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China and ASEM: Objectives, Perceptions, Roles and Expectations

Dr. Jin Ling¹

¹ Dr. Jin Ling, Senior Research Fellow, got her Ph.D. from CASS in 2007 in European Politics and joined China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) afterward. She now is the deputy director of the department of European Studies and the BRI research center in CIIS. Her major expertise is the EU integration and China EU relations. Recent years she published a lot on European issues and China-EU relations. From 2008-2010, she was the chair of a research project on China-EU-Africa relations, financed by the National Social Science Fund. Since the launch of Belt and Road Initiative, she has also done some researches on BRI. Her publication of the “comparative study between BRI and Marshall Plan has drawn wide interests among scholars.”

Introduction

China, as the biggest member of ASEM, has played an important role in promoting Asia and Europe cooperation. Its objectives towards ASEM are in line with its foreign policy peace and development goals. In the more than over 20 years of ASEM process, China has served the role of an active contributor, leading initiator and strong promoter of practical cooperation. Generally, Chinese elite and public hold a rather positive perception of ASEM while thinking it has its own deficiencies which need to be overcome to make it more efficient, healthy and sustainable. As regards to the future of ASEM, China would like to see ASEM could be a platform for Asia and Europe to join hands in defending multilateralism, deepening pragmatic cooperation and more institutionalized, thus playing a role of stability anchor in the uncertain world.

Chinese Objectives Towards ASEM

Generally speaking, Chinese objectives towards ASEM are in line with what have been stated in the “Presidential Statement” adopted at the first ASEM Summit in 1996 that is to maintain and promote peace and stability, create favorable conditions for economic and social development, and jointly conceive the future.² Chinese government has never clearly stated its objectives as regards to ASEM and its specific targets vary according to different international, domestic situations and policy priorities at different times. However, according to Chinese leaders’ speeches, different policy proposals and initiatives, the objectives could be summarized into three aspects: to

build new type of partnerships in international relations, leading to an equal and fair international order in peaceful and cooperative way; to promote ASEM as a platform for pragmatic cooperation for common development; to make ASEM a bridge for dialogue and communication, enhancing mutual understanding.

To be the Model of New Partnership, Promoting Equal and Fair International Order

To promote a more equal and fairer international order has always been China’s foreign policy goal. From Chinese perspective, the new order has some basic elements such as equal and mutual respect, consensus building, and non-intervention and win-win cooperation. From the very early beginning, China has helped to set above elements as the basis for ASEM with the hope the principles could set an example for the new type of cooperation partnership between different countries with different levels of development, histories and political systems, and finally contributing to a fairer new international order. By now, the international context has transformed a lot, but Chinese government still strongly advocate the new type of partnership based on the principles above, which could be easily traced from Chinese foreign policy positions.

Seeking the convergence of common interests to make ASEM become a model for inter-continental equality and cooperation, and an important force in promoting the establishment of a fairer and more equal new international order has been a long-term strategic goal from Chinese side. At the first summit meeting, Chinese the then Prime Minister directly expressed Chinese hopes by saying : “Strengthening direct contacts between politicians on both continents of Asia and Europe

2 ASEM, “Presidential Statement of the First Asia-Europe Meeting”, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqz_681964/lhg_682206/zywj_682242/t1270524.shtml

will help promote the establishment of a new international political and economic order that is peaceful, stable, just and reasonable.”³ Since then, it has been repeatedly stressed by Chinese government during different levels as regards to ASEM meeting.⁴ Recent years, with the multilateral international order being challenged, China put hopes on ASEM to play a role in defending it. Under the global context full of uncertainties, Chinese government strongly believes it is high time Asia and Europe play the role of stability anchor. During the summit meeting held last year, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang openly stated: “In the common challenges facing the international community, we should strive to seek multilateral solutions and abide by the international agreements that have been reached. As advocates and beneficiaries of multilateralism, Asian and European countries should also become defenders and leaders of multilateralism.”⁵

To be a Platform for Common Development

As a developing country, seeking common development is another important foreign policy goal of China. Since 1978’s reform and opening up policy, Chinese focus has been shifted to the economic development which has been written in all important government policy papers. It has been a commonsense in

China that “development is the key to China’s solutions to all problems”.⁶ With the advent of ASEM, Chinese attach important importance to it in promoting Chinese own development to serve its core task with the hope to further explore Asia market and strengthen economic cooperation with European countries. Besides that, China emphasize the development dimension of ASEM is also highly related to its own concept of security. China holds the mindset its own development is highly depend on a stable and secure neighborhood which could only be realized with win-win cooperation towards common development.

