 13 May 2010; see http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2010-05/13/content_3814509.htm; Cui

are picking up with the Southern EU countries, which in addition to their favourable maritime location share a growing receptiveness for Chinese investment.¹³⁸ Western Europe, lastly, made up of the oldest and most developed Member States, is particularly interesting for China as an affluent consumer market and as a major source of advanced technology and expertise, as well as because of its international financial markets and the political weight of the larger Western economies in Brussels.¹³⁹

The ‘Belt & Road’ initiative proposed by Beijing fits well with Chinese views on bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral cooperation within regional contexts. In line with the idea of expanding concentric circles in China’s foreign policy-thinking, here too the primary focus is on the neighbouring regions, including in the first place Central, Southwestern and South-eastern Asia, and only in the last place – through the eastern, southern or northern land and sea routes – on the final destinations in the heart of the EU. As an initiative aimed at facilitating not only domestic economic objectives but also China’s undisrupted, peaceful international rise, the initiative, Beijing understands, will eventually have to be able to sufficiently cater for the legitimate and real needs of the participating countries. A ready-made overall plan does not exist, but is to emerge piecemeal within the regional context and through negotiation by finding complementary benefits founded on actual realities and needs.¹⁴⁰ Thus, the vagueness sometimes ascribed to the initiative by European observers is on the one hand the result of the sheer scope of the initiative and Chinese priorities within its own region, and on the other of the inclusive strategic underlying idea and the initiative’s trial-and-error approach.¹⁴¹

China sees the ‘Belt & Road’ initiative as an opportunity for the EU to further integrate its internal market and invigorate economic growth, intensify cooperation with China and thereby to jointly ‘change the world’.¹⁴² Naturally, the large-scale ambitions for China contained within this initiative involve tremendous political, economic and financial risks, as well as complex security issues which Beijing cannot take on independently.¹⁴³ This simple fact guarantees China’s ultimate preparedness to cooperate with Europe, including in the areas of security and administration.¹⁴⁴ At the same time, Beijing believes it has a special responsibility to realize the project, by virtue of which it will continue to make a particularly

Hongjian, ‘Di wu jie Zhongguo-Bei’ou guojia zhiku yuanzhuo huiyi zai gebenhagen juxing’ [The fifth Sino-Nordic Think Tank Roundtable Held at Copenhagen], website CIIS, 3 July 2014; Wang Xi, ‘The sixth Sino-Nordic Think Tank Roundtable Held at CIIS’, website CIIS, 25 November 2016; see http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2016-11/25/content_9192569.htm (visited on 19 February 2017); Institute for Security & Development Policy, *Sino-Nordic Relations*, pp. 4, 6, 9.

¹³⁸ Zhou (2016), p. 7; Ekman (2016), p. 74; interview 16.

¹³⁹ Zhou (2016), pp. 6–7; interviews 14, 16, 26.

¹⁴⁰ Yiwei Wang (2016), pp. 57–64.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*; see also Matura (2016), p. 143.

¹⁴² Yiwei Wang (2016), pp. 65–70.

¹⁴³ On these risks, see inter alia Yiwei Wang (2016), pp. 83–133.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 181–5.

weighty contribution.¹⁴⁵

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) headquartered in Beijing is an example of the type of multilateral cooperation aimed at regional integration and inclusive growth envisioned by China with its 'Belt & Road' initiative.¹⁴⁶ Upon its foundation at the end of 2015, the AIIB attracted 57 founder members from Asia, Oceania, the Middle East, Africa, South America and Europe. Recently, accession of 13 new members was announced – among which EU Member States Belgium, Hungary and Ireland – and it is expected that the total membership count will soon exceed that of the Asian Development Bank.¹⁴⁷ With its promise to give up its right of veto as soon as its special majority is diluted, China has been hoping to convince the international community that its management role in the bank – unlike that of the US in the IMF and the World Bank – will be based purely on consensus and diplomatic accord, rather than on unilateral power.¹⁴⁸ During its first operational year, the AIIB attempted to prove that it was not what some Western critics had warned about: rather than as a disruptor in of the international order, AIIB presented itself as a responsible multilateral actor and constructive partner of established international institutions.¹⁴⁹ This was partly the payoff of active involvement on the part of the EU Member States (including the Netherlands, which supplies a non-resident alternate director on behalf of the Euro area constituency). By developing standards for transparency and environmental and social policies, the participating EU Member States have been making significant contributions to the bank's

¹⁴⁵ To a question about future Chinese leadership in a global context, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi, recently said the following: 'Rather than talking about "leadership", we should really be talking about "responsibility". Large countries have more resources and capability, so they should shoulder more responsibilities and make a greater contribution. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China will fulfill its obligations for international peace and security. As the [world's] second largest economy, China will make its due contribution to global growth. As the largest developing country, China will play an even bigger role in upholding the legitimate rights and interests of fellow developing countries.' See: 'Foreign Minister Wang Yi meets the press', website of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 8 March 2017, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1444204.shtml (visited on 15 March 2017).

¹⁴⁶ Cecile Liu, 'Initiative to facilitate regional integration', *China Daily*, 30 October 2015, see: http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2015-10/30/content_22313281.htm (visited on 20 February 2017).

¹⁴⁷ 'AIIB approved 13 new applicants, expands membership to 70', *Xinhuanet*, 23 March 2017, see: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-03/23/c_136151044.htm; Issaku Harada, 'China-led lender draws members, not staffers', *Nikkei Asian Review*, 17 January 2017, see <http://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/International-Relations/China-led-lender-draws-members-not-staffers?page=1>; James Kynge and David Pilling, 'China-led investment bank attracts 25 new members', *Financial Times*, 24 January 2017, see <https://www.ft.com/content/671d8ac4-e18a-11e6-8405-9e5580d6e5fb>; (visited on 23 March 2017).

¹⁴⁸ Jing Fu, 'AIIB chief rules out China veto power', *China Daily*, 27 January 2016, see http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2016-01/27/content_23265846.htm (visited on 20 February 2017).

¹⁴⁹ See 'China's AIIB: A surprisingly normal bank', *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, 28 October 2016: <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?Country=China&articleid=244763608&topic=Politics>; Wade Shephard, 'The AIIB one year in: not as scary as Washington thought', *Forbes*, 16 January 2017: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/wadeshepard/2017/01/16/the-aiib-one-year-in-not-as-scary-as-washington-thought/#3d41f82840fa> (visited on 20 February 2017). On 'strategic' concerns about the bank in the US and elsewhere, see Callaghan and Hubbard, pp. 123–5.

development.¹⁵⁰

3.3 Perspectives for the future

In spite of existing differences of opinion and occasional problems, China considers its relations with the EU – partly in the light of its difficult relationship with the US – to be relatively good. Among other things, Beijing can rely on constructive contacts with Brussels and other European capitals, reads positive elements (alongside negative ones) into the EU's China policy documents, and is pleased with European support for and participation in the AIIB. In the meantime, the EU has now been China's biggest trading partner for twelve years, mutual trade and investments are growing, and China's currency is increasingly finding its way into European financial markets. At the same time, the Chinese leadership is well aware of the challenges it faces in realising its ambitions to intensify its relationship with the EU. It is well-known in Chinese government circles that China's emergence is giving rise to mixed feelings in Europe, and is perceived as a threat.¹⁵¹ Removing these negative sentiments and improving China's image are therefore seen as major preconditions for further intensification of the country's partnership with the EU, although it is not expected that this can be achieved in the short term.¹⁵²

Building on the present foundations, China will continue to press for a deepening of cooperation in the areas of trade and the economy.¹⁵³ China hopes to find in the EU a partner in the international debate on the future of globalisation and free trade and in the development of the 'Belt & Road' initiative.¹⁵⁴ Beijing is striving in the shortest possible term for a feasibility study into a free trade pact between the EU and China, as well as to be granted market economy status in the context of WTO rules. China further hopes for speedy completion of the negotiations for a bilateral investment agreement. In spite of the recent record increases in China's foreign investments (which in 2015 for the first time exceeded in value incoming FDI), Chinese investments in Europe are currently still at an early stage, making up just a fraction of total incoming investments in the EU.¹⁵⁵ An increase in these investments is therefore to be expected in the years ahead. Although the Chinese see this as a 'win-win' development, Beijing is nevertheless also anticipating increased tensions between

¹⁵⁰ Alex Niatseski, 'The Netherlands and the AIIB', presentation at the workshop 'One Belt, One Road': China's pivot to Europe?, organised by Centre for East Asian Studies Groningen, University of Groningen, 12 September 2016. See also 'AIIB has swift start, solid governance, good cooperation – Dutch policy advisor', *New China*, 14 September 2016, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-09/14/c_135685630.htm; 'China-led lender draws members, not staffers', *Nikkei Asian Review*, 17 January 2017, <http://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/International-Relations/China-led-lender-draws-members-not-staffers?page=1> (visited on 20 February 2017).

¹⁵¹ Song & Wang (2005), pp. 8, 16–20; Song (2009), p. 125.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁵³ Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'China's policy paper on the EU', April 2014, sub IV.

¹⁵⁴ Baijie An, 'Xi: Sino-Swiss ties example to the world', *China Daily*, 16 January 2017, see http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017-01/16/content_27966525.htm; David Gosset, 'Xi Jinping in Switzerland: internationalism, multilateralism and multipolarity', *The Huffington Post*, 16 January 2017, see http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-gosset/xi-jinping-in-switzerland_b_14162234.html (visited on 20 February 2017).

