



Launching the UACES Collaborative Research Network on EU-China Relations: Input from China

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Report

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In order to live up to the idea the EU-China Collaborative Research Network (CRN), launch events were planned to be held in both Europe and China. The China launch event was held at Fudan University in the city of Shanghai on August 20, 2012. The core idea of the China launch was to get 'input from China' so as to make the CRN a success in the sense that Chinese scholars and European scholars working in China come up with and discuss their suggestions.

Four speakers composed the expert panel: Professors Pan Zhongqi and Chen Zhimin from the School of International Relations and Public Affairs (SIRPA) at Fudan University; They also very kindly offered to host the event in the premises of SIRPA. Furthermore, Professor David Gosset of the China Europe International Business School (CEIBS) was part of the expert panel. Finally, Raffaello Pantucci, who is currently a Visiting Scholar at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and a think tank researcher from the European Council on Foreign Relations.

The speakers were asked to combine substantive with practical suggestions. Notably three areas were addressed: first, what should the EU-China CRN substantively focus on in terms of research topics? Secondly, what are the practical challenges when implementing EU-China research such as in terms of interdisciplinarity, inter-cultural aspects or financial constraints? And thirdly, how can a bridge be built between academia and daily political practice?

As a start, an introduction to the EU-China CRN was given by Frauke Austermann from Free University Berlin and Renmin University of China who is one of the CRN coordinators. The CRN's background, its goals, current state and achievements so far were addressed. Austermann emphasized the importance of the EU-China study field, and its growing social, but moreover, scientific relevance. She stated the rationale and the purpose of the Network is to bring together scholars that work in the field of EU-China relations, to contribute in the advancement of EU-China relations as a relevant research area. The CRN basic trait is inclusiveness – not only it brings together individuals from both China and Europe (and beyond), but moreover, researchers from different

academic fields and disciplines. It also aims to link academia with policy practice. The network has already a fully functional mailing list and a website, of which an important part is the members' database, a tool aiming at facilitation of the communication between researchers. In the future, the CRN is planning on organizing workshops and conferences, such as during the Annual UACES conference in Passau which features four panels on EU-China relations, all of which are organized by the CRN. Moreover, the CRN shall stimulate online debates, and produce traditional publications.

Thereafter, the four speakers gave their input. Professor Pan Zhongqi of Fudan University provided an overview of the current work on EU-China relations done in Fudan University, Shanghai, one of the most important Chinese institutions when it comes to European Studies and study of EU-China relations. Pan discussed some of the practical, as well as research challenges. He highlighted work on the conceptual gaps between China and Europe, for instance, the questions of state sovereignty, democracy, human rights, multi-polarity, or global governance. He also discussed the importance of the relations between China and individual European countries, in the first place the member-states of the EU. He noted the importance of the China-EU-US triangular relations, the impact of crises and risk on EU-China relations, as well as EU-China cooperation in third countries in Africa and Asia. IN terms of practical challenges, Pan highlighted that Chinese scholars prefer focusing on general, "big" IR issues whilst European scholars tend to do more specific work, often related to comparative politics and the daily workings of Brussels.

Professor David Gosset spoke of the challenges to gather people together, the primary goal of the CRN. In terms of the action plan of the Network, he stated the importance of its relationship with the media, and the need for having a media strategy. He also suggested reaching out beyond the large cities (Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong), and establishing communication with institutions with second and third tier cities in China such as Qingdao or Chengdu; the same was said regarding Europe – not only researchers need to look beyond the big cities, they also need to look beyond EU27, but also include the countries from former Yugoslavia and Turkey in the perspective. Gosset also discussed the China-EU-Africa triangle and the examples and possibilities for creating constructive synergies. Finally, he raised the issue of the fading out of the mutual trust between China and Europe, and the move past the so-called "honeymoon" phase. In this sense, Gosset finds the collaborative focus of the Network promising; he also related the issue of (mis)trust with the role of media and the need for researchers to start more actively participating in creating the public discourse.

Raffaello Pantucci emphasized the role of think-tanks and the need to seek policy-oriented answers to questions. The strategic mistrust between EU and China, according to Pantucci, is rooted in what seems as the two sides talking "past each other" and missing out on possibilities for working together. Most important for collaboration, Pantucci argued, is to focus on "small practical things", especially in areas where the two sides have done a lot of things together or individually. He noted the region of Afghanistan and Central Asia, where EU and China have immediate interest, and they have both done a lot of projects. But these projects were accomplished in parallel, and the goal should be bringing their agendas together. He also mentioned that similar cases of "parallelism" are met in other areas as well – the goal should be a shift towards complementarity – the EU has the experience, China has the infrastructure, and this could provide grounds for cooperation.

Regarding the functioning of the CRN, Pantucci's advice was seeking funding from business and even act as a consultancy; methodology-wise he suggested battling "repetition" - the CRN should contribute to better coordination between researchers and more effective managing of resources.

He also advised that the inter-disciplinarity should be taken carefully in order to avoid cases of people coming from different disciplines talking past each other and operating in disparate frameworks. Pantucci also warned that when bringing together young and established researchers, the CRN has to pay attention to maintaining equality and help raising the voice of the juniors (often “young” implies “not to be listened to” - and this needs to be avoided).

Professor Chen Zhimin was the last speaker at the panel, and he discussed the great importance of projects such as the CRN. He introduced the ongoing research on China-EU relations projects at Fudan University, and discussed several research questions that deserve greater attention in the future – such as the role of the EEAS in China-EU relations; the relationships between China and individual EU Member-States; and the outside views of EU as a global actor.

After a coffee break which gave the participants time to socialize and talk more informally, the second part of the launch event was reserved for Q&A and discussion with the audience. Some of the ideas that were discussed were the importance of not only traditional media strategy, but also a new media strategy for the CRN and reaching out to wider audience via online tools; “grassroots” organization of smaller research workshops for graduate students wherever there is potential for such activities; the need for advancing methodologies and collaborating when it comes to large research undertakings such as surveys; the importance of contact, cooperation and coordination with other networks (such as ECRAN); etc. Finally, the session ended with a rough outline for next events on long term, and an announcement for a workshop to be held at Renmin University of China. The discussion touched upon other topics as well, the most prolific one being the role of media, the media debates and the impact of media discourse on EU-China relations.

The audience consisted of over 30 participants. It was a mix of established scholars from both China and Europe as well as PhD candidates and graduate students of EU-China relations. A few practitioners were also present. Some Shanghai-based diplomats uttered their interest in the CRN via email but were unable to attend due to the summer break.