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China-EU convergence 1957–2003: towards a 'strategic partnership'

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Abstract This article looks at how the 'strategic partnership' announced in 2003 between the People's Republic of China and the European Union came to be. Strategic geopolitical *balancing* and *containment* towards other third parties have been prominent features of their convergence, during a period when the EU developed more of a foreign policy dimension and China continued its economic surge. To some extent both actors in various ways began to see each others as partners in dealing with the Soviet Union and with the United States, and helping their own rise in the international system. Strategic convergence has taken place, though one could still notice China's emphasis on geo-politics and *multipolarization* and the EU's greater stress on geo-economics and *multilateralism*.

In recent years a perhaps rather unexpected, yet significant and generally positive relationship has emerged between the European Union (EU) and the People's Republic of China (PRC), "one of the most important yet least appreciated development in world affairs in recent years" (Shambaugh 2004: p.248). This development has taken a long time to come into the limelight, almost half a century, and has been a long and indeed winding road. This article seeks to see how much continuity and how much change has there been in their dynamics. Are there underlying threads that, in retrospect, show Grand Strategies at work?

Initially, "for almost a decade after the [1949] revolution, Western Europe was at the lowest rung of China's diplomatic ladder," a "far away continent" which did not "possess the sufficient clout to influence international politics," with a "lack of interest from China" (Kapur 1985: p.72; also Shambaugh 1996: p.18). Both sides saw each other as "weak and far away" (Griffith 1981: p.176). Ideology exacerbated this

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aloofness. The PRC considered the formation of a European Common Market as still showing it "dependent on the United States" (*Ta Kung Pao* newspaper, 28 March 1957). Indeed, the European Economic Community, as the EU was then styled, was seen by Beijing as an unpleasant face of Western American-dominated capitalism, "the economic arm of the aggressive NATO bloc" (Yang 1962: p.9) in a bi-polar world. Similarly negatively, in West Europe, China could be seen as economically bankrupt, failing in its Great Leap Forward, but unsettlingly confrontational vis-à-vis Western democracy and the world order.

Nevertheless, in the 1960s perceived 'contradictions' within capitalism offered geopolitical maneuvering space for the PRC. Beijing welcomed "the cut-throat competition...among the...capitalist countries...tensions between the United States and the European Common Market are just one aspect of that competition...with their growing economic strength the Common Market Six have been increasingly independent in their attitude to Uncle Sam economically as well as politically" (Yang 1962: pp.9, 10). Franco-German moves to push the pace of EEC integration were seen in Beijing in similar anti-American light, as a move to "squeeze out US and British influences from western Europe" (Peking Review 1962: p.22). For Mao Zedong it was all a question of 'great turbulence, sharp division and extensive regroupings' (*da dongdan, da fenhua*, *da gaizu*). By 1964, West Europe was formally seen as part of the 'intermediate zone,' countries like France who in some circumstances could and would resist too close a dependency on the United States. Although the Cultural Revolution (1967–9) halted diplomatic explorations, its ending brought more fluid relationships into play.

Heightened concerns about the USSR were manifest for China by the late 1960s, the Sino-Soviet split capped by the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia (1968) and by frontier clashes (1969) with Chinese forces. China could well welcome any European pressure on the USSR's western flank—classic IR *balancing* tactics. This reflected traditional Chinese tenets of diplomacy, of 'making friends with distant countries in order to facilitate attacking the neighbouring foe' (*yuan jiao gong*). The EEC's consolidation into the EC 'European Community' in 1967 fostered such a potential pressure point. Consequently, and not coincidentally, China starting expressing positive opinions on the EC in the early 1970s. Geopolitical concerns were entwined with geo-economics. Thus EC enlargement was welcomed by Beijing, "this is another harsh blow to the tottering hegemony of U.S imperialism in Western Europe and has further isolated it. The ten-nation Common Market will outstrip the United States in gold reserves, steel and automobile output as well as the volume of exports and will become the largest market for commodities and investments in the West" (Peking Review 1971a; also Peking Review 1971b). Traditional Chinese concepts of 'using the barbarians to control barbarians' (*yi yi zhi yi*) re-emerged with EC business constantly interpreted and emphasised as anti-American and/or anti-Soviet. Typical was the analysis (February 1972) on EC Enlargement that "consolidation and development of the Common Market has thrown up many obstacles for the two superpowers in their deals and power politics and has seriously challenged US hegemony in Western Europe...the enlargement of the Common Market is from many aspects a setback for the Soviet Union" (Peking Review 1972b; also Peking Review 1973a,b). During 1972 European Monetary Union (EMU) proposals were seen by Beijing as ones to "reflect the desire of the West European countries to get rid of superpower domination and interference by strengthening unity" (Peking

Review 1972c: p.21; also Peking Review 1972d: p.19). Relatively mundane US-EC corn negotiations showed "the aggravation of the contention for markets among the West European capitalist countries and the West European countries' dissatisfaction and resistance to US power politics and selfish policy" (Peking Review 1972a: p.21).