¹⁵⁵ Eurostat FDI statistics 2012–2014; Hanemann & Huotari (2016), p. 13; Li (2017); Pieke (2016), pp. 158–164.

the two sides and hence acknowledges the shared interest in entering into agreements at institutional level concerning market access, a level playing field and the resolution of disputes.¹⁵⁶

In the area of trade, China would like to boost the import of advanced technologies from the EU. It feels restricted in this, however, by the export restrictions ensuing from the arms embargo imposed by the EU after the 1989 crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square. This embargo is a thorn in Beijing's side primarily for political-symbolic reasons – as it wonders how this can be part of today's comprehensive, strategic partnership, while a country such as Vietnam is not subject to such restrictions.¹⁵⁷ In the meantime, China's own knowledge potential on defence issues is rapidly increasing. Chinese objections to European export restrictions nevertheless also still have a practical aspect. There is great demand in China for European technologies in the fields of new energy sources, new materials and environmentally friendly production methods, among other things. Restrictions on exchange in these areas under the export ban, Beijing feels, is hurting both sides' economic interests.¹⁵⁸

The increasing Chinese subregional focus discussed in the previous section will for the foreseeable future continue to be reflected by a diversity of priorities in Europe. In Southern Europe, further investments may be expected in port development, container capacity, the cruise terminal industry and other forms of maritime cooperation.¹⁵⁹ In Central and Eastern Europe, China is working among other things towards further cooperation in the areas of infrastructure, industrial capacity and e-commerce.¹⁶⁰ Beijing also sees a role for the Western Member States in this, especially in capacity production. The idea propagated by Premier Li Keqiang is that Western European countries, with their advanced technologies, could and should team-up with China, with its expertise in the areas of infrastructure and industrial production, to jointly fulfil demand for better products and production processes in these countries.¹⁶¹ Apart from this, the dialogue with the Northern European countries will be intensified in the years ahead, especially now that ties with Norway have been normalised, with a view to further cooperation in the areas of innovation, sustainability and trade.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁶ Li (2017); interview 27.

¹⁵⁷ Shi (2012).

¹⁵⁸ Li (2017); interview 27.

¹⁵⁹ Maria Petrakis and Lyu Chang, 'Passage to Piraeus', *China Daily*, 15 April 2016, see http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2016-04/15/content_24560625.htm; Elodie Sellier, 'China's Mediterranean odyssey', *The Diplomat*, 19 April 2016, see <http://thediplomat.com/2016/04/chinas-mediterranean-odyssey> (visited on 20 February 2017).

¹⁶⁰ 'Spotlight: China, CEE countries pledge stronger infrastructure, production capacity cooperation', *China Daily*, 6 November 2016, see http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-11/06/c_135808565.htm; Hu Yongqi, 'New financial holding company set up to finance China-CEE projects' *China Daily*, 6 November 2016, see http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016liattendsSCOCCEEC/2016-11/06/content_27286146.htm (visited on 20 February 2017).

¹⁶¹ Interview 14.

¹⁶² Speech by the Chinese ambassador to Sweden, Chen Yuming, at the seminar 'Sino-Nordic relations: opportunities and

In Western Europe, China will promote an expansion of cooperation in financial and monetary areas and, in spite of constant challenges, will continue to work steadily on the internationalisation of the renminbi.¹⁶³ For this purpose, China has deepened its cooperation with the United Kingdom, where in May 2016 it issued the first offshore government bonds and which now houses the biggest offshore market for the yuan outside of Asia. In addition, China is also looking in this context to Germany, where it recently conducted new currency swaps, approved the designation of the first bank in the Eurozone for processing RMB transactions, and established a trading platform for Chinese investment products as a potential springboard for an offshore Chinese stock exchange.¹⁶⁴ The aim is to realise a market for so-called ‘D-shares’ by this year, where Chinese companies will be able to raise capital for their overseas acquisitions.¹⁶⁵

At the other end of the spectrum from this subregional focus is the global perspective, and this aspect of the EU-China relationship is also assured of Beijing’s ongoing attention. Alongside reforms to international trade and financial-economic governance, Chinese observers see issues such as global climate policy, non-proliferation and internet security as issues on which China and the EU should act together more closely, both bilaterally and within a multilateral context.¹⁶⁶ Finally, Beijing will continue to invest in cultural and interpersonal exchanges, even if only – in the face of a lack of effective Chinese public diplomacy – to enhance Europeans’ trust and understanding of China.¹⁶⁷ In the light of the increasing prosperity and internationalisation of Chinese society, in the years ahead a further increase can be expected in the influx into the EU of Chinese tourists, students, researchers, knowledge migrants and other expats, with the expected positive effects in terms of employment, the treasury and the economy.¹⁶⁸

the way ahead’, 12 November 2016, see <http://www.chinaembassy.se/eng/sgxw/t1414841.htm>; ‘Premier Li eyes China-Norway relations’, website of the Chinese State Council, 19 December 2016, see http://english.gov.cn/premier/news/2016/12/19/content_281475520198847.htm; Bjørnar Sverdrup-Thygeson and Marc Lanteigne, ‘China and Norway: unpacking the deal’, *The Diplomat*, 25 December 2016, see <http://thediplomat.com/2016/12/china-and-norway-unpacking-the-deal> (visited on 20 February 2017).

¹⁶³ Jennifer Hughes, ‘Renminbi internationalisation remains elusive’, *Financial Times*, 30 January 2017, see <http://www.globalcapital.com/article/zvnq9rrlhtwb/deutsche-boerse-clears-path-for-chinese-mampa-finance-with-39dshare39-market>; Alfred Romann and Cecily Liu, ‘Yuan in demand’, *China Daily*, 9 December 2016, see http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2016-12/09/content_27618033.htm (visited on 20 February 2017).

¹⁶⁴ Li (2017).

¹⁶⁵ ‘D-shares’ are defined as shares in limited liability companies incorporated in mainland China but listed on the German stock exchange in accordance with European regulatory standards after approval from the Chinese securities exchange regulator. See: <https://www.ceinex.com/products/d-shares>; Owen Sanderson, ‘Deutsche Boerse clears path for Chinese M&A finance with “D-Share” market’, *Global Capital*, 6 October 2016, see: <http://www.globalcapital.com/article/zvnq9rrlhtwb/deutsche-boerse-clears-path-for-chinese-mampa-finance-with-39dshare39-market> (visited on 20 February 2017).

¹⁶⁶ Li (2017).

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*; Song & Wang (2005), pp. 8, 13–14.

¹⁶⁸ ‘Europe is set for a significant rise in Chinese tourists’, website of the China Outbound Tourism Research Institute, 12 April 2016, see: <http://china-outbound.com/2016/04/13/europe-is-set-for-a-significant-rise-in-chinese-tourists-number-of->

4 Chinese Visions of the EU and Sino-Dutch Relations

Against the background of China's foreign policy visions as presented in the previous sections, this section looks at Chinese visions on the Netherlands, the place of the Netherlands within the EU, and the development of bilateral relations between China and the Netherlands. Once again, the original Chinese perspectives are presented here; the researchers' own conclusions are included in Section 5 below.

4.1 General policy

In China, the Netherlands has long been known as a highly developed, open and internationally oriented country. Its historic and exceptional relationship to water occupies a central place in the common Chinese image of the Netherlands.¹⁶⁹ In addition to its impressive achievements in the field of water management, the Netherlands' eminent past as a global maritime power, which once led to the Netherlands being known in China as the 'coachman of the sea' (海上马车夫), today still garners the admiration and respect of the Chinese (in spite of the colonial aspects of this, which also impact China). This powerful historical impression reaches further than intellectual circles, thanks in part to a documentary series aired a decade ago by the Chinese state television about nine (former) world powers, including the Dutch.¹⁷⁰ Agriculture is also a significant element in the Chinese image of the Netherlands.¹⁷¹ As instantly recognisable symbols, tulips, dairy, windmills and Dutch football all contribute to a rather distinct and positive impression of the Netherlands among the Chinese general public. Dutch brands are held in high regard in China.¹⁷²

Within the limited public interest for Europe in China, the Netherlands does therefore enjoy a good reputation. Chinese elites describe the Netherlands as a highly developed, prosperous country with a strong, open economy and extensive system of social security.¹⁷³ In their view, the Dutch are hard-working, efficient and result-oriented, but also – particularly when compared to their neighbours to the East – flexible and pragmatic team players.¹⁷⁴ The Dutch have always been known among the Chinese for their industriousness (勤奋), thrift (节俭), pragmatism (务实) and tolerance (包容), traditional virtues which the Dutch – from a Chinese viewpoint – share with the Chinese themselves and which historically have served as the basis for mutual understanding and trust among them.¹⁷⁵ The characterisation of the

[arrivals-from-china-will-continue-to-grow-in-2016](#); 'Europe prepares for a rise in Chinese tourists', *CCTV.com*, 27 October 2016, see <http://english.cctv.com/2016/10/27/VIDEKzcrrwwVsliJQfJUVPP0161027.shtml>; John Morgan, 'China and EU aim to create "education Silk Road to the future"', *Times Higher Education*, 18 October 2016, see: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/china-and-eu-aim-create-education-silk-road-future> (visited on 20 February 2017).

¹⁶⁹ Van Pinxteren & Pieke (2017), pp. 48–9; interviews 4, 23.

¹⁷⁰ China Central Television (CCTV), *Daguo jueqi*.

¹⁷¹ Van Pinxteren & Pieke (2017), pp. 48–9.

¹⁷² Interviews 4, 23.

¹⁷³ Interviews 14, 22, 26.

¹⁷⁴ Interviews 22, 29.

¹⁷⁵ Interview 29.

Dutch as ‘the Chinese of Europe’ (*‘Die Chinese Europas’*; *‘les Chinois de l’Europe’*) popularised in Europe during the 17th century is still recalled by Chinese officials today to emphasise existing commonalities.¹⁷⁶ The essence (精髓) of Dutch success however is the traditional openness of the Dutch economy and of Dutch trade policy.¹⁷⁷

Place within the EU

Chinese policymakers see the Netherlands as a highly developed Member State within Western Europe, located in the heart of a region dominated by the European ‘big three’ (Germany, France and the United Kingdom). Within the present region-based departmental organisation of the Chinese Foreign Ministry the Netherlands – together with Belgium and France – belongs to the ‘French’ group.¹⁷⁸ As an original founding member of the EU, the Netherlands is seen as a representative and influential Member State within the Union.¹⁷⁹ An important element of the Chinese perspective is that the Netherlands has survived the recent Eurozone crisis well compared to other parts of Europe, and that its economic and financial house is in good order. In spite of its small physical area and population, the Netherlands is regarded as a ‘giant’ in terms of BNP per capita.¹⁸⁰ Together with the Scandinavian countries and – at least for the present – the United Kingdom, the Netherlands belongs to a group of liberal Member States pushing within the EU for liberal trade, but which at the same time also set great store by human rights and civic freedoms.¹⁸¹ The Netherlands is part of the group of Member States considered to be most open to cooperation with China.¹⁸²

From a geo-economic perspective, the Netherlands is not a priority country for China owing to its location at the far opposite end of and in the most prosperous part of the Eurasian continent.¹⁸³ Nevertheless, thanks to its importance as a sea port and its extensive hinterland, the Netherlands has always been important for China as a gateway to Europe – although by no means an exclusive or necessarily the primary one.¹⁸⁴ This strategic significance could increase with further exploitation of the Northern Sea Route, which shortens the maritime crossing to China by more than 20% and will likely impact current trade flows. What is important to China is principally the openness of the Dutch economy and the liberal, anti-protectionist voice expressed by the Netherlands within the EU.¹⁸⁵ In addition, the Netherlands is interesting for its technologies and expertise in such areas as water

¹⁷⁶ *Ibidem*. On the Dutch as the ‘Chinese of Europe’ see e.g. Blussé (1989), pp. 8–10.

