

EUROPE-CHINA READER

Europe – China dialogue in a historical perspective

(European opinions – Chinese answers on state and international organization through European eyes)

Éva Bóka

Abstract: This textbook investigates and compares two civilizations, the Chinese and the European, through European eyes in a historical perspective. Both civilizations were based on similar moral and social organizational principles. However, the different geography, differences in ways of thinking, and local specificities led to very different realizations of these principles. The Chinese civilization was the first to develop, and it had its influence on the development of its European counterpart. Later, primarily in the 19th and 20th centuries, it was the European trend of modernization that influenced and challenged Chinese development. This documentary essay deals with the interpretations of some important European political thinkers of the values and principles of the Chinese civilization, as well as the thoughts of their Chinese contemporaries. The goal is to contribute to the dialogue between the two civilizations. It also investigates the answers given by some important Chinese thinkers to the challenge of European modernization in the area of state and international organization in the 19th and the 20th centuries.

Synopsis:

The Europe-China Reader is a text-book. It deals with the history of the encounter and of the cooperation between the Chinese and European civilization in the field of state and international organization ideas. It also touches upon legal and political practices through European eyes. Its goal is to serve as an introductory study material to the problems of the Europe-China dialogue in a historical perspective. It is important to investigate this subject: indeed, the general knowledge on China is relatively poor in the European Union in spite of the fact that a new world system is in the making where both China and the European Union are bound to play an important role.

Both the European and the Chinese civilizations contributed to the state and international organization of humanity. But China and Europe represent different models of social organization. As a consequence, their contacts and mutual influences were useful and educative for both. Having said that, the same contacts included a lot of painful elements, primarily in the period of European colonization. In some ways, the China-Europe relationship can also be regarded as a contact as well as a “clash” of civilizations.

The main chapters of the book present the differences and similarities between the European and Chinese civilizations based on the narrations of European travellers, missionaries, political thinkers (before and after the period of colonization and imperialism). The textbook also investigates the challenge created by the European modernization and the answers given thereof by important Chinese political thinkers. Finally it drafts the history of the EU–China partnership (See table of contents).

The book presents three main periods of the European view on China:

1. 16-18th century; the Europeans highly appreciate the Chinese civilization

2. from the 19th century until the reforms of Deng Xiaoping; Europeans regard China as a stagnating society, unable to modernise itself. The period of Mao Tse-tung's personal cult and the Cultural Revolution is strongly criticized and rejected by Europe

3. Starting with the reforms of Deng Xiaoping up to today; the EU-China partnership is in development, based on a dialogue between the two civilizations. EU regards China as a rising power and aims to be present in the Chinese market

In the first period Europe was less developed than China. Chinese civilization was highly appreciated by European thinkers. The study of Confucius contributed to the European Enlightenment.

In the second period, due to Western imperialism and the more sophisticated weapons of the colonizers, Europe was economically strengthened and gradually modernised itself. Science and technique developed; Britain became the centre of the world economy; modernity appeared as an universal phenomenon. But European colonial imperialism also produced two world wars and nearly destroyed European civilization. After the Second World War the European civilization was able to renew its state and international organization principles thanks to the successes of the supranational – intergovernmental integration process.

In the third period the Communist block gradually collapsed, the European Community established itself as a peaceful economic and trade block and the enlargement towards Central Europe started. In parallel, China gradually opened up and started to participate in the world economy and trade. Chinese reforms resulted in a booming economy and trade, and the gradual establishment of EU-China partnership. China is in search of a “Confucian capitalist model” as an alternative social organization system.

The book investigates these three periods on basis of a large documentary material, by comparing the different sources. Quotations from the most important books and documents on the subject help students to understand the similarities and problems between the two civilizations, and better appreciate the importance of the Europe-China dialogue.

The introductory first chapter presents some of the similarities and important differences in Chinese and European thinking. It compares the ideas of Confucius on state and community organization with the ideas of Plato and Aristotle. It concludes that the roots of the ancient Chinese civilization of philosophers has a lot of similarities with the European.

The second chapter deals with the first phase of the contacts between the two civilizations. In this period Europeans highly appreciated Chinese rationalism and natural philosophy. Confucianism was an important subject of European missionaries as a collection of basic moral rules directing the behaviour of persons. While studying Confucius Europeans discovered natural philosophy, and launched the movement of Enlightenment (Ricci, Leibniz, Wolff, Voltaire, Montesquieu).