As China looked at the EC, what was it faced with? At the time Bressi considered "relations between China and Western Europe, being by nature tactical, become highly relevant on the condition that Western Europe is capable of really coordinating its foreign policy...the faster Europe can attain unification, the readier Peking will be to come to terms with it" (Bressi 1972: pp.839,845)—a situational process dynamics that was to underpin their emerging relationship. The EC's institutional identity was indeed strengthening. *European Political Cooperation* (EPC) was launched in 1970. China followed with close attention the call by the EC Paris Summit of October 1972, that "the member states of the Community, the driving force of European construction, affirm their intention, before the end of the present decade, to transform the whole complex of their relations into a European Union." Something of a "Euro-passion" (Chen 2003: p.45) for European opportunities were discernible from China's Premier and foreign policy shaper Zhou Enlai.

A decisive supranational direction was taken as the EC Commission was authorised to collect its own revenues and to handle common external trade policies and negotiations from January 1973. Zhou Enlai's report to the CCP Tenth National Congress stressed rising dangers from the Soviet Union, "externally it has invaded and occupied Czechoslovakia, massed its troops along the Chinese border," against which China should aim to "form the broadest united front" (Zhou 1973: p.23) through cooperation with other forces. Geopolitical convergence was apparent for the *Times* (6 September 1973) "China and Europe share an interest in maintaining a balance of power in relations with the Soviet Union and avoiding a situation in which either would be dominated by Moscow." Amidst growing speculation on a linkup between the EC and China, Wilson argued "an entirely new factor has emerged in world politics in the form of possible limited but equal partnership between the two great continuous centres of world civilization...Europe and China," in which "it is the political [i.e. strategic] rather than the economic aspects of the EC relationship which have been discussed" (Wilson 1973: pp.666,655). Institutional consolidation within the EC continued, with agreement on direct elections for the European Parliament reached in 1974 and the setting up of the heads of government *European Council*. Interest in Europe, and its integration vehicle, was palpable in the Chinese state media. In the *People's Daily* there were 63 entries about Western Europe in 1972, but in 1975 the number had dramatically risen to 297. Some of this was with regard to national states, e.g. opportunities with countries like France, but part of it was through the EC.

Such dynamics fed into the formal establishment of diplomatic relations between the PRC and EC in May 1975. Li Qiang, the Minister of Foreign Trade, was cited as seeing this as "a positive development in the international system" which "will certainly frustrate the schemes of the superpowers seeking world hegemony" (Peking Review 1975: p.6), i.e. the EC seen as potential *balancing* allies. EC explanations were more circumspect, merely registering that "the European Council welcomed the decision by the Government of the People's republic of China to establish official relations with the Community. It felt that China's decisions opened the way to developing closer relations between Chin and Europe, on which the Heads of Govern-

ment set much store" (European Council 1975). How was the EC seeing itself? Nicholas Soames' trip to Beijing in 1975, to initiate formal diplomatic relations, saw him asserting "once again the Europeans are a force to be reckoned with in the world... it was never intended that our goal should be limited to the fulfilment of economic purposes alone...we have begun to push forward to a measure of common action in the political sphere...one of the chief purposes of the European Community is to give its members greater weight in their dealings with the United States...China and the European Community have much to gain from the closer and more confident relationship which now opens up before us" (Soames 1975: pp.111, 113–16).

Debates in the European Parliament over emerging EU-China links were wide ranging and revealing. The success of the EEC in establishing official relations with China in 1975 was acclaimed by Kirk as "probably the most far-reaching event to take place in the field of the Community's external relations" (European Parliament 1975: p.122), and considered by Jahn as "a development of prime importance in world politics" (European Parliament 1975: p.130). China's geopolitical interpretations of the EEC were noticed, and accepted, by some figures. Jahn argued that "Chinese policy makers were quite clear-sighted and realistic about regarding the European Community as a third world power...it wanted to have several power centres in the world, not just two power blocs in a state of perpetual confrontation" (European Parliament 1975 p.128). From that, "their assessment of the European Community's importance is based on the twin realities of industrial potential and volume of foreign trade. China concludes quite logically that a strong economy and foreign trade add up to a successful foreign policy and direct or indirect power, which cannot be overlooked as a factor on the world scene" (European Parliament 1975 p.128).

'Power' considerations were apparent for others as well. For Carpentier, Sino-European convergence was to be welcomed, to "lead to a change in the balance of power...the balance of power in the world will be better assured as a result of their collaboration" (European Parliament 1975: p.131). Power considerations were not absent, for Lehihan "this represents an intelligent, sophisticated approach towards the broad geo-politics of the world...we have to recognize that in the world of today the old balance-of-power idea, given a new civilized and sophisticated dimension... what we must seek to achieve is a reasonable balance in the world today" (European Parliament 1975: pp.134–5) between the USA, the EC, Russia, China and other 'great emerging' countries. Consequently, working with China was to be recommended as "by seeking to harmonize the balances throughout the whole world, the Community can itself play a very real, practical and fruitful role" (European Parliament 1975: p.135). For Moller, Sino-EC diplomatic recognition did not make an immediate "direct impact on the international balance of power," still dominated by the USA and USSR, but it "acknowledged the other's future international potential" (Moller 2002: p.11). A question that became an underlying ongoing theme was how long would it take for each other's 'international potential' to become manifest? As Kaspereit put it in the European Parliament, both actors were on the rise, "China's attitude is each day assuming greater importance and Europe cannot afford to be absent from the great international debate that is just beginning" (European Parliament 1978: p.190).