¹⁷⁷ Interviews 14, 22, 29.

¹⁷⁸ Interview 14.

¹⁷⁹ ‘China, Netherlands to cement parliamentary exchanges’, *Xinhua*, 7 November 2016, see: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-11/07/c_135812151.htm; ‘Top Chinese political advisor meets Dutch parliament leader’, *Xinhua*, 10 November 2016, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-11/10/c_135820485.htm (visited on 24 February 2017).

¹⁸⁰ Interview 26.

¹⁸¹ Fox and Godement (2009), pp. 25–6, 71–8; interviews 22, 26.

¹⁸² Xi Jinping (2014b); interview 29.

¹⁸³ Interviews 22, 26.

¹⁸⁴ Xi Jinping (2014b); interview 29.

¹⁸⁵ Interview 22, 26, 29.

management, ports and shipping, logistics, agriculture, advanced technology and sustainable development.¹⁸⁶ The Dutch social security system and higher vocational education serve as sources of inspiration for the research into and design of the necessary reforms and modernisation of these sectors in China.¹⁸⁷

Bilateral relations

The Netherlands and China have a long shared history of (trade) relations, with few major problems. Although the Netherlands belongs to a group of Western countries with an ‘imperialist’ past in China – as reflected in the colonisation of Taiwan in the 17th century and extraterritorial privileges in the 19th and 20th centuries – the Netherlands neither took a leading, nor an exceptional role from the Chinese point of view.¹⁸⁸ The erstwhile ‘unequal’ situation ended in World War II, when China and the Netherlands were allies and their mutual diplomatic relations were modernized. This historical turning point was jointly commemorated in late 2014 as part of the opening of a Dutch consulate-general in the former wartime capital, Chongqing.¹⁸⁹ A special appreciation also exists for the fact that the Netherlands is one of those Western countries which recognised the People’s Republic of China as early as in 1950 – even though it was only in May 1972 that diplomatic relations were normalized.¹⁹⁰ Ever since then, mutual ties strengthened steadily, despite the occasional problem.¹⁹¹ This year marks the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level between the People’s Republic of China and the Kingdom of the Netherlands.¹⁹²

Partnership

Recent developments have further strengthened and injected new momentum into bilateral

¹⁸⁶ ‘Eerste Kamervoorzitter ontmoet Voorzitter van het Nationale Volkscongres van China’ [‘President of the Dutch Senate meets Chairman of the National People’s Congress of China’], website Dutch Senate, 7 November 2016, https://www.eerstekamer.nl/nieuws/20161107/eerste_kamervoorzitter_ontmoet (visited on 24 February 2017).

¹⁸⁷ Interview 22.

¹⁸⁸ On this, see V.K.L. Chang (2016b).

¹⁸⁹ See ‘Festive opening of the Dutch consulate-general in Chongqing’, Dutch government website government, 20 November 2014, <https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2014/11/18/festive-opening-of-the-dutch-consulate-general-in-chongqing>; ‘Chen Xu dashi chuxi qingzhu Helan zhu Chongqing zong lingshiguan kaiguan huodong’ [Ambassador Chen Xu attends celebration ceremony of the opening of the Dutch consulate-general in Chongqing], website of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22 December 2014, <http://nl.china-embassy.org/chn/xwdt/t1221640.htm> (visited on 17 May 2017). Chinese television made a television documentary about this period following the publication of a book by the Dutch embassy. See V.K.L. Chang (2013, 2016b).

¹⁹⁰ See the statement by the Chairman of the National People’s Congress during the recent visit by the President of the Dutch Senate to China, see: https://www.eerstekamer.nl/nieuws/20161107/eerste_kamervoorzitter_ontmoet (visited on 24 February 2017). Recognition of the People’s Republic by the Netherlands took place in 1950. Formal diplomatic relations began in 1954, but it was not until 1972 that these were given ambassadorial status. See V.K.L. Chang (2016b).

¹⁹¹ The major obstacles to the recent development of bilateral relations include the ‘submarine affair’ of 1980-1983 and the freezing of relations following the Tiananmen incident of 1989.

¹⁹² On 18 May 2017, the Chinese embassy at The Hague hosted a reception and photo exhibition to celebrate the anniversary, see: <http://nl.china-embassy.org/eng/xwdt/t1463295.htm> and <http://www.diplomatmagazine.nl/2017/05/28/china-45th-anniversary-of-diplomatic-relations-with-the-netherlands> (visited on 29 May 2017).

ties between China and the Netherlands, which was described by Chinese leaders as a constructive and productive relationship of cooperation, characterised by mutual trust.¹⁹³ China sees the Netherlands as an ‘important partner’ within the EU. In March 2014, president Xi Jinping started his first official visit to Europe with a state visit to the Netherlands. On this occasion, both parties agreed to intensify the bilateral relationship and to develop an ‘open and pragmatic partnership for comprehensive cooperation’. With this unique qualification – most Chinese bilateral partnerships are ‘strategic’ – openness and pragmatism have been elevated to key symbols in this bilateral relationship, offering both sides concrete points of reference around which to expand and deepen their cooperation.¹⁹⁴ Following a reciprocal state visit to China by King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands in October 2015, relations between the two countries are now at a historical high.¹⁹⁵ The pair of giant pandas that recently arrived in the Netherlands this year should, as public ambassadors, further consolidate the current ‘basis of friendship between our two peoples’.¹⁹⁶ The fact that the envisaged goodwill effect – in the Netherlands, but also previously in other EU Member States – has so far been limited and balanced by critical reporting, leads to surprise and frustration in official Chinese circles.¹⁹⁷

4.2 Areas of cooperation

The Chinese government claims it attaches great importance to the further development of the ‘open and pragmatic partnership’ the two sides pledged to develop in 2014. A number of specific themes that play a role in this bilateral relationship are discussed briefly in this section.

Trade, investments and globalisation

For many successive years, the Netherlands has been one of China’s most important trading partners within the EU, and a significant source of investment in China (and vice versa).¹⁹⁸ For about a decade, the Netherlands consistently ranked as China’s number two trading partner within the EU, until it surrendered this position to the United Kingdom in 2015. Following ‘Brexit’, the Netherlands would regain this position. For the Netherlands, China is also the number two (non-EU) trading partner. China hopes that the positive momentum in

¹⁹³ ‘Eerste Kamervoorzitter ontmoet Voorzitter van het Nationale Volkscongres van China’ [‘President of the Dutch Senate meets Chairman of the National People’s Congress of China’], website of the Dutch Senate, 7 November 2016, https://www.eerstekamer.nl/nieuws/20161107/eerste_kamervoorzitter ontmoet; ‘Ontmoetingen Eerste Kamervoorzitter met Voorzitter CPPCC en President Hooggerechtshof van China’ [‘Meetings between President of the Dutch Senate with Chairman of the CPPCC and President of Chinese High Court’], 11 November 2016, see https://www.eerstekamer.nl/nieuws/20161111/ontmoetingen_eerste (visited on 24 February 2017).

¹⁹⁴ Interview 25.

¹⁹⁵ See e.g. Wang Mengzhen, ‘Dutch King’s China visit signifies closer China-EU ties: expert’, website China Radio International, 25 October 2015, see: <http://english.cri.cn/12394/2015/10/25/3684s901092.htm>; interviews 25, 28.

¹⁹⁶ Wu Guoxiu, ‘President Xi meets King Willem-Alexander’, *CCTV.com*, 27 October 2015, see: <http://english.cntv.cn/2015/10/27/VIDE1445912883777450.shtml>; interviews 28, 29.

¹⁹⁷ Interviews 28-30.

¹⁹⁸ Xi Jinping (2014b). See also the factsheet the Netherlands and China by CBS from 2015: <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-achtergrond/2015/43/factsheet-nederland-en-china> (visited on 24 February 2017).

the current bilateral political and economic relations can be used to further enhance mutual cooperation, including in the areas of trade, finance, shipbuilding, rail and air transport, agriculture and new energy sources. Possibilities for cooperation in these and other fields are also being signalled in third countries.¹⁹⁹

Furthermore, China hopes that the Netherlands – following the lead of other European Member States such as Germany and Italy, and building on the successful precedent of the AIIB – will act as an active partner in multilateral and subregional initiatives such as the ‘Belt & Road’ project.²⁰⁰ Although a Dutch role in this initiative is principally seen as desirable, Chinese officials have yet to express concrete ideas about what exactly this could entail.²⁰¹ In any case, given the open-ended and cooperative nature of the initiative, pro-active Dutch contributions are welcomed in this respect.²⁰² By analogy with Chinese views on a potential British input, it seems fair to assume that, alongside Dutch expertise in the area of infrastructure and logistics, for example Dutch financial institutions, knowledge institutes and innovation platforms should be especially welcome to make contributions to the development of this initiative.²⁰³

China sees the Netherlands as a strong advocate of free trade and a potential partner in the debate on the future of global free trade. Especially now that the liberal British voice within the EU is about to be lost, Beijing hopes that the Netherlands will continue to argue strongly in Brussels for the protection of free trade as well as for the granting of market economy status to China.²⁰⁴ China explicitly profiles itself as a proponent of balanced, sustainable economic globalisation.²⁰⁵ In this respect, Chinese observers note, China attaches importance to European social norms – including in the areas of combatting climate change and environmental responsibility (‘与大自然协调’) – areas in which China expressly hopes to consult Dutch expertise.²⁰⁶

¹⁹⁹ ‘China Focus: China, Netherlands seek stronger partnership as Dutch King visits’, *Xinhuanet*, 26 October 2015, see: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-10/26/c_134752074.htm (visited on 1 March 2017); interview 29.