The above goal of China towards ASEM is reflected from Chinese ASEM positions and different initiatives. In setting the ASEM principle, mutual benefit and common development have been listed and clearly stated the ASEM should focus on the economic cooperation. Then after that, China plays a very active role to put forward proposals with the common development purpose. Recent years, with its own Belt and Road initiative, Chinese government strongly support the pragmatic cooperation through connectivity.

To be a Bridge for Mutual Understanding

As the biggest country with different political system in ASEM, China fully understands the strategic mistrust and suspicion it faces, which explains China is hesitant to play leading role in ASEM. In order to dissimilate misunderstanding, China advocates the importance of ASEM as a bridge to serve mutual exchange and dialogue, which could not only contribute to the new type of partnerships between

3 “Premier Li Peng’s speech at the first Asia-Europe Meeting”, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zjyh_682240/t1281126.shtml

4 Ma Chaoxu, “Asia-Europe summit will consolidate Asia-Europe economic partnership”, <http://yuqing.people.com.cn/n/2012/1107/c349680-19521569.html>, Wang Yi, “Strengthening new partnerships to create a better future for Asia and Europe”

5 Li Keqiang, “Li Keqiang’s speech at the 12th Asia-Europe Meeting” http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2018-10/20/content_5332925.htm

6 “17th CPC Plenary Session report”, 1997 http://language.chinadaily.com.cn/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-10/16/content_32684830.htm

Asian and European countries but also help the trust building between China and its neighbors. And if look at Chinese proposals at ASEM meeting, strengthening political dialogue and enhancing mutual trust has been persistently on the agenda.

Through analyzing Chinese prime ministers' speeches during different ASEM summit meeting, it could be found China keep stating Chinese peace and development policy including sharing Chinese development experiences with partner countries and classifying domestic reform measures and foreign policy positions. For example, as a response to the partners concerns to Chinese future steps towards further opening up and reform, Premier Li Keqiang gave a very detailed response as regards to China's macroeconomic policy and specific measures for opening up etc.

ASEM's role in promoting mutual understanding was concluded as: "The Meeting has become an important stage for China to carry out summit diplomacy and bilateral or multi-lateral dialogue and cooperation with many countries. It will not only help strengthen China's political, economic, scientific, cultural and cultural fields with the EU and East Asian countries. Dialogue and communication has eliminated misunderstandings and prejudice against China, creating a good external environment for China's peace development".⁷

Chinese Perception of ASEM

Generally speaking, ASEM does not enjoy high public attention in China. There are far fewer researches and media coverage of ASEM compared with other cooperation platforms. How-

ever from the existed reports, analysis and official documents, it could be easily found that Chinese perception of ASEM is highly positive. The cooperation is considered as a natural strategic choice between Europe and Asia as a result of globalization and the trend of global multi-polarity, which has contributed a lot to the Asia-Europe cooperation with huge potential for further cooperation. Of course, there are also some debates focus on its inherent deficiencies such as the ineffectiveness, imbalanced power structure and development among its three pillars.

ASEM is a Natural Result of Globalization and Multi-polarization

ASEM, launched in 1996, is widely considered as a natural result of the globalization and the trend of multi-polarization, which is repeatedly expressed by official speeches and Chinese academicians. It covers the following three important points:

Firstly, The ASEM process was initiated and developed against the background of economic globalization and political multi-polarization⁸ and it is a cooperation mechanism reflecting the changing international context of globalization and multi-polarization and conforms with the trend of globalization, multi-polarization and regional integration.⁹ "As we move into the 21st century, international relations are undergoing profound changes with two prominent features of globalization and multi-polarization. Asia and Europe are important actors in the global trends, thus the ASEM meeting reflects and adapts to these

⁷ Pan Guang, "ASEM process and China" in "Qiu Shi", Vol 21, 2008.