Chinese sources were keen to enlist the EC into an anti-Soviet grouping, as recognised by Jahn in the European Parliament, that "in its relations with the Soviet Union it can

only be of advantage to China to have a strong Europe as a counterweight. China supports our efforts towards unification, therefore, not only for their own sake but also, and primarily, because they fit into China's own plans" (European Parliament 1975: p.123). Nyborg recognised that, quite simply, "in Peking's view, only a strong and united Europe is capable of counterbalancing Soviet power. We hope that China's position is not based on secondary or purely tactical considerations, but on acceptance of the idea that the EEC is an end in itself and recognition of its role as a promoter of peace and equilibrium" (European Parliament 1977b: pp.145–6). However, that may have been a secondary consideration for Nyborg, but it was a primary consideration for Beijing.

Here, China had viewing international relations in the late 1970s through its 'Three Worlds' schemata (Chen 1979). The concept was enunciated by Mao in 1974 and adapted from the earlier 1960s 'intermediate zones' concept. The US and USSR were in the First World, Europe (and Japan) were in the Second World, China with the rest of Asia (except Japan) and Africa were in the Third World. Europe's role as a 'second world' partner against 'first world' hegemons, the USA and above all the Soviet Union, was re-emphasised during the 1970s. 1975 had Beijing congratulating how "the West European countries have come to see more clearly the expansionist policy being pushed by Soviet revisionism...their unity in opposition to the Soviet revisionists' hegemonism is being continually enhanced" (Ming 1975: p.19). The following year, Chinese warnings were strident, Europeans being told "the Brezhnev clique's greed and ambition far surpass Hitler's" (Jen 1976: p.13). More precisely, they should not believe Moscow's "détente lullaby" as "Soviet social-imperialism's threat to West European countries has grown unmistakably...it has steadily thrown a strategic encirclement around them...never in the post-war years have the West European countries been confronted with such a grave threat...it has openly attacked the proposal of West European countries to form a union" (Jen 1976: pp. 11–12). Chinese advice was for European countries to "strengthen their unity, and press on with their struggle, Soviet social-imperialism's wild ambitions to seek hegemony in Europe is sure to end in defeat" (Jen 1976: p.13).

In 1977 the message was still as strong, that "today Soviet social-imperialism obviously represents the gravest danger to the West European countries...and compels them to strengthen their defenses, coordinate their relations with each other and maintain and enhance their unity economically, politically and in defense" alongside the threat in Asia with "the massive Soviet buildup in the Far East, aimed at China" (Peking Review 1977: p.30). In Beijing's own words (1978), European integration was because European states were becoming "conscious of the threat from Soviet social-imperialism...the possibility of Western Europe falling into the clutches of the new tsars, with their countries reduced to Soviet dependencies and the people to second class citizens" (Peking Review 1978a: pp.22, 24). In short, to cope with the Soviet military threat, "western Europe must unite" (Peking Review 1978a: p.24). The PRC dwelt at length on this theme in its tract *West European Unity Against Hegemonism is a Historical Necessity*, where "the Soviet threat in particular is growing with each passing day, it is only natural that people are concerning themselves with the development of West European unity against hegemonism. In recent years, the features of Soviet hegemonism have become more exposed than ever in Europe... West European unity against hegemonism is a historical necessity...in the face of the Soviet offensive" (Peking Review 1978b: pp.21–2).

In retrospect, China's hopes for any firm EC strategic-military alignment during the 1970s against the Soviet Union were unrealistic. At that time, EC integration had not reached such levels of foreign policy cohesion, any Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was still in the future rather than the present. For one commentator, "the Chinese have paid particular attention to the EEC. They look forward more ardently than the most committed European Federalist to the day when political union will take place and when the EEC will, also become an effective self-defence community" (Yahuda 1978: p.257). In an ironical twist China could appear more European than the Europeans themselves! Chinese hopes were "a form of wishful thinking aiming at alleviating external pressures with the help of a unified strong Western Europe. Chinese misperception of European integration demonstrated two aspects, an over-estimation of the pace of this process coupled with an underestimation of the inherent difficulties (Chen 2003: p.56). Consequently, "this led to an unrealistic expectation towards the EEC as the representative entity of the 'unified Europe,' without taking account of its main external competence" (Chen 2003: p.56). In consequence, during the late 1970s there was "a perplexing phenomenon, namely that the exchange with the EC was focused on the domains of low politics, i.e. trade between China and the EC, while the importance of the relations with the EC was linked to the high politics, i.e. the issues concerning China's external security" (Chen 2003: p.56).