²⁰⁰ On German and Italian intentions, see e.g. Jan Gaspers, ‘Germany wants Europe to help shape China’s Belt and Road Initiative’, *The Diplomat*, 17 December 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/12/germany-wants-europe-to-help-shape-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative/> and He Wei, ‘Italian president backs Belt and Road Initiative’, *China Daily*, 24 February 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017-02/24/content_28342684.htm (visited on 1 March 2017).

²⁰¹ Interviews 9, 14, 29.

²⁰² Interviews 14, 22, 29.

²⁰³ For suggestions from the Chinese ambassador in the United Kingdom concerning a possible British contribution; see: Liu Xiaoming, ‘Britain can be a key partner in China’s new Silk Road’, *The Telegraph*, 13 March 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/13/britain-can-key-partner-chinas-new-silk-road> (visited on 24 March 2017).

²⁰⁴ ‘Eerste Kamervoorzitter ontmoet Voorzitter van het Nationale Volkscongres van China’ [‘President of the Dutch Senate meets Chairman of the National People’s Congress of China’], website of the Dutch Senate, 7 November 2016, https://www.eerstekamer.nl/nieuws/20161107/eerste_kamervoorzitter_ontmoet (visited on 24 February 2017); interviews 14, 22, 29.

²⁰⁵ Wang Lei, ‘China calls for more inclusive globalization at Boao Forum’, website CGTN, 25 March 2017, see: https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d456a4d34457a4d/share_p.html (visited on 25 March 2017).

²⁰⁶ Interview 29.

Human rights dialogue

The Netherlands is one of the few Member States with which China also conducts bilateral human rights consultations (alongside the EU-wide human rights dialogue). China welcomes such bilateral consultations, provided that these reflect the principles of ‘equality and mutual respect’.²⁰⁷ In concrete terms, this means that Beijing expects its dialogue partner to accept that China adopts the policies which it considers appropriate to the level of its own development and to Chinese cultural and social values.²⁰⁸ Within these general parameters, the open and pragmatic partnership between China and the Netherlands also offers scope for a constructive dialogue on human rights – therefore not aimed at forcing China into reforms, but as a means of promoting mutual understanding and exchanging experiences.²⁰⁹

China basically views the bilateral human rights dialogue as a completely optional and non-binding form of international ‘cultural’ exchange, which takes place only when the bilateral climate between the relevant counterparts allows.²¹⁰ To the Chinese, open criticism outside of this dialogue does not fit in with the spirit of friendly and constructive consultations. The fact that the dialogue with the Netherlands originally planned for 2016 did not take place, cannot be seen in isolation from Dutch support in March of that year for a collective (non-EU) statement at the UN Human Rights Council, which probed the worsening human rights situation in China.²¹¹ Beijing’s position is that partners should discuss their concerns and differences of opinion within the appropriate bilateral dialogue mechanisms, instead of commenting on these publically in multilateral fora.²¹²

Unlike some other Member States, the Netherlands, as a mere requesting party, has generally been successful from a Chinese point of view in finding a workable balance between constructive cooperation and urging improvements.²¹³ However, as discussed in the previous section, Chinese patience with the EU’s (the West’s) ‘interference’ in this area is wearing thin owing to the perceived double standards, single-minded focus on individual cases and lack of patience and trust on its part.²¹⁴ On the other hand, exchange of technical expertise and experience in the area of human rights within the framework of concrete projects or visits – for example, in the area of the courts system or prisons – is generally seen as

²⁰⁷ See for example State Council Information Office, ‘Assessment Report on the Implementation of the National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2012-15)’, 14 June 2016, http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/2016-06/14/content_38663611.htm (visited on 27 March 2017).

²⁰⁸ Interviews 3, 5, 8, 16. See also above, paragraph 3.1.

²⁰⁹ Interviews 3, 5, 8, 16. For Chinese visions of human rights, see also Pieke (2016), pp. 84–6.

²¹⁰ Interviews 3, 5, 8, 16, 29.

²¹¹ Interviews 3, 29. This collective statement, initiated by the United States, was also supported by the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Finland, Australia and Japan, see: <https://geneva.usmission.gov/2016/03/10/item-2-joint-statement-human-rights-situation-in-china> (visited on 27 March 2017).

²¹² Interview 29.

²¹³ Interview 22.

²¹⁴ One of the Chinese respondents put it like this: ‘When it comes to human rights, Europe always looks to the minority interest; in the case of China, this means political dissidents. In China, it is the majority interest that takes primary importance, that is the stable social and economic development of the country’. Interview 21.

constructive.²¹⁵

Cultural, educational and people-to-people exchange

In 2014, the Netherlands and China identified the creative industries, the museum sector and the film industry as priority areas for bilateral cultural cooperation.²¹⁶ The creative industries are a strongly emerging, blooming sector in China, and as such offer promising opportunities for bilateral cooperation with a prominent actor in this field such as the Netherlands. Chinese officials do, however, see differences between the two sides in terms of policy spearheads and accents. Whereas in the Netherlands the creative industries focus principally on innovative architecture, design, fashion as well as media and entertainment, Chinese policymakers – and therefore also the Chinese overseas embassies – tend to operate from the notion of ‘cultural and innovative industry’ (文化创意产业): a much broader term, which on the one hand – alongside new fields – also covers traditional forms of culture and heritage, while on the other hand traditionally does not include fields such as architecture and urban planning.²¹⁷ Apart from opportunities, this partial incongruence may also present practical challenges which should be taken into account when developing new initiatives.

In the context of cooperation in the museum sector, concrete exchange projects have been realised in recent years, in which prominent Dutch institutions such as the Van Gogh Museum and the Reinwardt Academy have provided training programmes in China on themes of growing relevance to Chinese museums (thanks to the rapid development of this sector), such as collection management, exhibition design and museum management.²¹⁸ Concrete steps have also recently been taken within the third pillar of cultural relations, the film industry. Following several editions of the ‘One Touch’ online Dutch film festival in China, a bilateral film co-production treaty was concluded during King Willem-Alexander’s state visit to China in 2015.²¹⁹ Although these initiatives have been welcomed in China within the sectors concerned, their importance within the broader context of bilateral ties should not be overestimated. Accordingly, the Chinese media have to date devoted relatively

²¹⁵ Interview 14.

²¹⁶ ‘China zet deuren verder open voor Nederlandse cultuurmakers’ [‘China opens doors further to Dutch culture creators’], Dutch government website, 24 March 2014, see: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2014/03/24/china-zet-deuren-verder-open-voor-nederlandse-cultuurmakers>; ‘Yi xingdong cujin wenhua hezuo [Promoting cultural cooperation through action]’, website of the information agency of the Chinese State Council, 26 March 2014, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zhzc/35353/35354/Document/1505621/1505621.htm> (visited on 1 March 2017).

²¹⁷ Interview 28. For Chinese visions of Dutch cultural policy, see Yang Xiaolong (2016a, 2016b).

²¹⁸ ‘Second Sino-Dutch museum management training program successfully completed’, Dutch government website, 22 November 2016, see: <https://www.netherlandsworldwide.nl/latest/news/2016/11/22/second-sino-dutch-museum-management-training-program-successfully-completed> (visited on 17 May 2017).

²¹⁹ ‘Film treaty signed between China and the Netherlands’, website Netherlands Film Fund, 26 October 2015, see: <https://www.filmfonds.nl/nl/page/3228/film-treaty-signed-between-china-and-the-netherlands>; ‘Cai Fuchao qianshu “Zhong-He dianying hepai xieyi”’ [Cai Fuchao signs Sino-Dutch Co-Production Pact], website of the Chinese state administration for the press, publishing, radio, film and television, 29 October 2015, see: http://www.chinasarft.gov.cn/art/2015/10/29/art_112_28778.html. On the most recent edition of ‘One Touch’, see: <http://china.dutchculture.nl/en/offshore/netherlands-one-touch-online-film-festival-china> (visited on 17 May 2017).

little attention to these initial achievements.

The significance of cooperation in these areas for China will likely increase in the case of effective linkage to education. China is strongly interested in cooperating with the Netherlands in the area of intermediary and higher education, notably in the field of vocational education.²²⁰ In 2014, the Netherlands and China agreed to intensify cooperation in this area.²²¹ Last year, a 16-strong delegation of university deans from Central and Western China travelled to the Netherlands for training, and a visit by 11 Chinese vocational schools is planned for this year.²²² The Chinese are not interested only in mainstream fields such as technology, agriculture, catering, economics, logistics and water management, but increasingly also (particularly at higher vocational level) in niche courses in the areas of fashion, film and the arts – precisely those fields of the creative industry in which the Netherlands hopes to intensify cooperation.²²³ At the same time, there is also still scope for a bigger Dutch educational footprint in China. The plans by the University of Groningen to set up a campus in China are seen as a smart move at the right time, as Chinese observers doubt whether there will still be space for such initiatives a few years from now.²²⁴

Set against the background of current developments in China and the increasing internationalisation of Chinese society, a gradual shift is also taking place in the area of cultural cooperation from a need for Western imports to a growing demand for international exposure and export of Chinese assets. One illustration of this is the recent establishment of a Chinese cultural centre in The Hague, which officially opened at the end of last year and has become fully operational from April of this year.²²⁵ A major political consideration for the establishment of such centres – of which there are some 30 worldwide at present – is to introduce Chinese culture in order to promote bilateral relations and China's 'soft power'.²²⁶ Next to that, however, is a real and concrete aim of promoting cooperation and exchange by

²²⁰ Based on previous professional experiences of the author as an adviser to Chinese and Dutch higher education establishments. See also 'Nederlands MBO maakt school in China' ['Dutch Intermediate Vocational School opens in China'], Dutch government website, 26 March 2014, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2014/03/25/nederlands-mbo-maakt-school-in-china> (visited on 1 March 2017).

