

Words of Welcome- Konrad Adenauer Foundation



Nine years have passed since the launch of an EU-China strategic partnership in 2003. In February 2012, the 14th EU-China Summit took place in Beijing, and in three years more than 1.8 billion “concerned citizens” will see the 40th anniversary of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between European countries and China.

The rise of China has been a major focus of worldwide attention for many years and, like other global phenomena, has produced very different reactions and assessments in China and in the West. The often cited success of the People's Republic in economic arenas accompanied by an assumed decline of Western “supremacy” at the same time, has spawned many theories based on the development of China's interaction with other regions, especially the US and Europe.

Claims and assertions about exceptional economic growth in the PRC are not immune to many of the problematic side effects of political modernization and transformation; they have the potential to create serious misunderstandings between China and European nations. Yet, despite these problems there still remains much room for cooperation and mutual understanding; this has opened up for exploration by scholars and practitioners a territory formerly believed to be a barren field.

But all too often we depend on clichés, bias and a traditional world-order we used to take for granted. There is this story told of the man who was found looking under the street lamp for a coin he had dropped. When asked where he had dropped it,

he said “Over there”, pointing to the darkness. “Why are you not looking there?” “Because the light is here”, he answered. Theoretical patterns and assumptions are like the limited light we throw on data and so called facts in international relations. Mere data are but raw material for understanding; they have to be related and interpreted, otherwise remain the dark area in our story. I believe that especially in Europe/China relations we could often be compared to the man who looked only where the light was: we tend to use ready made theories derived elsewhere instead of building on own experiences, eye-witnessed developments and a productive cross-fertilization of ideas.

The impetus for this Workshop-conference on China and Europe in the 21st century stems from our desire to provide an intercultural forum for an in-depth and people-to-people exchange of Chinese and Western scholars, diplomats and students to learn and discuss their views and perspectives on current and future China/Europe political topics.

I am confident that this meeting will provide an opportunity for its participants to become better informed on the genuine problems of inter-regional relations and cooperation that China/Europe dynamics are presently facing. On behalf of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, I therefore sincerely thank all contributors of this event for their efforts in helping to realize these ambitious goals.

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