Some uncertainties were apparent. On the one hand, as the EC moved towards drafting some sort of trade agreement with China during 1977, it cautioned that "it should not be forgotten that Chinese policy is notorious for its many unexpected developments and surprises" and that "care must be taken to avoid over-hasty approaches to a country that puts its desire for independence above all else" (European Parliament 1977a: p.140). Nevertheless, prospects were promising, "the tendency of the [Chinese] leaders now in power seems to be towards greater intensive recourse to foreign technology, and more generally, a greater openness to the outside world," and "for political and military reasons China wholeheartedly supports the regrouping of European nations while mistrusting American power" (European Parliament 1977a: p.140). The subsequent EC-China trade agreement was something attracting the comment that "this country [China] is like a waking giant, we must recognize all the opportunities, and perhaps also the risks, which will arise out of closer economic collaboration with this vast continental power" (European Parliament 1978: p.173).

Economic issues were indeed becoming important for both sides, and as such leading to a redirection of their relationship. Grand geopolitical vistas of the 1970s were supplemented by more obvious economic projects and projections. China's own economic aspirations had been muffled in Mao's revolutionary anti-capitalist years, but on his death in 1976 came to the surface with Deng Xiaoping's drive for economic modernisation and wealth creation. Consequently, a trade agreement was negotiated between the EC and China in April 1978. European signatories referred to its trade features. However, revealingly, Chinese figures still invested it with direct geo-political significance, "we support Western Europe in its union for strength and in its struggle against hegemony. We wish to see a united and powerful Europe" (Li 1978: p.5). Whilst economic links with the EU were significant for China's domestic economic renewal, wider long-term strategic implications were apparent for Deng Xiaoping, "without sound economic foundations, it will be impossible to modernise

our national defence...the role we play in international affairs is determined by the extent of our economic growth" (Deng 1980: p.225).

In addition, in the short term, immediate adjacent geopolitical threats were faced by the PRC from a resurgent Soviet Union. Chinese calls to Western Europe had already stressed Soviet expansionism and military build-ups in the Europe, the Mediterranean and the Horn of Africa. The Soviet Union was also on the move in Asia during the late-1970s, encapsulated by Soviet moves into Afghanistan in December 1979. As Deng bluntly put it, "in international affairs...the 1980s will be a dangerous decade. So the task of opposing hegemony will be on our agenda. The 1980s are off to a bad start, what with the Afghanistan affair" (Deng 1980: p.225). In such troubled times, the *Peking Review* saw the EC as a power centre to be encouraged in "playing its proper role in the confrontation with the Soviet Union," and able to "tilt...the balance of power" (Zhang 1981: pp.13, 14). For Gu Mu, "all countries must close their ranks in opposition to the hegemonist policy of aggression and expansion [posed by the USSR]. We are happy to see a strong and united Europe" (Gu 1981: p.276).

Economics were not forgotten by China. As a leading non-American centre of finance and technology, West Europe had a key economic role for Deng Xiaoping's new China. Deng told the Chinese Central Committee, with regard to West Europe "we should lose no time in seeking their cooperation, so as to speed up our technological transformation...We should seize this opportunity. It is a matter of strategic importance" (Deng 1983: p.43). Economics was 'strategic' in enabling China's modernisation of its armed forces, economics was 'strategic' in increasing China's general diplomatic leverage and influence. Political as well as economic imperatives surrounding the EC were, typically, discerned in the *Beijing Review* in 1984. On the one hand, with regard to the EC, "its economic strength will be its trump card when it carries out its independent policy and plays an important part in international affairs" (Ji 1984 p.30). On the other hand, "its political co-ordination has just started...West European countries must unite before they can match [and constrain] the superpowers" (Ji 1984: p.30). Convergence was asserted at this geopolitical level, China's...firm stand against hegemonism is identical with West Europe's... opposition to the pattern of polarization" (Ji 1984 p.30). Elsewhere in 1984 visiting European Parliament delegates were told "West European countries and China are faced with the common task of opposing hegemonism" (Beijing Review 1984). Such a geopolitical balance of power convergence represented "a deeper logic" (Shen 1986: pp.174–5) for China.

Initially EU–China links remained explicitly economic, though implicitly (certainly for China) strategic. Their initial 1978 trade agreement was reaffirmed in the 1985 *Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation*, still the current framework, "to intensify and diversify their trade and actively develop economic and technical cooperation in line with their mutual interests" (EEC-China 1985). In economic terms, trade become a significant feature for both parties. Admittedly in the early 1980s there was some "stagnation in economic relations" as China reined in its economy; with Yahuda still terming the EC-China relationship a "secondary" one, in which "China ranks fairly low among E.C trade partners" (Yahuda 1994: p.275). However trade patterns had changed dramatically a decade later. Total two-way trade increased over 30-fold since Deng Xiaoping's reforms began in China in 1978, and

was worth 135 billion in 2003, for EU Trade Commissioner Lamy a rate of growth "scarcely imaginable even a few years ago" (Lamy 2004).