²²¹ *Ibid.* See also: 'China, Holland seek more education cooperation', *Xinhuanet*, 25 March 2014, see: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-03/25/c_133213451.htm.

²²² See 'Nederlandse hbo is voorbeeld voor China' ['Dutch higher vocational education example to China'], EP-Nuffic website, 30 May 2016, see: <https://www.epnuffic.nl/nieuws/ep-nuffic-news/nederlandse-hbo-is-voorbeeld-voor-china>; 'Mbo haalt banden met Chinees beroepsonderwijs aan' ['Intermediate vocational education strengthens ties to Chinese vocational education'], 13 June 2016, see: <http://www.profielactueel.nl/onderwijs/nieuws/mbo-haalt-banden-met-chinees-beroepsonderwijs-aan/b15g1c1o1916> (visited on 1 March 2017).

²²³ Based on previous professional experiences of the author as an adviser to Chinese and Dutch higher education establishments.

²²⁴ Interview 22.

²²⁵ On the Chinese cultural centre in The Hague, see 'China cultural center officially opened in The Hague', website Invest in Holland, 24 November 2016, see: <http://investinholland.com/china-cultural-center-officially-opened-hague>; 'China cultural center inaugurated in The Hague, the Netherlands', *Xinhuanet*, 25 November 2016, see: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-11/25/c_135856862.htm (visited on 1 March 2017).

²²⁶ Song & Wang (2015), pp. 13–14.

effectively bringing together creators of culture from both countries.²²⁷ The general feeling on this is that although there is great potential for Sino-Dutch cooperation in the cultural field, at present there is still insufficient concrete linkage between the two sides. Chinese diplomats hope that the Dutch government will make greater efforts to facilitate and channel these possibilities. From the Chinese viewpoint, a national cultural event could be a useful first step in this.²²⁸

The joint celebration this year of the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations at ambassadorial level presents additional opportunities to intensify cultural and interpersonal links. The Chinese Foreign Ministry expressed at an early stage that China is interested in joint celebrations, and the Chinese embassy in the Netherlands reportedly is also engaged in preparations for this.²²⁹ In the case of Germany, where China is celebrating a similar anniversary, the Chinese government has developed an extensive cultural programme with a dedicated website.²³⁰ China is looking forward to likewise strengthen its ties to the Netherlands in this anniversary year.²³¹

²²⁷ Interview 28.

²²⁸ *Ibid.* See, in a general sense, also Yang Xiaolong (2016b).

²²⁹ Interviews 8, 29.

²³⁰ 'Celebrating 45 years of China-Germany ties', website Chinaculture.org, 16 February 2017, see: http://en.chinaculture.org/2017-02/16/content_955957.htm; 'China-Germany cultural events to celebrate 45 years of relations', *China Daily*, 16 February 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2017-02/17/content_28234428.htm. For the Chinese-German programme, see: <http://www.chinaheute45.org> (visited on 1 March 2017).

²³¹ Interviews 8, 29, 29. Also see footnote 196.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Chinese perceptions

The most significant results of this research in terms of Chinese perceptions on the EU and the Netherlands can be summarised as follows.

Internal deficit

The Chinese view of the EU has never before been as sombre as it is now. China has been closely following the process of European integration – particularly since the end of the last century, when China prepared to join the WTO. Around the beginning of this century, the Chinese view of the EU was highly positive, and the EU served as a textbook example of regional integration and a promising global power. The first blot on its copybook was the failure of the European Constitution, but this was seen as merely an unfortunate incident. Even during the financial crisis and the Eurozone crisis which followed not long afterwards, many Chinese observers – particularly economists and area specialists – were still optimistic about the EU's future. Developments over the past two years have put an end to that, however. The refugee crisis, terrorist attacks and particularly the re-emergence of renationalisation, culminating in the 'Brexit' vote, have revealed structural problems within the EU. The prevailing expectation in China is that the EU will not be capable of reforming itself within the foreseeable future in such a way as to become an economically sound and politically effective global actor. The current leadership is considered insufficiently capable of bridging the gap between the EU and its citizens.

External deficit

Interviews with Chinese officials indicate that the EU has lost much of its credibility as a 'normative' global power. While China has always had its problems with the EU's normative mission, with its imperative emphasis on values it considers universal, now not only is the moral justification for this lacking, but also the underlying economic imperative. Do not go preaching to others if you cannot keep your own house in order, is the implicit thought among many Chinese observers. This reality has however not yet been sufficiently recognised in Europe, leading Chinese observers to identify another growing gulf: namely between the EU's inflated self-image and its – in reality – declining influence in the world. The external credibility of the EU is being further eroded by the double standards the EU is guilty, from the Chinese point of view, of applying. One example is that European politicians tend to see terrorism and the influx of refugees into Europe principally as external threats, thereby failing to recognise their own contribution to the root causes, while European commentaries typically blame terrorist attacks by Tibetans or Uyghurs in China to culpable actions by the Chinese government. China also sees examples of such double standards in the area of human rights.

Strategic importance

In spite of its suboptimal condition and reduced international credibility, the EU has not in principle lost its strategic importance to China. This is a matter mainly of the *relative* interest the EU and the EU-China relationship represent in the Chinese perspective on the multipolar

world order, and its present imperfect shape. On the one hand, China hopes that a united, independent EU will act as a counterbalance to US hegemony, while on the other many Chinese – contrary to what Beijing projects externally – harbour a deep-rooted historical mistrust of their northerly neighbour, Russia. The EU's strategic interest will therefore increase in the event of a rapprochement between the US and Russia or a deterioration of China's relations with the US and with American allies in Asia. From an economic standpoint, the EU will continue to fulfil an essential role for China as the largest global economy (even after Brexit) and its most important trading partner and investment destination. Chinese readiness to cooperate with the EU therefore remains great, in spite of various setbacks in relations between the two parties in the past year. Against this background, Chinese leaders and the Chinese state media are consistently adopting a markedly positive tone in relation to Europe and the EU. Although from a Chinese standpoint the EU's responses to Chinese advances and initiatives have been inadequate, Beijing understands that Europe's acute priorities currently lie elsewhere. Chinese expectations of what can be achieved with Brussels are therefore modest.

Bilateral and subregional approach

Within this broader general context, the focus of EU-China relations is shifting increasingly away from Brussels towards the Member States level. In this process, China is adopting a differentiated, subregional focus based on the strategic location and economic realities of the regions concerned. For Europe, the result is basically a differentiated approach along the past fault lines of the continent. In Central and Eastern Europe, China has launched the '16+1' platform, through which it seeks to coordinate its bilateral contacts with 11 Member States and 5 candidate Member States of the EU and explore the possibilities for plurilateral cooperation in infrastructure and industrial capacity. With the Northern countries, discussions are taking place at think tank-level about the development and security of the Northern Sea Route, among other topics. A dialogue is also taking shape with the Southern EU countries, who on top of a favourable maritime location share a growing receptiveness for Chinese capital investment. Western Europe, the heart of the original EU with the oldest and most developed Member States, is attractive to China as high-end consumer market and for its advanced technologies, know-how and expertise, leading international financial markets and leadership role in Brussels. China understands that such a subregional approach on its part will add to political challenges for the EU, but considers these to be the inevitable result of existing European realities – i.e. differences – which also contain the seed of cooperation.

The Netherlands as a partner

The Netherlands has a reputation among Chinese policymakers and diplomats as a small but strong country with a robust, open economy and a highly developed social security system, and as a well performing, influential EU Member State with which China has long enjoyed good relations. Beijing cherishes the sound mutual relationship and strives to enhance the 'open and pragmatic partnership for comprehensive cooperation' the two governments in 2014 decided to develop. China sees the Netherlands as a strong and partly like-minded proponent of global free trade. Especially now that the liberal British voice within the EU is about to fall away, Beijing hopes that the Netherlands – together with the Nordic countries – will continue to argue strongly in Brussels for free trade and open global markets. China also

hopes that the Netherlands will show greater interest in Chinese multilateral or plurilaterale subregional initiatives such as the ‘Belt & Road’ plan. From a geo-economic perspective, the strategic significance of the Netherlands – as a maritime gateway to Europe – is set to increase further with the future exploitation of the Northern Sea Route, which will considerably shorten the sea crossing to China.

5.2 Importance for the EU

The previous sections provided a rather one-sided, ‘Sinocentric’ sketch of the position of the EU and the Netherlands in China’s international relations and Chinese interests in its partnerships with the EU and the Netherlands. Naturally, from a European or Dutch perspective there are many caveats and qualifications to be made in relation to these Chinese viewpoints. We have refrained from doing so in the previous sections in view of the basic purpose of this study, i.e. gauging Chinese perspectives and views. Besides, European perspectives on China and the state of relations with China are well covered in the many Western publications on these topics, a modest selection of which is presented in the bibliography accompanying this report. These points of view are also well known in general terms to Chinese policymakers, diplomats and observers, and therefore – at least from a Chinese perspective – these have already been sufficiently taken into account in the visions as described in this report.

The same is true to a much lesser extent vice versa. Generally speaking, European politicians and policymakers are familiar with or even interested in Chinese policy visions only to a limited extent. This may be due both to other priorities, intransigent views and sentiments, as well as a more limited supply of accessible (i.e.: not Chinese-language) sources. In addition to this, Chinese public sources have a tendency in most cases – especially when there are no strong mutual tensions at work – to downplay or refrain from mentioning negative or confrontational matters. This ‘constructive’ approach can be explained on the one hand by the Chinese cultural tradition, which prefers to avoid open criticism, and on the other – in relation to Europe – by China’s intent to continue seeing and treating the EU as a strategic ‘pole’. There are, of course, many degrees within the level of circumspection applied. In bilateral consultations, the Chinese can and will express criticism, but the content of these dialogues – which some EU diplomats describe as sets of mutual *monologues* – is not made public.²³²

The fact remains that to gauge Chinese official views, it is necessary to read between the lines. This survey is not an exception to that rule. Interpretations, based on personal observation and historical comparison, are of course unavoidable in such an exercise. It must be stressed however that clearly this does not mean that what is stated in the sections above represents our own opinions. On the contrary, we believe the result of this exercise offers a representative, objectified account of Chinese perceptions and sentiments as expressed – explicitly or implicitly – in the sources and people consulted. It is precisely because of the existing shortage of *candid* yet *representative* public Chinese commentaries that we considered it valuable to principally present the results of this survey without qualification or commentary. In this way, we hope, this report should contribute to a better understanding of

²³² Interviews 8, 9, 10, 15.

the views and motivations of this rising superpower, still so unfamiliar to many people, and consequently also to an adequate anticipation of (future) realities.