The third chapter investigates the period of European colonization and modernizing expansion when the European view on Chinese culture radically changed into a negative direction. During the 19th and 20th centuries European civilization produced the basic principles of the democratic civil state, international law and international human rights: representative parliamentary system, suffrage, pluralism, equal political and civil rights, popular sovereignty, self-determination, universal human rights, universal organization and international law, and European supranationalism. On the other hand European civilization developed nationalism and racism during the “age of sovereign nation states”, as well as colonial imperialism. It spread these phenomena all over the world. Based on the successes of European expansion and the perceived European values European thinkers started to overestimate their own culture. Marx, Hegel, Legge, and Weber, for example, developed ideas on European superiority and Chinese stagnation, eternal standstill, and retard. They viewed Chinese civilization as being unable to develop without the adoption of Western ideas and methods.

That chapter also shows how European modernity, economic, trade and market expansion, and the European imperialism challenged Chinese civilization. Chinese society was a rationally organized, peaceful agricultural society concentrating on livelihood when it met the Europeans. Confucian moral principles, education, self-cultivation, respect for the elders, ancestor worship, filial piety, a patriarchy, and the examination system all played an important role. These principles appeared in rituals which were necessary to ensure the livelihood of the persons in an agrarian society that was not profit oriented.

The chapter also investigates the explanation of a Chinese thinker, T'ang Leang-Li, who tried to explain to European politicians—teaching European democracy in China—how to understand Chinese society of before the Opium War. His book can be regarded as an attempt to harmonize the two civilizations through dialogue.

The fourth chapter presents how some European thinkers (Russell, Dewey) tried, after the First World War, to understand and solve the problems of China that developed during Western expansionist modernization. In his lectures Dewey aimed to convince the Chinese to adopt Western democracy. Russell was more understanding regarding the problems of China. In his book on the problems of China he realized that both Europeans and Chinese have to face the necessity to search alternative ways of modernization and democracy. He emphasised that the dialogue between the two civilizations could contribute to establish peaceful relationships in the world.

The fifth chapter investigates some of the most important Chinese answers to the European market economy and profit oriented capitalism that emerged as universal world system in the period of imperialism. Chinese thinkers realized the necessity to reform if they wanted to be involved on equal terms in a world economy and safeguard what they had achieved (K'ang Yu-wei, Sun Yat-sen). They accepted Western knowledge and technology but did not sympathise with Western colonial mentality, imperialism, racism, and an uncontrolled focus on profit that served the interests of a ruling elite only. An important discussion on modernization took place among Chinese philosophers and politicians. There were those who realized the importance of modernization and the capitalist market economy but they rejected its colonizer and imperialist form. They were in thinking on an alternative capitalist solution serving the livelihood of the people. As, basically, Confucian thinkers they tried to find a way to use money and profit as rational tools to increase general living standards (K'ang Yu-wei, Sun Yat-sen). There were those who went beyond the Confucian tradition and wanted to adopt European market economy and the democratic civil nation state altogether (Liang Ch'i-cha'ao). Finally, there were also those who rejected the whole capitalist system as self-destructive, and proposed communism based on the collectivity of the property and the centralized one party system (Mao Tse-tung). This chapter presents the main ideas of K'ang Yu-wei, Sun Yat-sen and Mao Tse-tung on the Chinese reform policy.

The sixth chapter deals with the renewal of the European and the international organizational principles after the Second World War, and its influence on Chinese policy. The Chinese understandably, rejected the old colonial and imperial European model, with its share of slavery, exploitation, racism, nationalism, and which also caused two devastating wars. But the new peaceful principles of the European Community could become attractive only gradually; China was in search for his own way. After the Second World War the troubles in China continued: Mao Tse-tung established his personal cult; the Chinese had to face the extremism of the Cultural Revolution. Only after the death of Mao Tse-tung could China start a new reform period in an improved historical scene.

The new reform policy of Deng Xiaoping represented the vision of “Confucian capitalism”. This vision was influenced by the successes of Singaporean politicians. Confucian capitalism was based on the challenge to solve the livelihood of the people by using capitalist investment policy but under the control of an expert government and critically adapting Western methods. The

essence of the idea was to use money and profit for rational investments aiming at a better living standard overall. The “Confucian capitalism” model has been elaborated with the aim to serve as an alternative model to the European liberal democratic model. It does represent a challenge for the European Union; i.e., the EU-China dialogue could positively influence the organization principles of both societies.