By then political-strategic considerations had become noticeable. Although Kapur noted differences between the two sides, "one party [the PRC], principally motivated by political factors, and another [the EC] whose prime objective is economic, can be problematic," he also discerned convergence with an "increasing politicisation of Sino-EEC relations" (Kapur 1985: p.103). European Parliament statements that "the European Community signs trade treaties with China not only for economic reasons, but for political reasons" were welcomed in China as showing how "like China, the nations of Western Europe oppose hegemonism...the foreign policy efforts of the European Community have received Chinese support" (Chen 1985: pp.15–16). Enlargement of the EC, with the entry of Spain and Portugal in 1985, was something that China "applauds" (Beijing Review 1985); with Chinese analysts agreeing that "it [the EC] will certainly play an increasing role in the world" (Wei 1985: p.11; also Zheng 1986). Whilst some Chinese commentators still noticed that "the decisional process that functions within the EEC framework is slow," nevertheless they welcomed how "Western Europe has gradually begun to display its 'European identity' in international affairs, and has begun to adopt a foreign policy that is different from that of the United States" (Ding and Lao 1987). Their noting of the EC draft treaty on cooperation in foreign policy was complemented by the 1986 *Single European Act*, its moves toward more majority voting and a Single Market being a further 'decisional process' reinforcing EC coherence as an international actor.

By the end of the 1980s dramatic changes were taking place in the international system, and creating new spaces of European-China convergence, as the Commission President later summed up, this represented "enormous tectonic shifts in the international system...a new world order" (Barroso 2004). The collapse of the Soviet Union during 1990–91, and its replacement by a shrunken weaker Russia, changed international and regional balances of power. Opportunities were clearly seen by the PRC for itself and for the EC. As the Soviet Union stumbled towards collapse and disintegration, Deng Xiaoping told the Central Committee that "the situation in which the United States and the Soviet Union dominated all international affairs is changing...when the world becomes three-polar, four-polar or five-polar...China will be counted as a pole" (Deng 1990: p.341), as would Europe. The final disintegration of the USSR during 1991 brought a radically different post-Cold War setting for both China and the EC, creating political strategic space and openings as well as the challenge of American preeminence. Alongside the EC's strategic role as a potential fellow multi-polar actor, came its economic role as a source of investment and technology transfer to help China's economic imperative. For Deng, the imperative was to "develop the economy without delay...and quadruple the GNP by the end of this century...If China is to withstand the pressures of hegemonism and power politics...it is crucial for us to achieve rapid economic growth" (Deng 1990: pp.342–3).

Admittedly EC-China relations plummeted in the wake of the Tiananmen Square crackdown of 1989, which "haunt Sino-European relations to this day" (Moller 2002: p.14). The European Council Summit of June 1989 expressed "deep concern" about the PRC, in which its *Declaration on China*' "strongly condemns the brutal repression taking place in China" (European Council 1989: pp.15, 17). Specific measures against China were implemented. Financial credits were frozen, cooperation

programmes halted as was 'military cooperation,' bilateral meetings suspended, China's human rights flagged as an international issue to be pursued, and an arms embargo put in place. However, political and cultural links were relatively quickly restored by the summer of 1990, which raises the general issue of how far Human Rights do, and should, affect relations between international actors. All this came at a time of quickening EC integrationist moves, as the European Community gave way to the European Union, the EU. This was signalled at Maastricht in 1992 with the *Treaty on European Union*, its objective of a 'common foreign policy' and its new intergovernmental *Common Foreign and Security Policy* (CFSP) 'pillar'. Whilst the EU and China had in effect concentrated on internal transformation during the 1980s, the 1990s was to see them increasingly drawn outwards, in part to each other. Military contacts were resumed in 1994 as an official Exchange of Letters initiated a broad 'political dialogue'—for the EU "in recognition of China's status as an emerging power on the international scene" and for China a "new horizon for Sino-European ties" (EU Commission 2007). Meanwhile "Beijing applied the now familiar multipolarity yardstick" (Moller 2002: p.20), welcoming the accession of East European states to the EU, but voicing concerns about them joining a US-led NATO.

Such a yardstick was prevalent amongst Chinese scholars and commentators in the mid-1990s in their sustained "multipolarity debate" (Pillsbury 2005: pp.3–61). Both the EU and China could be seen as 'rising' powers, multipolar partners sharing a strategic interest in curbing American unipolar dominance. At SIIS, the Shanghai Institute of International Studies, sources used old Maoist rhetoric, asserting "with the end of East–West confrontations, the contradictions and struggles among the major economic powers, namely the United States, Japan and the European Community (EC) become more prominent...China will surely benefit from this competition" (Chen 1993: p.239). At CIIS, the Chinese Institute for International Strategic Studies, Shen Guoliang argued "Europe can only become one of the poles in the world by way of integration and playing a role in the multipolar order" (Shen 1997 p.30) alongside China. In a 1996 study conducted by SIIS, Wang Houkang emphasised that "the European Union taken as a whole, is a force that can be completely equal to the United States...if Europe wants to surpass the United States and play the role of a future world leader...the most important basic condition is European unity. This is to say, Europe must not only realize economic integration, but also political integration, and during this process establish a powerful military force" (cited Pillsbury 2005: p.23). Whilst European integration was incomplete, "as of today, the European Community and the European Union still are alliances of sovereign nations," its forward momentum was irreversible "the trend of European integration will not stop or reverse, this point is certain" (cited Pillsbury 2005: p.23).