This does not, of course, mean that Chinese perceptions should shape or dictate the formation of European or Dutch China policies. What it does mean, however, is that the feasibility of these policies must be considered and assessed in the light of Chinese policy objectives and visions and that their ultimate effectiveness will to a large degree depend on the extent by which European policymakers intelligently respond to or anticipate on these. As Varrall (2015) observed, even Henry Kissinger, the ‘doyen of Realist foreign policy practitioners’, recognises that differences in world views do matter, and it is important that European policymakers take account of the implications of their policy responses to China for future Chinese behaviour.²³³ Gaining accurate and up-to-date insight in this area is all the more important for the EU in view of its declining weight and popularity in the world, and increasing tensions with Russia, Turkey and – most recently – even the United States. This applies equally to the EU and to its individual Member States, and all the more so – and even increasingly as the role of the EU wanes in the future – to a smaller Member State such as the Netherlands.

China’s take on its own core national interests – including the general stability of the political system – makes it unmistakeably clear that banking on the fall of the Chinese Communist Party (regime change) or a process of fundamental democratisation in China is an illusion that could lead to dangerous wrong choices. To see the CCP not as a credible partner, but simply as an unwelcome obstacle to desired change, is to chart a course heading for conflict or confrontation. It is precisely in this respect that a European approach could differ from the American one, which sees China as a strategic rival, if not hostile contender.²³⁴ Against this background, it is time for Brussels and The Hague to rethink why they should continue to make the projection of their own core values onto China and Chinese domestic affairs a central part of their policy when China considers keeping out unwelcome external political influences one of its absolute core interests. In case of continuation of this approach, it should be made clear what stands to be won, and at what cost.

This survey shows that the EU’s present relationship with China – in spite of shared aspirations and considerable goodwill – is revealing ever more clearly the fundamental vulnerability, if not weakness, of the EU as a global actor. The ineffectiveness of the EU’s attempts to speak with one voice in its interaction with China is in itself nothing new.²³⁵ What is new, however, is China’s more powerful, self-assured performance on the international stage at a time when the EU is losing global influence. On the one hand, this could result in a (further) decrease in Chinese willingness to accept European projection of values – universal or otherwise – while on the other hand, as its global interests increase, Beijing will bring its international influence to bear more heavily, also in Europe. Although Chinese foreign policy can traditionally be considered predominately as ‘defensive realist’ and Beijing harbours no distrust in principle, nor resentment nor latent aggression towards the EU, the ‘offensive

²³³ Varrall (2015), pp. 2–3, who refers to Kissinger, *World Order*, New York: Penguin Press, 2014, p. 226.

²³⁴ See also Pieke (2016), pp. 1119–20.

²³⁵ See for example Austermann (2012).

mercantilism' with which the rise of China seems to increasingly be accompanied, may well add to existing problems and tensions for the EU.²³⁶

At the same time, a (resurgent) growing interest in and engagement with the EU can be felt in China in the light of recent global developments and increasing uncertainties. This is reflected, among others, in the Chinese invitations to the 'Belt & Road' forum earlier this year and in Beijing's urging for the annual EU-China summit to be held as soon as possible. In this way, new opportunities are arising for the EU and China to further enhance their strategic partnership in several areas of cooperation. Here too, however, there are two sides to the coin. On the one side, Beijing's recent diplomatic activism makes that there is something at stake for China – which means realistic opportunities for the EU to propose modifications, impose conditions and promote its own policy objectives. On the other side, in the light of the EU's loss of economic and normative power, Brussels and the Member States will have to adjust their expectations, policy and attitudes towards China in certain areas in order to facilitate a sustainable partnership. For the Netherlands, this has additional relevance given the momentum and increased levels of aspiration inherent in the current state of bilateral relations.

At present, the EU-China relationship is still lacking some key features of a partnership. Europe is questioning China's strategic intent and worries about the growing influence and assertiveness of its 'partner'. China, on the other hand, sees a partner who believes itself to be superior, despite showing inferior behaviour. Superior, insofar the EU considers it necessary to publically lecture China on international norms and values. Inferior when, from the Chinese perspective, it consistently applies double standards, and – in ways similar to what Trump did during his election campaign – blames China for its own problems. One example of this is the recurring complaints heard about increasing Chinese influence in Eastern and Southern Europe.²³⁷ Firstly, these complaints primarily reflect the sentiments of the Western Member States, and are not shared to the same degree in many other parts of the EU.²³⁸ More important still, is that the root causes of the problem signalled are real differences and diverging interests within the EU itself. Anyone who wants to compete at the highest level, has to be fit. Brussels may be able to reprimand Beijing for unsporting behaviour far more effectively if such differences of opinion were aired more uniformly and behind closed doors, and stopped once it refrained from blaming the other side for its own failings.

Naturally, it is up to the EU (and the Netherlands) if they wish to set out a self-assured, assertive or even confrontational line, unhampered by Chinese perceptions or wishes, in the development and concrete realisation of the partnership. Geopolitical reality, however, ultimately also argues for structural cooperation with China. Unlike for the US, with its

²³⁶ On China's offensive mercantilism, see for example Holslag (2017).

²³⁷ See recently Wendy Wu, 'Berlin uneasy about Beijing's growing clout in eastern, southern Europe', *South China Morning Post*, 18 February 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2072046/berlin-uneasy-about-beijings-growing-clout-eastern> (visited on 3 March 2017).

²³⁸ See for example Turcsáni, who blames the Western Member States who express these kinds of complaints, for sowing conflict within the EU. During the interviews with representatives of the various diplomatic missions in Beijing, differences between the older, Western Member States and the Eastern newcomers were also clearly noticeable.

autonomous foreign policy and global military supremacy, for the EU the strategic dilemma of containment versus engagement of China is merely a false one. The EU is not in a position to contain China either militarily, economically, or otherwise, even if it wanted to. For the EU to take part in any such attempt as an ally of the US would only lead to further increased strategic dependency on Washington, while having less and less to offer in return, thereby weakening its position even further. For these and other reasons, it is of vital importance to the EU to prevent the recurrence of a bipolar Cold War scenario. Maintaining healthy relationships with both China and the US, on the other hand, would allow the EU to retain influence with both sides, and prevent it from being side-lined. In this respect, the EU would benefit – also in the light of its relationship with Russia – from a constructive partnership with China.

In the economic field as well, cooperation is unavoidable in the light of both the abovementioned political factors and the economic interdependence that has come to define the relationship between Europe and China. As major polities at the extremities of the same land mass, it is natural and desirable that connections are further expanded and intensified. Seen against this background, China's 'Belt & Road' initiative is at its core neither illogical, nor threatening to Europe. On the contrary, in spite of the enormous political and other challenges it will entail for the EU, the initiative offers a considerable and in essence welcome potential foundation upon which to set globalisation, while at the same time offering opportunities to enhance Europe's internal integration and economic growth. The proposed bilateral investment agreement, as a launchpad for a possible future EU-China free trade agreement, can also serve to solidify and improve further cooperation. Whatever one's take on Trump's withdrawal from the TPP trade agreement, at the end of the day this agreement meant competition for Europe, and its rejection opens up new opportunities for the EU to expand and intensify its trade relations in the Asia-Pacific region.²³⁹

In general, it would serve the EU and the Member States if they adopted open, positive rhetoric in relation with on their ties to China, expressly conveying the fundamental willingness to enhance mutual cooperation and connectivity (obviously under the appropriate conditions). As argued elsewhere, the explicit naming of common interests and shared visions can contribute significantly to a constructive relationship with China, without causing actual risks.²⁴⁰ This should not be taken to imply that the EU should go 'soft' on China or merely flatter it. On the contrary, a more positive engagement should serve as a lever for exerting greater influence on or gaining concessions from China. While EU diplomats appeared to pride themselves on the unity displayed by the Member States at the recent 'Belt and Road' forum by refusing to endorse a Chinese statement, this in fact amounted to ineffective engagement between the EU and China.²⁴¹ Had the EU and the Western Member States expressed their interest the conference more actively and strongly from the outset, and sent

²³⁹ See – albeit with a different conclusion – François Godement, 'Europe's Trump-China dilemma', ECFR website, 31 January 2017, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_europes_trump_china_dilemma_7226.

²⁴⁰ See V.K.L. Chang (2016a).

²⁴¹ See 'EU backs away from trade statement in blow to China's 'modern Silk Road' plan, *The Guardian*, 15 May 2017; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/15/eu-china-summit-beijing-xi-jinping-belt-and-road> (visited on 17 May 2017).

their senior leaders to the conference in a clear show of (nominal) support, it is unlikely that Beijing would have disregarded their concerns and refused to compromise. By expressing substantial demands through second-rate delegations, however, the EU and the Member States overplayed their hand, basically leaving the conference empty-handed. Beijing, of course, would do better to invite Member States (and EU institutional) representatives of equal political rank, and to avoid awkward and potentially harmful ‘half’ summits in the future.

There are of course many difficult hurdles still to be overcome. When China argues in favour of global free trade and inclusive globalisation, it is in the first place concerned about ensuring foreign consumer markets for its own exports, reducing excess capacity in domestic industries, and securing access to resources, commodities and investments. For the EU, securing reciprocity is of the greatest importance, not only in terms of increased market access in China, but also in terms of promoting socially and environmentally acceptable standards for incoming trade and investment flows. The ‘Belt & Road’ initiative will thus be a stringent test of the EU’s effectiveness. In spite of the shared political-economic interest in deepening existing ties, there are great differences between China’s network-based approach to inter-regional cooperation and the rules-based approach of the EU.²⁴² To close this gap, both sides must show a willingness to make concessions. Moreover, the EU will have to display the flexibility, decisiveness and competitiveness required to ensure that the ‘win-win’ cooperation proposed by Beijing actually results in a positive outcome from the sum of its parts.