⁸ ASEM Team, "ASEM survey and analysis of cognitive status" in "Foreign Affairs Review", Vol 85, Dec,2005

⁹ Li Keqiang, "Li Keqiang's speech at the 12th Asia-Europe Meeting" http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2018-10/20/content_5332925.htm

historic changes.¹⁰ “This meeting is a historic initiative. It shows that the multi-polarization trend is further developing.” As put in the first ASEM summit meeting by the time Chinese prime minister.

Secondly, Asia and Europe increasing inter-dependence and mutual complementarities provides a sound basis and big potential for mutual cooperation. “There are many political consensuses in the two regions. The economic advantages are complementary and each has its own cultural characteristics. It has laid a solid foundation for a broader and substantive dialogue and cooperation.”¹¹ Asian and European countries each have their own advantages. Economically, Europe is one of the regions with developed economy, advanced technology and abundant capital in the world. The Asian economy is booming, the market is vast and full of vitality. That makes Asia-Europe cooperation full of potential. The perception of “being full of potential” has been consistently stressed by Chinese side. At the first summit meeting, Lipeng stated that: “The cooperation between Asia and Europe will not only bring new evangelism to the people of the two continents, but also meet any challenges.”¹² At the 11th ASEM summit meeting, now Chinese Prime Minister Li keqiang also stated the great potential for Asia and Europe

cooperation.¹³

Thirdly, ASEM is an important platform to deal with the common global challenges. At the beginning of ASEM, Chinese proposed the cooperation between Asia and Europe could help promote the coming out of a more fair and justice global system to deal with the global challenges.¹⁴ With increasing interdependence and the common challenges, dealing with the common challenges has been considered as a strategic task both for Asia and Europe. “The threats and challenges faced by Asia and Europe highlight the necessity and urgency of deepening cooperation.”¹⁵ Then in 2010, dealing with common challenges has been listed as one of the initiatives from Chinese prime minister’s speech.¹⁶ So it can be seen from official cognition that China attaches importance to Asia-Europe cooperation and development of relations with Europe, not for the purpose of balancing the United States, but for coping with the challenges of globalization”.¹⁷

ASEM has made great contribution to the Asia- Europe cooperation and its strategic implication to the fairer international order is highly visible.

China inclines to see the role of ASEM from a

10 Qian Qichen, “Speech by Vice Premier Qian Qichen and Foreign Minister at the First ASEM Foreign Ministers”, Meeting https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1281155.shtml

11 Secondly, Asia and Europe increasing inter-dependence and mutual complementarities provides a sound basis and big potential for mutual cooperation. “There are many political consensuses in the two regions. The economic advantages are complementary and each has its own cultural characteristics. It has laid a solid foundation for a broader and substantive dialogue and cooperation.”

12 “Premier Li Peng’s speech at the first Asia-Europe Meeting”, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1281126.shtml

13 Li Keqiang, “Li Keqiang’s speech at the 11th ASEM Summit”, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1382115.shtml

14 “Premier Li Peng’s speech at the first Asia-Europe Meeting”, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1281126.shtml

15 Wen Jiabao, “Premier Wen Jiabao’s speech at the 6th ASEM Summit”, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1281131.shtml

16 Wen Jiabao, “Wen Jiabao’s speech at the opening ceremony of the 8th ASEM Summit”, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t758665.shtml

17 ASEM Team, “ASEM survey and analysis of cognitive status” in “Foreign Affairs Review”, Vol 85, Dec, 2005

strategic and long-term perspective. Although China clearly understands the limited results on the practical cooperation, it still repeatedly stresses the importance of the cooperation itself.

Strategically speaking, both Chinese government and scholars confirm the platform's positive role in building a new type of partnership which helps to promote the world towards multi-polarization within a more balanced and fairer international system. "The continuous development of ASEM and its promotion of Asia-Europe cooperation have had a profound impact in promoting multi-polarization in the world. And more important is the cooperation shows the possibility and great potential of civilized dialogue and cooperation between different development models and diverse cultural values."¹⁸ The positive reflection of ASEM could also be seen from the leaders' speeches. In 1998, the then prime minister Zhu Rongji in his speech made at the ASEM summit meeting expressed ASEM's new type of partnership helped the regional peace and development¹⁹ and the view is also echoed by different Chinese leaders.²⁰

Political speaking, ASEM has been perceived as an important platform to strengthen the political dialogue and mutual trust. In the review done by the ASEM research team led by one of the most influential think tank, the political achievement of ASEM has been consid-

ered as the first one. It stated that: "The ASEM has played an active role in increasing trust and dispelling doubts and promoting political dialogue since it builds a platform and communication channels for strengthening consultation and cooperation between Asia and Europe in international affairs, where heads of successive ASEM meetings and the foreign ministers' meeting could have dialogues on major international and regional issues of common concern, covering international issues."²¹ The importance of ASEM in building trust between Asia and Europe is more highly perceived today when the world is facing more uncertainties in which Asia and Europe are expected to serve the role of stability anchor.