Some Chinese scholars emphasised China's usefulness for the EU's own growing hopes. In 1998 Shen Yihui argued that "the EU needs to count on China for support," because "West Europe's building closer ties with China will enable itself to play a bigger part in international affairs. It is also conducive to quickening the process of world multipolarization as far as international politics is concerned" (cited Pillsbury 2005: pp.54–5). Moreover, not only could China help the EU gain power in world affairs, but improved Sino-EU relations could also benefit the EU in other areas as well, Shen arguing that "the Chinese market is needed to catalyze Europe's economic

growth" (cited Pillsbury 2005: p.55). Even in the area of security, Shen claimed "China can be used to build a [supportive] 'crescent' security zone around the EU" (cited Pillsbury 2005: p.55). Feng Zhongpin argued in 1998 that this new relationship with China will "help the EU in its long cherished endeavor to assert itself on the world stage and become an independent 'pole' in world affairs" (cited Pillsbury 2005: p.54). The reason the EU could become a "pole" was because of "China's status in the unfolding world power balance" (cited Pillsbury 2005: p.54)

The irony was that the major post-Cold War events of the 1990s, Iraq in 1991 and Kosovo in 1999, saw the EU and the PRC diverging rather than converging in their initial responses. EU countries generally supported US military intervention but the PRC held back and expressed reservations and concerns. Nevertheless, these crises had a longer term effect of making both the EU and the PRC take the problem of 'world order' seriously, and thereby recognise each other as strategic actors to consider. Problems of instability were a push for both actors to involve themselves in the future on stabilising the international system, whilst the further boost to American pr-eminence furthered mutual concerns between the EU and the PRC to reign back the USA in the longer term. Here, the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam pushed the EU's Common and Foreign Security Policy, CFSP, a bit more. For Solana, fronting the CFSP, "my aim, at the head of this adventure, was to promote the Union as a global political player, capable of mobilising all the resources available—economic, commercial, humanitarian, diplomatic, and of course military—to act in a coherent and above all effective manner over the whole of its international environment" (Solana 2004: p.6). Meanwhile EU-China relations were further consolidated in the EC's *A Long-Term Policy for China–Europe Relations* (1995) and *Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China* (1998). For EU officials like Angelos Pangratis, these "documents mark particular milestones in the way EU-China relations have developed," and where the European Commission has become a very important institutional actor driving this relationship (Pangratis 2001: p.70).

A Long-Term Policy for China–Europe Relations considered that "Europe's relations with China are bound to be a cornerstone in Europe's external relations, both with Asia and globally" (EC Commission 1995: p.1b). Academic commentators were quick to pick up the significance of the initiative (Westerlund 1995; Cabestan 1995; Shambaugh 1996). The media were also quick to contrast EU-China convergence with Sino-American divergence in the mid-1990s, where 'China Threat' perceptions were prominent (China Daily 1995; Dale 1995). *Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China* noted "the EU itself is changing in ways that will lead China to adjust its own strategic vision of the European continent. The EU stands on the threshold of a single currency and enlargement eastwards, and with the Treaty of Amsterdam has equipped itself with new means to assert itself on the world stage" (EC Commission 1998: p.4). The EEC's original thrust of Franco-German reconciliation within Europe widened into grander EU global visions of shaping an 'international society,' where "engaging China's emerging economic and political power, as well as integrating China into the international community, may prove one of the most important external policy challenges facing Europe" (EC Commission 1998: p.4).

One of the most immediate issues facing Europe in 1998/99 was the collapse into anarchy and bloodshed in the Balkans. The severe divisions exposed within the EU over the Balkans during 1998/99 were undeniable, as Chris Patten, Commissioner

for Foreign Relations 2000–2004, ruefully admitted "the crisis in the Balkans has taught us a bitter lesson...Europe's weakness was exposed" (Patten 2001) as EU dependence on American military intervention was shown. For Solana "the Kosovo crisis has been a wake-up call for European leaders and European public opinion. It revealed the shortcomings of European national and collective military capabilities... It was against this background that the Helsinki European Council took historic decisions on ESDP [European Security and Defence Policy]" (Solana 2000). There, it undertook to provide and maintain 60,000 troops, for humanitarian and rescue work, crisis management, peace-keeping and even peace making. As a result "the European Union already has considerable instruments of a credible foreign policy in the diplomatic, economic and trade areas. It now wants to be able to back these instruments, if and when necessary, with the ability to use force where its vital interests are at stake and to be able to respond more effectively to crises" (Solana 2000). For Patten, this was making "is a great step forward...Europe's Common Foreign and Security Policy now has operational teeth...Europe—a new power pole," with "CFSP—making Europe a political heavy weight on the global scene" (Patten 2001).

At that global level, in order to provide 'strategic vision' annual EU-China summits at Heads of Government level commenced in 1998, "top-level meetings [which] enable China's leaders to dwell on their favorite themes of multipolarity" (Yahuda 2004: p.2). In such a vein, Chinese analysts speculated that the introduction of the euro would foster multipolarity in the long run (Shen 1999). Certainly, a recurrent theme for Chinese strategists in the 1990s was to foster a multi-polar balance of power situation, to safeguard its position and interests within an international system, dominated in the post-Cold war by American pre-eminence. Such "Power relations" underpinned Chinese talk in 1999 of the PRC and the EU being two of five great powers, amidst "the increasing multi-polarization trend of the present times, which has especially been sponsored by China" (Yang 1999).