Seen in this context, a successful political-economic strategy concerning Asia and China stands or falls with an effective and united EU, which is in a position to convincingly engage with its trade partners – including China – and call them to account in relation to their obligations and responsibilities. The first prerequisite for this is that the EU must be better able to overcome and control its internal differences. This can be achieved not by rejecting essentially welcome subregional cooperation with China in parts of the EU (hit hard by the recent financial crisis), but rather by ensuring that such cooperation eventually benefits to the entire Union.²⁴³ Against the backdrop of the worldwide issue of globalisation, the EU stands to gain from better internal wealth distribution – not only between groups of citizens, but also among the Member States. The EU faces the difficult task of renegotiating a workable definition of free trade and globalisation between Xi Jinping’s understanding of ‘mutual benefit’ and Trump’s variant of ‘fair trade’ – one which does justice to the economic differences and diverse needs existing among the Member States, and which encompasses more than simply putting up or taking down trade restrictions.²⁴⁴

²⁴² See for a recent article on this issue, Andreas Grimm, ‘One Belt, One Road: A new model of interregionalism’, *Shanghai Daily*, 27 March 2017, http://www.shanghaidaily.com/opinion/foreign-perspectives/One-Belt-One-Road-A-new-model-of-interregionalism/shdaily.shtml?utm_source=Silk+Road+headlines&utm_campaign=b088f5b27f-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_03_29&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_70119be3b7-b088f5b27f-79803473 (visited on 31 March 2017).

²⁴³ In the same vein, also interviews 23, 25.

²⁴⁴ On Trump’s visions of ‘fair’ trade, see e.g. ‘US President Trump seeks to promote “fair” trade with Japan’, *China Daily*, 11 February 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017-02/11/content_28169501.htm; David Nakamura and Abby

As long as the fundamental economic, social and political differences between the EU Member States persist as they are, however, only a greater preparedness for compromise can lead to such a future-proof approach and effective common China strategy. If the EU wishes to continue to play a role of any significance in a multipolar world in which China is demanding greater influence, then every Member State – including the Netherlands – must be truly prepared to make potentially painful concessions in Brussels, and to stand by these publically, in word and deed. This preparedness demands greater efforts from the political establishments in individual Member States to counter widespread Euroscepticism and renationalization trends. The challenge is to make it clear that the rational debate in the 21st century is much less about Europe versus Member State, than it is about the choice between a collective versus an individual answer to the growing influence of countries such as China (or Russia or the US for that matter). China's strategic interest in Europe, as a crucial part of the 'Belt & Road' initiative, underscores the urgency of the choices that need to be made.

The results of this study underline the complex duality that characterises EU-China relations. On the one hand, both sides are forced to cooperate within the context of their great interconnectedness, their shared interests and contemporary geopolitical realities. On the other hand, there are essential and persistent mutual differences in values and cultural traditions, and it is precisely cooperation with China that raises questions of internal division and brings to surface the weaknesses of the EU. Partnership with China therefore represents a major test case for the Union as a reflection of the internal unity and external effectiveness of the EU. European leaders would do well to bear this particular bilateral relationship in mind when discussing the future of the EU. Choices for more, less or a differentiated, multi-speed Europe may reflect real differences between Member States, but at the same time may threaten to further widen existing fault lines; they may respond tactically to the subregional focus of China's diplomatic initiatives, but also could compromise the EU's strategic, external leverage.

The chances of the national governments of EU Member States showing sufficient preparedness to find consensus on an effective, consistent China policy seem small in the present political climate. At first glance, there is little reason to assume that the EU will now suddenly find a unity of purpose that to date has been persistently lacking.²⁴⁵ However, the final future scenario for Europe is still far from set in stone. As a rational power taking a long-term view, China also considers the possibility that after the recent and upcoming elections in France and Germany, a more stable and perhaps even more progressive period may be dawning for the EU again.²⁴⁶ In such a context, a more dynamic China-policy would be driven by positive, objective elements, likely balanced however by persistent negative sentiments such as those feeding the recurring 'China threat' theories. It is important that Europe reverse these negative tendencies, and on the basis of a sense of reality seize the

Phillip, 'Trump bid to smooth relations with Germany's Angela Merkel complicated by policy, personal differences', *The Washington Post*, 17 March 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-welcomes-merkel-to-white-house-for-high-stakes-meeting-amid-friction-on-trade-refugees/2017/03/17/423e0146-0b2b-11e7-a15f-a58d4a988474_story.html?utm_term=.ab86c629a983 (visited on 20 March 2017).

²⁴⁵ See e.g. Holslag (2011), pp. 304, 310; Gaenssmantel (2014), p. 286.

²⁴⁶ Interview 30.

opportunity currently available to intensify cooperation with China. The Netherlands can play a constructive role in this, while at the same time boosting its own bilateral relationship with China, albeit not entirely without risk. Although the recent crises in Europe have not had any visible consequences for the current state of bilateral relations, there are therefore real implications for the policy to be pursued in the foreseeable future.

5.3 Policy implications for the Netherlands

As an advanced, innovative trading and services nation, the Netherlands stands to win much more than it loses from a fruitful partnership with China. This is why the Netherlands has a permanent interest in making efforts in Brussels towards the development of a partnership with China, and why such efforts on the EU level should be a spear point of Dutch China policy. At the same time, the Netherlands should be able, where necessary, to make its own way in the future. In 2013, the Dutch Advisory Council on International Affairs pointed out the possible need to take the bilateral path in order to represent national interests.²⁴⁷ This advice is still relevant. In view of these considerations, it would be prudent for the Netherlands to implement a policy aimed at sustainable intensification and embedding of cooperation with China: a policy that is realistic and can be effectively implemented both within and beyond the EU context.

The findings of this survey have implications across the entire spectrum of the Netherlands' current China policy, which according to a 2013 policy memorandum from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is geared to 'investment in values and business'.²⁴⁸ In both areas, the relationship – an unequal one to begin with – will be exposed to potential further shifts, for which reason it is advisable to consider the extent to which the present course needs to be adjusted in the light of recent developments described in this report. In addition – and possibly even more crucial still – it is time for a more profound, fundamental reconsideration of this outdated dual policy.

Investment in values

The 'investment in values' pillar of Dutch China policy is concerned primarily with the promotion of human rights and the rule of law in China. As described in paragraph 4.2, the Netherlands actively takes on the role of advocate in this area. However, as the EU – seen from the Chinese perspective – is losing political and moral authority, the Netherlands will have to increasingly take into account diminishing Chinese tolerance of a 'normative' European approach. This results in growing tension with European wishes, particularly as long as the situation in terms of political rights in China continues to deteriorate or stagnate. The Netherlands will therefore, given the lack of means through which to exert pressure, have in the future to try even harder to achieve a constructive, effective dialogue and to prevent itself from being side-lined.

In the light of the findings of this survey, public statements expressing concern or dissatisfaction about the human rights situation in China should as far as possible be

²⁴⁷ See Advisory Council on International Affairs (2013), pp. 32, 59.

²⁴⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2013), *Het Nederlandse China-beleid: Investeren in Waarden en Zaken [The Dutch China Policy: Investing in Values and Business]*.

restricted to the domain of the EU. Individual Member States, the Netherlands included, should refrain from expressing support for statements independent of the EU, whether individual or collective. On the one hand because such ‘extra’ statements will serve to compromise the hard-won internal consensus and delicate external credibility of the EU; and on the other because individual criticism by the Netherlands undermines the bedrock on which the bilateral Dutch-Chinese human rights dialogue rests, resulting in this dialogue being cancelled or delayed. As a consequence, the most constructive element of the Dutch human rights policy will fail even before it begins. Alongside the bilateral consultations and quiet diplomacy towards Beijing, the Netherlands should focus primarily on creating majorities and pushing for consensus in this area in Brussels and bilaterally within the EU and, in exceptional cases, for collective, EU-wide statements.

The Netherlands should make use of the bilateral dialogue with China to build a truly effective basis for exchange and cooperation in the area of human rights. This may seem like the present aim of the Dutch policy, but shifts the emphasis somewhat. The exchange of expertise and cooperation called for in the Dutch policy memorandum requires first and foremost good insight into the specific context. Simply ‘requesting attention for problems signalled, including individual cases’, as the Dutch policy paper states, is not an effective means, and as an aim is subordinate to the greater interest of creating real stimuli that encourage and motivate China to introduce structured improvements and reforms in this area within the existing social and political context. The suggestion that there is no appetite for this at all from the Chinese side is symptomatic of a lack of confidence that is reinforced rather than overcome by simply ‘bringing up’ problems ‘signalled’. Suggesting progress through false solutions for domestic political consumption will do nothing for the effectiveness or credibility of Dutch policies.²⁴⁹

Little public information is available on the specific human rights projects in China sponsored by the Dutch government. Here too, the importance of structured incentives should be leading, albeit in an even more practical context. It would be reasonable to assume that active, constructive cooperation be sought with Chinese parties and institutions, including Chinese local (or higher) authorities. In as far as this is not already the case, such active involvement by Chinese parties and government organs should act as a formal precondition for the allocation of Dutch government resources to foreign NGOs active in this area in China.

Investing in business

When it comes to ‘investing in business’, the Netherlands is interested above all in the promotion of market access, equal opportunities and legal protections in China for the benefit of Dutch trade and industry, as well as in attracting Chinese investments that stimulate prosperity and employment in the Netherlands. In this context as well, it is now truer than ever that the Netherlands will primarily have to focus on a joint EU approach, while on the other hand retaining the ability to go its own way if and where necessary. In view of the current state of the EU and the political climate within the Member States, the focus of the EU-China relationship could shift further towards the bilateral level, with (the sense of) competition between the Member States becoming stronger as a result. A reverse scenario is

²⁴⁹ On this, see also Pieke (2016), pp. 119–20.

also conceivable, however, especially after continued pro-EU election results in the Member States and increased unity as a result of the ‘Brexit’ negotiations or the ‘Trump effect’.