On specific cooperation level, even China holds higher expectation towards more results-oriented practical cooperation, Chinese government still think ASEM has contributed to the all-areas practical cooperation." In the tenth year of ASEM summit meeting, Wen Jiabao, the then minister stated: "Over the past 10 years, Asia and Europe have carried out extensive and diverse dialogues and cooperation on the basis of mutual respect, equal dialogue, gradual progress and consensus. Political dialogue has deepened, economic ties have become increasingly close, cooperation in the social field has expanded rapidly, and people to people exchanges are more frequent".²² And in 2014, Chinese Prime minister Li Keqiang also expressed very positive views of ASEM cooperation by saying: "Since the establishment of the Asia-Europe Meeting in the past 18 years, the pragmatic cooperation has

18 Pan Guang, "ASEM process and China", in "Qiu Shi", Vol 21, 2008.

19 Zhu Rongji, "Premier Zhu Rongji's speech at the Second Asia-Europe Meeting", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zjyh_682240/t1281127.shtml

20 Wen Jiabao, "Wen Jiabao's speech at the opening ceremony of the 5th ASEM Summit", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zjyh_682240/t1281130.shtml, Hu Jintao, "Speech by President Hu Jintao at the 7th ASEM Summit",

21 ASEM Team, "ASEM survey and analysis of cognitive status" in "Foreign Affairs Review", Vol 85, Dec, 2005

22 Wen Jiabao, "Wen Jiabao's speech at the opening ceremony of the 6th ASEM Summit", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zjyh_682240/t1281131.shtml

flourished, social and cultural exchanges have become increasingly widespread."²³

ASEM has its Inherent Deficiencies but with Huge Potential for Further Cooperation

Contrary to the above positive perception of ASEM, there are also a lot of debates and analysis in China, especially within the academic circles focus on its inherent deficiencies which to a large extent diminishes its role as an inter-regional cooperation mechanism with a nickname of "talk shop" without down to earth projects felt by public.

Imbalanced power structure damages the equality of the partnership. The imbalanced power structure of ASEM is not there are more European countries than Asian ones, but more important is European countries are more integrated and institutionalized and more developed than Asia. What makes it even imbalanced is the cooperation structure makes the EU has more leverage on its Asian partners. "The multiple, multi-level conference mechanism of the ASEM and the multi-layer governance within the EU are similar in terms of institutional structure. It divides different jurisdictions by function and also encourages broad participation within both government and non-government sectors. A similar institutional structure can provide the EU and its member states with more channels of influence, giving it a comparative advantage over Asian members."²⁴

There are imbalanced developments among its different pillars. Because of different expectations between European and Asian countries, the three pillars of ASEM of political, economic a cultural cooperation has progressed at different paces. EU primarily see ASEM as an informal dialogue platform either than a pragmatic cooperation one, which makes the economic pillar to a large extent invisible. A typical example is the continuity of the summit meeting without any interruption while the economic and financial ministerial meeting had ever been interrupted for more than 10 years. "The little attention put by the media to ASEM is because of the cooperation added value could not be felt by the public. The economic cooperation of ASEM has long been in hibernation," said Zhang xiaokang, the Chinese high official of ASEM in 2014.

Finally, the lack of institutions weakens its efficiency. On one side, during the past 23 years, more and more countries have joined the ASEM, which implies more diversified and more difficult to reach consensus. On the hand, At present, the ASEM has not yet established a secretariat, which makes the platform face capacity problem. "The non-institutionalization of the ASEM has led to the looseness and slow progress of Asia-Europe cooperation."²⁵ Recently, China has put more emphasis on the efficiency of the cooperation. At the 11th ASEM summit meeting, Chinese premier has advocated for more pragmatic mechanisms and enhance the effectiveness of Asia-Europe cooperation.