PRC politicians were explicit enough. Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan agreed that "China and the European countries and the EU have become important trading partners"; but pointed out "what is more important, politically and internationally, China and the EU...both sides believe that in today's world, there is an accelerated movement towards multi-polarity" (Beijing Review 1999: p.10). Jiang Zemin considered the 1998 EU-China 'mechanism' as facilitating "a long-term and stable China-EU constructive partnership" in which "world multipolarization is an inevitable trend" (Jiang 1999: p.7). In effect, both parties shared interests in curbing American "efforts to push through hegemonism" (Wang 2002: p.55) in the wake of 9/11, as well as sharing concerns about international global terrorism. Multipolarity, classic IR *balancing*, was the key for Wang Guoqiang's (2002) analysis, "deepening cooperation between China and the EU can further promote the development of the multi-polar process...China will align with Europe" (Wang 2002: pp.57, 54).

In 'functional' terms, an Exchange of Letters on April 2002 expanded EU-China dialogue into regular, structured series of meetings at several levels; namely EU Troika Foreign Ministers, Political Directors, Heads of Missions, Regional Directors, technical meetings of high officials. More importantly, in 'strategic' terms, both sides were looking towards each other and their roles in the international system. Grand Strategy was on the agenda.

Both actors were in an international system hitherto dominated by others, but both actors were on the rise. EU officials could argue "both the EU and China are, to some extent, still looking for their rightful place in the world" (Pangratis 2001: p.71). For that international system, the big picture was "a formidably dynamic 'Chinese Dragon,' who will inescapably be one of the major players on the world scene during the twenty-first century...the challenge of developing a comprehensive robust and enduring relationship with China, is one of the great geo-strategic challenges for the twenty-first century" (Pangratis 2001: pp.77, 78). Elsewhere in the EU, Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy, reflecting IR *realism*, similarly felt that "I am convinced that the geopolitical shifts in the century ahead will see China playing an increasingly pivotal global role. So I know that it is worth investing heavily in building a good relationship with China" (Lamy 2000). Both the EU and China were recognising themselves and the other as important rising powers for the 21st century, actors that were not be ignored. Chinese voices arguing that "both China and the EU ought to be the key components of the current and upcoming international strategic structure" (Wang 2002: p.53), were complemented by EU voices arguing that in terms of "the future development of the world economy and indeed international relations....EU-China relations will...be pivotal to the century which has just begun" (Lamy 2003).

2003 was the year that earlier talk of 'political dialogue,' the language of the preceding 2001 and 2002 summits, was replaced by increasing talk of a 'strategic relationship' and indeed a 'strategic partnership'. 2003 had seen the EU split over Iraq, some countries (UK, Spain) strongly supporting US intervention, whilst others (France and Germany) equally strongly opposing it like China. Nevertheless, post-Iraq, some EU consensus seems to have re-emerged over ways forwards, with the *European Security Strategy* drawn up by Solana and formally adopted at the EU Summit in December 2003. Generally there was some EU-China consensus over the need for greater multilateralism, and focus on the UN as an international forum.

Consequently, the 2003 EU-China Summit recorded further progress as "Leaders welcomed the recent issuing of policy papers on China-EU relations by both sides," noted the "dynamic progress of their relationship" and "stressed their resolve to further expand and deepen China-EU relations, guided by the two policy papers, which promote the development of an overall strategic partnership between China and the EU" (EU-China 2003). The two policy papers in question were the EU's *A Maturing Partnership : Shared Interests and Challenges in EU-China Relations* and the PRC's *China's EU Policy Paper*, released earlier that autumn, in a delicate operation whereby each sides' drafting was carried out with some awareness and reference to the others' composition. As such, they represented an interesting and unusual example of unofficial policy formulation coordination between international actors. In effect they became almost joint documents, or certainly ones that were explicitly judged as compatible and convergent. They set the scene for the 'strategic partnership' announced in 2003.

The EU's *A Maturing Partnership*, issued in September 2003, dealt with the relationship in two frameworks. In the immediate term was the "striking" (EU Commission 2003: p.3) growth in bilateral trade, as well as acknowledgment of well known "serious differences" (EU Commission 2003: p.6) over human rights. In the

longer-term was elements of strategic positioning, "China is one of the EU's major strategic partners...China's geopolitical vision of a multipolar world, and the Chinese perception of the EU as a partner of growing importance, also provide a favourable context...the EU as a global player on the international scene, shares China's concerns for a more balanced international order" (EU Commission 2003: p.23).