The Netherlands could continue to play a strategic, constructive role by pushing for a more effective, and more realistic EU policy supporting cooperation with China and against defensive trade measures. The Dutch government should therefore deliberate on the question of to what extent and in what way it is able and willing to continue to represent a liberal voice within the EU in the wake of Brexit, and how it can push in a credible manner for continued, yet more balanced and sustainable, globalisation in the face of protectionist and renationalization tendencies. Towards China, the Netherlands could present itself in this area as a partner and advocate in Brussels, and at the same time as an attractive, advanced part of Europe that explicitly welcomes bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

The Netherlands can also play a strategic role in the responsible development within Europe of the ‘Belt & Road’ initiative. To this end, the Netherlands should consider possibilities for teaming up more closely with Germany, its neighbour and natural partner, which has previously promised Beijing to help with the implementation of the project in Europe. The aim should be to formulate a strategic vision for a realistic (multilateral) European response to the Chinese initiative that does justice to European interests, wishes, values and legislation. Naturally, new dimensions and conditions promoting European values and interests – and thus enhancing European cooperative involvement in the initiative – could and should be added to the basic concept and especially its implementation in Europe. As in the case of the AIIB, these could include effective guarantees of sustainability and corporate social responsibility, and, for example, also more structurally involving the small and medium-sized business sector in the initiative.²⁵⁰

The Netherlands and Germany could (together with other European Member States) seek to connect strategically with the subregional focus of the Chinese initiative, as has been seen with comparable trends in other European regions. This could include potential sustainable expansion, an upgrade or improved operation of regional transportation connections in cooperation with Chinese partners, for example geared to strengthening and expanding the existing links between the Dutch sea port and the European hinterland. Simultaneously, linkage could also be sought with Chinese-Scandinavian orientations towards the further development of the Northern Sea Route, with a view to the strategic positioning of Rotterdam. The long-established, active cooperation between the Dutch and Chinese customs services could perhaps make a positive contribution to this.

In addition to identifying modalities for enhanced cooperation and connectivity, the Netherlands and its European partners naturally should also address the question what preconditions and checks should be attached to this – both within and outside of the context of existing EU rules. In view of the multifold challenges the initiative presents for Europe, a start can be made on the development of joint approaches for analysis and control of the various security risks entailed in this project.²⁵¹ In this respect too, a proactive, joint dialogue

²⁵⁰ In this regard, see also Sebastien Goulard, France, Italy and China’s ‘Belt and Road’ initiative, *The Diplomat*, 7 March 2017, <http://thediplomat.com/2017/03/france-italy-and-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative> (visited on 13 March 2017).

²⁵¹ On the security implications of the ‘Belt & Road’ initiative and the perspectives for cooperation with China in this respect,

with China is needed from an early moment on. This could initially be introduced in a semi-formal manner at the level of Dutch and Chinese think tanks and other knowledge institutes, in line with the example provided by the round table discussions between China and the Nordic countries.

Without prejudice to this much-needed critical assessment, it would be worthwhile for the Dutch political establishment to adopt and display a more open and receptive basic attitude toward China and Chinese initiatives, in line with the essence of the open and pragmatic partnership that the two sides pledged to develop. As argued earlier in the EU context, the purpose of a more positive, ostensible engagement obviously is not to gratify China, but to place Member States such as the Netherlands in a position from which they can more effectively influence, modify or co-shape Chinese initiatives in line with their own objectives and visions.²⁵² In this context, the ‘Belt & Road’ initiative offers a welcome framework in principle, not just for developing economic cooperation, but also for permanently reminding China of, and keeping it to, its commitments to inclusiveness, mutual benefit, good governance and sustainability.²⁵³ After all, without the overarching ‘Belt & Road’ trademark, Beijing would pursue many of the project’s underlying aims and activities all the same, yet with even less room for public ‘scrutiny’. In short, therefore, rather than engaging in theoretical discussions driven by emotional sentiment or abstract values, Dutch policymakers and politicians should confront the practical question of how existing differences with China, and risks ensuing from these, can be made into opportunities for both sides in a way that eventually benefits Dutch tax payers and Dutch society.

Investment in sustainable partnership

Alongside these implications for existing policy areas, the outcomes of this research call for a more fundamental re-evaluation of the current policy of ‘investing in values and business’. The old dual notion of ‘preacher’ versus ‘merchant’ that still resonates within the Netherlands’ present China policy is no longer appropriate today. Just as a constructive dialogue entails more than a set of crossing monologues, so the development and maintenance of a bilateral relationship, especially one with an emerging global power, requires much more than keeping and pursuing a wish list based merely on ‘making profits’ and ‘projecting values’ without duly taking into account the policy objectives and ideas of the other side or the greater causes of the cooperation. Clearly, such an outdated, narrow policy, which to Chinese contains clear echoes of the West’s imperialist past, is also incompatible with the open and pragmatic partnership for comprehensive cooperation that the Netherlands and China embraced in 2014 as the guideline for their future bilateral relations.

Against the background of China’s ongoing rise, advancing globalisation and increasing

see: Ghiasy & Zhou (2017).

²⁵² Once the basic mutual willingness is established, projects can be shaped and modified in such a way that they serve a wider purpose than initially perceived or envisaged by Beijing. In this same vein, see also Manoj Joshi, ‘Can the OBOR project be made to work for countries other than China?’, *The Wire*, 23 May 2017, <https://thewire.in/138647/obor-china-india-gains> (visited on 31 May 2017).

²⁵³ For these commitments and intentions see, inter alia, the joint statement adopted on 15 May 2017 by the participants of the ‘Belt and Road’ forum, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/15/c_136286378.htm (visited on 16 May 2017).

economic, social and cultural interconnectedness, China in the 21st century therefore can no longer exclusively be approached from this limited, binary mind-set. Whatever one may think of this, China's growing global influence is palpable in a wide range of social arenas in the Netherlands, from imported products and investments in trade and industry to incoming knowledge migrants, who stimulate growth and innovation. A world which is becoming ever more 'Chinese' – without actually becoming Chinese – demands an approach that rests on a broader vision.²⁵⁴ A sound, sustainable partnership assumes a basis of equality and reciprocity, and therefore the mutual readiness to invest, on the basis of a broad outlook, in synergetic cooperation and long-term exchange, and in the promotion of shared interests, common understanding and mutual patience.

This requires a policy that also systematically incorporates cooperation in the areas of knowledge, culture and education as a central element of bilateral relations. Concrete, interpersonal, typically long-term connections in these areas can add depth and continuity to the bilateral partnership which are easily lacking in the political and commercial contexts. By analogy with long-held policy views on cross-pollination and innovation in the Dutch domestic context, it is likewise true for the bilateral level with China that there is added value to be found in structural cooperation and exchanges between government, industry and knowledge institutions. The Netherlands and China could, either in specific fields of cooperation or beyond these, initiate semi-formal or informal dialogues at the level of think tanks, knowledge institutions and NGOs in order to permanently feed and sustain the development of the bilateral relationship and make ongoing contributions to grassroots exchange and bottom-up ties. Logically, cultural workers should occupy an integral place within this policy to meet existing mutual demand, promote sustainable creative exchange and bridge cultural differences.

A Sino-Dutch national cultural event, involving an exchange of culture and knowledge in a thematic but also cross-sector setting, could give relations a further impulse as well as cater to existing Chinese wishes. There is also scope for smaller-scale, joint initiatives in the recently opened Chinese cultural centre in The Hague. While investing in a partnership for the future, due attention should be devoted to the rich shared history between the Netherlands and China. The unique Dutch past as a global maritime power, for example, is perfectly suited to the Chinese narrative of the maritime Silk Road. Apart from the 'Belt & Road' initiative, studies into the Dutch East India Company, Indonesia and World War II, for example, could focus greater attention on the often neglected role played by China and the Chinese in relation to the Netherlands. Both the 'Leiden-Asia Year', currently hosted by Leiden University and several of its partners, and the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations with China, offer ample opportunities to initiate meaningful new activities.

²⁵⁴ See also Pieke (2016), pp. 144–145.

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Reference Matter

Participating institutions

Official institutions

Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs	中华人民共和国外交部
Chinese Embassy at The Hague	中华人民共和国驻荷兰王国大使馆
Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs	
Dutch Embassy at Beijing	
Dutch Consulate-General at Shanghai	
German Embassy at Beijing	
Lithuanian Embassy at Beijing	
Czech Embassy at Beijing	
EU Delegation at Beijing	
Council of the European Union, General Secretariat, Brussels	

Think tanks

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing	中国社会科学院
China Institute of International Studies, Beijing	中国国际问题研究院
Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, Beijing	中国人民大学重阳金融研究院
Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, Shanghai	上海国际问题研究院

Universities and Research Centres

Renmin University, Beijing	中国人民大学
- Center for European Studies	中国人民大学欧洲问题研究中心
Fudan University, Shanghai	中国复旦大学
- Institute for International Studies	中国复旦大学国际问题研究院
- Center for China-Europe Relations	中国复旦大学中欧关系研究中心
- Center for European Studies	中国复旦大学欧洲问题研究中心
- Dutch Studies Center	中国复旦大学荷兰研究中心
- Financial History Studies Center	中国复旦大学金融史研究中心
Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai	中国上海外国语大学
- Center for EU Studies	中国上海外国语大学欧盟研究中心

Free University Brussels

- Brussels Academy for China & European Studies

Other Institutions

China-EU Association, Beijing

中国欧盟协会

Chinese Society for EU Studies, Shanghai

中国欧盟研究会

Euraxess China, Beijing

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比利时布鲁塞尔自由大学孔子学院

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Interview 30	The Hague/Brussels, March-May

Conferences

1. *'One Belt, One Road': China's Pivot to Europe?*, workshop at Centre for East Asian Studies Groningen, Groningen University, 12 September 2016
2. Symposium on EU and China with participants of the China-EU Association, hosted by Clingendael and LeidenAsiaCentre, Leiden University, 7 October 2017
3. *China's Future and Reporting EU-China*, symposium hosted by EU-Asia Centre, Press Club Brussels, 15 November 2016
4. *The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and its Role in Furthering Asian Development*, Discussion with AIIB president Jin Lique, hosted by Clingendael, The Hague, 18 November 2016
5. *China, The Netherlands and Europe*, opening conference of the Leiden Asia Year 2017, LeidenAsiaCentre, Leiden University, 9 February 2017

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