Chinese Comprehensive Roles under the ASEM framework

23 Li Keqiang, "Li Keqiang's speech at the first plenary session of the 10th ASEM Summit", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1201413.shtml

24 Zhang Jun, "Developing the European model in international relations: From the perspective of the ASEM process", in "European Studies", Vol 1, 2005, P4-10

25 ASEM Team, "ASEM survey and analysis of cognitive status" in "Foreign Affairs Review", Vol 85, Dec,2005

As the engine of Asia-Europe development and the promoter of Asia-Europe cooperation, China has always participated in the Asia-Europe process in the spirit of active participation, seeking common ground while reserving differences, expanding consensus, and strengthening cooperation since the establishment of the Asia-Europe Meeting. China's role in the cooperation process could be summarized as an active contributor, leading initiator and strong promoter of practical cooperation.

Advocate of the Concept of Equal, Fair and Inclusive Cooperation

The Chinese government and relevant departments have issued many important and constructive views on the objectives, significance, and principles, which made important contributions to the achievement of concept consensus among ASEM members in all aspects.

ASEM involves varieties of countries from Asia and Europe with different culture, histories and political systems. Adhering to the principle of equality, fairness, inclusiveness and non-intervention is the precondition for coordination and cooperation. In 1996, At the first leaders' meeting, the then Chinese Prime minister put forward the five basic principles for ASEM with equality, mutual trust, mutual learning and mutual benefit at its core, which could be seen finally in the Presidency statement of the first summit meeting. China has advocated the principle during the whole ASEM process.

After the 9.11 in 2001, Chinese government sees the urgency to promote cultural and civilization dialogue. In the 4th ASEAM summit meeting, Chinese prime minister for the first time advocated for the "civilization dialogue"

and promised China would host the ASEM Conference on Civilization and Culture in due course. After that, China, together with France jointly drafted The "ASEM Declaration on Culture and Civilization Dialogue" adopted at the Fifth Asia-Europe Meeting, which embodied China's views and propositions on respecting the diversity of the world and encouraging equal dialogue among different civilizations. Since then, China keeps promoting inclusive dialogue among different cultures under ASEM framework.

Active Participant and Initiator within ASEM

China is an advocate and builder of Asia-Europe dialogue and cooperation. Chinese leaders have participated in all the summits of the "Asia-Europe Meeting". At all the previous Asia-Europe Meetings, China has proposed valuable and urgent issues to be resolved in order to expand and strengthen Asia-Europe cooperation.

Since the first Asia-Europe Meeting, China has initiated a series of important activities within the framework. In the past 22 years, Chinese leaders have proposed 31 cooperation initiatives at the Asia-Europe Meeting and become the country that advocates the most follow-up actions of the ASEM. Chinese initiatives cover wide ranges of areas, not only including the traditional areas of trade and investment, science and technology, environment and sustainable development but also some new areas such as connectivity, customs, justice, and anti-terrorism, which helps to further expand the space for Asia-Europe cooperation. Besides that, China actively provides human resources and financial support for many activities and projects and is one of the biggest contributors to ASEM.

"In the past 22 years, Chinese leaders have proposed 31 cooperation initiatives at the Asia-Europe Meeting and become the country that advocates the most follow-up actions of the ASEM."

Strong Promoter for Practical Cooperation

Different from European partners, China has always attached great importance on practical cooperation within ASEM. At the first summit meeting, Chinese government emphasis the focus should be on economic cooperation with the statement: "At present, the role of economic factors in international relations is rising. To explore Asia-Europe cooperation, economic cooperation should be placed at the forefront as an important basis for the Asia-Europe partnership. I hope that this meeting will have a broad consensus on economic cooperation."²⁶ Also at the meeting, China put forward very pragmatic proposals to make preparation for economic cooperation such as, to establish expert groups to make analysis of Asia and Europe investment situation and put forward action plans. After that, broadening and strengthening economic cooperation between Asia and Europe has always been on Chinese agenda for Asia and Europe cooperation.

Taking the 7th ASEM Summit held in 2008 as an example, under the leadership of the host country China, the meeting focused on how to deal with the financial crisis that swept the world at that time, reflecting the mechanism transition to the solution of practical problems and move towards a pragmatic development

direction. And it is also China who proposed the restart of the meeting of the Asian-European Ministers of Economy after more than 10 years of suspension.