From the Chinese side, their first ever EU 'White Paper,' *China's EU Policy Paper*, released in October 2003, also acknowledged differences over human rights, but also looked at wider-ranging geopolitical areas. Section V of the document, its 'military aspect' acknowledged EU's fledgling military steps, where "China and the EU will maintain high-level military-to-military exchanges, develop and improve, step by step, a strategic security consultation mechanism" (PRC 2003). Hopeful structural trends were present, where "the trend towards world multipolarity and economic globalisation is developing amid twists and turns...and is an irreversible trend of history" (PRC 2003). However, whereas the EU still emphasised 'internal' (human rights) democracy, China stressed the 'external' dimension; that countries should externally "respect diversity in the world and promote democracy in international relations" (PRC 2003). This was a continued stressing on state sovereignty, multipolarity and a veiled rebuttal of American unilateralism and hegemonism in the wake of 9/11. As a counterbalance to this, China acknowledged "the European Union (EU) is a major force in the world...the European integration process is irreversible and the EU will play an increasingly important role in both regional and international affairs" (PRC 2003). In that international arena, the PRC argued that "China-EU consultation and co-ordination on major international and regional hotspot issues...China-EU relations are now better than at any time in history" (PRC 2003).

A third important document was also acknowledged at the sixth EU-China Summit held in October 2003; where Summit Leaders officially "also noted the draft European *Security Strategy Paper* [adopted by the European Council in December], in which China features as a key partner for the EU's strategic security relationships" (EU-China 2003). The *European Security Strategy* (European Council 2003) was "the European Union's 'strategic identity card' [as] a global security player" (Solana 2004: p.6). Its author Solana felt that "a stronger Europe with a common strategic vision is also a Europe capable of consolidating relationships with the other great partners" like China, as "a pillar of the organisation of the new world" (Solana 2003). It showed ever widening longer term strategic hopes and power claims by the EU; in effect showing the EU as able to use China and in turn be used by China within converging hopes for a new international order.

All this represented grand visions, Grand Strategy for international rise by both actors. Traditional balancing rhetoric underpinned this convergence. As Lamy argued, from "lofty geopolitical heights" at the EU-China Summit, "unlike in the US—there is a much lesser sense of geopolitical challenge to Europe from China...because we are happy to see...a greater diffusion of power, a more multi-polar world developing" (Lamy 2003). Such phrasing was welcomed in PRC circles. The 2003 EU-China Summit formalised this strategic convergence. It also initialled China's participation in the EU's Galileo satellite tracking programme, a decision which worried the US, pleased the EU, and which was 'strategic' in essence. Within a multipolar setting the EU and China could settle down together, as the Summit noted "the increasing

maturity and growing strategic nature of the partnership" (EU-China 2003). A 'strategic partnership' had arisen for the twenty-first century (Scott 2007).

Conclusions

EU-China relations evolved from the early 1960s into substantive links by 2003, in which economic ties and Grand Strategy were discernible, evidently and explicitly in China's case and in a more halting implicit way from the EU.

Meanwhile at the larger global level remain 'hard' power issues of security and unipolar American pre-eminence. There are underlying geopolitical undertones for China and to a degree from the EU, namely reining in the United States and advancing their own advancements onto the global stage. In 2002 Moller judged "the gradual demise of the Soviet bloc slowly invalidated the basic strategic framework for EU-China relations. Subsequent attempts at building a new framework have thus far remained unconvincing" (Moller 2002: p.10). However, such bi-polar Cold War anti-Soviet logic were replaced by a degree of common EU-China post-Cold War strategic concerns over overweening American power in a post-Cold War hegemonic system. American unilateralism could be reigned in by multilateralism, American unipolar concentration of power reigned in by a more diffused multipolar distribution. As the 'strategic partnership' phrase settled down, the Jamestown Foundation (2004) noted "the relationship between China and the EU is being driven inexorably by geopolitical forces even more than economic ones. Ever since the disintegration of the Soviet Union left the US as the world's only superpower, China has been casting around for partners to check the excesses of American power...the Chinese, like the Europeans, want to bring about a multipolar world—with China and Europe as two of the poles" (Ching 2004: p.5). This has in retrospect been an underlying subtext and has reinserted a 'basic strategic framework'.

Such hopes are all to do with relative rise, and also relative decline, to evoke Paul Kennedy's magisterial *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* (1989), where Soviet 'contradictions' and collapse was already foreshadowed, as was Japan's 'dilemma' of restricted base size and America's potential 'imperial overstretch'. Conversely, the two actors identified as on the rise were the EU and China. For the former, "in its *potential*, the EEC clearly has the size, the wealth and the productive capacity of a Great Power" (Kennedy 1989: p.472); but thereby dependent on how far the integration process carries on, in 'an ever-deepening Union' as the Treaty of Rome first famously laid down. For the latter, China's "economic expansion..., *if it can be kept up*, promises to transform the country within a few decades," for which the Chinese leadership was "evolving a grand strategy" to enable Great Power rise "altogether more coherent and forward-looking than that which prevails in Moscow, Washington or Tokyo" (Kennedy 1989: p.447), and where its realisation "is only a matter of time" (Kennedy 1989: p.458). 17 years on, one could well consider 'that time' as all the closer (Swaine and Tellis 2000; Goldstein 2003) With a shrunken post-Soviet Russia still in some decline, and a Japan constrained by limits of size, population and resources, the two 'continental' powers of the EU and China beckoned as leading poles for the twenty-first century alongside the United States. That had become their common Grand Strategy. Time will now tell on how far their proclaimed

'strategic partnership' will indeed strengthen, deepen, and bring this about. History has brought it this far; international relations will shape it in the future.

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