This chapter also discusses the goals of a EU-China dialogue. It presents the main phases of the a partnership policy that is being developed gradually: how European and Chinese politicians try to find the necessary consensus between the two civilizations to be able to cooperate on bilateral level as well as on multilateral level within the frameworks of the UN and the WTO. The chapter also investigates the human rights dialogue between the two civilizations.

The book concludes that the contacts—in the framework of a partnership policy—between these two civilizations can positively influence the history of mankind. It can contribute to the establishment of democracy among states, and the reform of the international organizations (UN, WTO). However, the follow up of a much more troubled relationships has not been avoided yet either. Both the EU and China need further democratic reforms to be able to influence each other peacefully and avoid renewed conflicts. China may need to elaborate “Confucian capitalism” as a democratic alternative. The EU may need to reform the principles of the “new-type intergovernmental-supranational union of states” and overcome its “democratic deficit”.

The most important conclusion of the book is that European studies should be involved in Chinese education, and Chinese studies in European education. This textbook serves this goal.

I hope that the Europe-China Reader will serve as a useful study material for anybody who wants to understand the historical background and the problems of the EU-China dialogue and partnership policies.

Éva Bóka

Table of Contents

1. Introduction: Different Ways of Thinking, Different Philosophies of the State	4
1.1. Different Ways of Thinking	4
1.2. The Basic Principles of the European and the Chinese Philosopher on State: Plato, Aristotle, Confucius	6
2. Chinese Civilization as Seen by Europeans.....	16
2.1. Periods of European Views on China	16
2.2. Discovering China and Confucius	16
2.3. The Influence of Confucianism on the European Enlightenment, 17th-18th Centuries.....	20
2.4. Leibniz on Chinese Civilization	20
2.5. Christian Wolff on Confucius as a Reformer	23
2.6. Voltaire Versus Montesquieu.....	24
3. Changing European opinion: European Views on China During Colonization.....	27
3.1. The Principles of European Colonial Expansion in China.....	27
3.2. Marx on the Importance of China's Opening.....	28
3.3. Changing Opinions: Western Superiority - China's Eternal Standstill.....	29
3.4. Hegel on Chinese Stagnation.....	30
3.5. James Legge on Confucius as a Conservative Traditionalist	31
3.6. Weber on the Chinese Caesaro-papist State	33
3.7. Chinese Society Before the Opium War: T'ang Leang-Li.....	34
4. Image of China in Europe After the First World War	38
4.1. Russell on the Problem of China.....	38
4.2. Dewey's Lectures in China on Western Democracy	40
5. Chinese Responses to the Challenge of European Modernization.....	41
5.1. K'ang Yu-wei, the Constitutional Monarchical Reformer	41
5.2. Sun Yat-sen, the Republican Reformer	43
5.3. K'ang Yu-wei versus Sun Yat-sen.....	50
5.4. Comparison of K'ang and Sun	51
5.5. Mao Tse-tung on the New Democracy	53
6. The European Community and China.....	57
6.1. Renewing International Law and Human Rights After the Second World War.....	57
6.2. Emerging European Union as a New Type of Supranational-Intergovernmental Union of States	58
6.3. The Acceptance of the European Community by China	61
6.4. The Opening of China Through the Reforms of Deng Xiaoping.....	64
6.5. EU-China partnership: The acceptance of the Chinese Reform Process by the European Union.....	67

6.6. China and the International Organizations.....	69
6.7. Outlook: Maturing and Closer Partnership.....	69
7. Conclusions	73
8. Literature.....	76

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Important Internet sites:

EU homepage: <http://europa.eu>

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/china/intro/doc.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/china/com95_279en.pdf

WTO homepage:

<http://www.wto.org>

United Nations Organization homepage:

<http://www.un.org>

China led the world in living standards during the Northern Song dynasty, but had fallen behind Italy by 1300. At this stage, it is possible that the Yangzi delta was still on a par with the richest parts of Europe, but by 1700 the gap was too large to be bridged by regional variation within China and the Great Divergence had already begun.Â This paper uses historical national accounting methods to estimate GDP for China during the Northern Song, Ming and Qing dynasties, and combines the resulting series with population estimates to produce GDP per capita.Â Section 8 then places this performance in an international perspective by comparing GDP per capita in China with other economies to shed light on the origins of the Great Divergence.