After the international financial crisis, under the context of rising of anti-globalization, China put more energy on the pragmatic cooperation. In 2013, during the 11th ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting held in India, Chinese foreign minister put the down to earth pragmatic cooperation as one of his three proposals for ASEM, which he thinks could make ASEM win the hearts of the people.²⁷ And at 2016 summit meeting, Premier Li Keqiang made the point even clearer by saying: "We believe that although the ASEM is an informal dialogue mechanism, it is necessary to lead cooperation to a more pragmatic direction, especially to strengthen economic and trade cooperation."²⁸ With Chinese promotion, the connectivity working group finally set up and by now it has been a permanent issue of the ASEM, which helps to promote more pragmatic mechanisms, and enhanced the effectiveness of Asia-Europe cooperation.

Concluding Remarks: Chinese Expectation Towards Future ASEM

Chinese government holds a rather positive perception of ASEM, but it does not think ASEM has met its expectations and it still thinks the potential of ASEM needs further exploration, especially in dealing with the com-

26 "Premier Li Peng's speech at the first Asia-Europe Meeting", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1281126.shtml

27 Wang Yi, "Strengthening new partnerships to create a better future for Asia and Europe" https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1098955.shtml,

28 Li Keqiang, "Li Keqiang's speech at the first plenary session of the 10th ASEM Summit", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1201413.shtml

mon challenges today the uncertain world is facing. In order to make the ASEM as an effective, healthy and sustainable platform to fulfill the tasks and goals, China has put forward its expectations as regards to the future of ASEM.

To overcome challenges, strengthen cooperation, and decisively defend multilateralism. The world today is facing unprecedented challenges from different types of protectionism and unilateralism. China clearly understands the complicated situation within ASEM framework, where US is always an unavoidable factor. Most Asian countries put their security interests in the US basket while integrating with Chinese economies, let alone the transatlantic pillar of European countries' foreign policy. But in the face of Trump administration's unilateralism, China thinks Europe and Asia should join hands to send out strong messages to the world instead of taking opportunistic positions. "At this time, Asia and Europe strengthening cooperation is a very important stabilizer. If Asia and Europe gave up cooperation and kept silent, the situation would become more complicated. Strengthening regional cooperation between Asia and Europe is actually a hedge and balance between unilateralism and isolationism."²⁹ The expectation towards ASEM explains why recent years Chinese openly and strongly called for Asia and Europe cooperation defending multilateralism

To promote ASEM transform from a "talk shop" to a delivery platform. As described above, China perceives ASEM's added value has not been widely felt by the public. In order to increase its vitality and influence, the focus should be put on the rebalancing of its three

pillars through more pragmatic cooperation to unleash its cooperation potential. Since 2014, China has successfully made the connectivity accepted as a common focus for EU and Asia. Nowadays, China put high expectations for connectivity initiative and its working group to inject momentum for ASEM's transition by jointly seeking synergies between different Asia and European partners. "The ASEM has been over 20 years and needs new impetus to achieve sustainable development. Our aim is to promote a better transformation of the ASEM that explains why we put forward the connectivity initiative."³⁰ To deal with the institutional deficiency of ASEM. There exist wide debates about ASEM's inefficiency. Looking at the official position, as early as 2009, China has openly called for to further strengthen the institutionalization of the Asia-Europe Meeting and provide stronger support and guarantee for Asia-Europe cooperation³¹ the Chair supporting group, which plays the seemingly role of secretariat demonstrates Chinese expectation towards ASEM's institutional building. "Institutional building will help consolidate the ASEM platform and ensure that it produces more practical outcomes...we hope to take this as an opportunity to strengthen internal coordination and promote the mechanisms for more practical cooperation, in order to expand the influence of ASEM and enhance the efficiency of ASEM cooperation."³²

29 Quotes from the interview of Feng Zhong Ping, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2018-10/16/content_5331175.htm

30 Quotes from the interview of Xie Bohua, <http://www.chinatradenews.com.cn/content/201706/20/c2968.html>, 20th, June, 201

31 Yang Jiechi, "Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi's Speech at the Ninth ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1281171.shtml2009.

32 Li Keqiang, "Li Keqiang's speech at the first plenary session of the 10th ASEM Summit", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1201413.shtml