

# China, the European Union and the Fragile World Order\*

ZHIMIN CHEN  
Fudan University

## Abstract

The EU (European Union) and China are the two arguably most unusual powers in today's world: the EU as the most integrated regional association of states and China as the largest developing great power. As the post-Cold War American-led liberal world order is facing challenges from forces unleashed by the power transition and power diffusion in the international system, this article will look into the order-shaping roles of the EU and China, to identify their respective visions of a desirable world order and to conceptualize how the EU and China can make themselves 'building blocks' of a working world order through parallel, complementary and concerted order-shaping.

**Keywords:** China; the EU; World Order; Sovereignty; Order-shaping

The world is changing and the world order seems to be in flux. If there was a prevailing 'American-led liberal hegemonic order' since the end of the Cold War, as John Ikenberry argued, that order is now in crisis. For Ikenberry, this crisis is one of authority or governance, but not of the basic principles of the liberal order. Therefore, he argues, with minor changes this order could be resurrected (Ikenberry, 2011). By contrast Henry Kissinger, in his book on world order, believed that this world order will be adapted to the new reality in the world. The pressing challenge for the human kind – or, in his words, 'the mystery to be overcome' – shared by all peoples is 'how divergent historic experiences and values can be shaped into a common order' (Kissinger, 2014, p. 9). Reflecting on the Ukraine crisis, prominent world figures have been concerned about the threatening scenario of a world in disorder. Former Soviet leader Gorbachev raised the question of whether the world is entering 'A New Cold War Order' (Gorbachev, 2015). Moreover, Kofi Annan, former secretary-general of the United Nations, made an appeal to world leaders to save the global order (Annan, 2015).

This article discusses the current challenges facing a working world order, then investigates how the European Union (EU) and China, the two most unusual powers and key order-shapers in today's world, envisage a desirable world order from their own respective perspectives. The article will also discuss how the EU and China can collaborate in their order-shaping efforts to ensure a more peaceful and more progressive world order.

## I. World Order, Reorder and Disorder

In analysing the order of today's world, some scholars prefer to use the term 'international order'. In Oran Young's definition, 'International orders are broad framework arrangements governing the activities of all (or almost all) the members of international society over a wide range of specific issues' (Young, 1989, p. 13). To operationalize

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the concept of international order, Ikenberry has conceived of five dimensions of an international order: participatory scope, sovereign independence, sovereign equality, rule of law and policy breadth and depth (see Ikenberry, 2009, p.78). Others, such as Amitav Acharya, have used the concept of 'world order' interchangeably with the concept of 'international order' (Acharya, 2014). However, Hedley Bull tried to distinguish between the two concepts. For Bull, world order is a much 'wider' concept, including 'order among states but also with order on a domestic or municipal scale, provided within particular states, and with order within the wider world political system of which the states system is only part' (Bull, 2002, p. 21). If we can assume that international order could encompass the inter-state arrangements and the arrangements of relations between states and other non-state actors in the international system, then Bull's definition has an important aspect to which other concepts of international order did not give sufficient emphasis: order within the states, in addition to international order. Hence, world order could be defined as a set of sustainable arrangements in the international system to allow political entities, and the people within them, to enjoy a meaningful level of peace, welfare and justice.

Since the end of the Cold War, the Western liberal order led by the United States has become the global order. It is an order among sovereign states, as Kissinger pointed out: 'Of all these concepts of order, Westphalian principles are, at this writing, the sole generally recognized basis of what exists of a world order' (Kissinger, 2014, p. 10). But it is hierarchical, led by the only superpower – the United States – supported by a US-centred alliance network and by multilateral institutions, with its missions to advance globalization and spread political values originating from the West, such as democracy and human rights. This American-led liberal order was built primarily within the Western advanced industrial world in the Cold War years. As Ikenberry argues, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of bipolarity, the 'inside' Western system became the 'outside' order (Ikenberry, 2011, p. 8).

However, after 20 years, this American-led hierarchical liberal order is facing challenges and reordering attempts from multiple fronts. The first challenge comes with the relative decline of the once unprecedented US primacy in the world power hierarchy after two failed wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the financial and economic crisis since 2007. While facing the limits of American power, the United States is not prepared to give up its leadership role in the world: the 2015 National Security Strategy claimed, 'A strong consensus endures across our political spectrum that the question is not *whether America will lead*, but *how we will lead* into the future' (White House, 2015, p. 2). To renew the American-led liberal order in the world, the Obama administration fashioned its own reordering strategy: to advance its re-balancing to Asia and the Pacific, strengthen its alliance with its Western allies and try to shape international economic order with the negotiation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), trade agreements deemed of having 'economic and strategic benefits for the United States' (White House, 2015, p. 17). Facing the growing weight of the emerging powers, the Obama administration has been willing to share some minor decision-making powers in the international institutions, such as the 2010 reform of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which would increase the voting powers of the emerging powers in the IMF. However, the Congress of the United States did not ratify that reform until five years

later. Overall, the United States seems reluctant to share its leadership role with the emerging powers.

The second challenge comes from the 'rise of the Rest' (Amsden, 2003; Zakaria, 2008), as represented by the rise of emerging powers. The rise of the West, in Ferguson's view, is a result of the West's mastering of six identifiably novel complexes of institutions and associated ideas and behaviours: competition, science, property rights, medicine, consumer society and work ethic. These six 'killer apps' are now in the process of being downloaded by the rest of the world, and as a result, the Rest starts to rise; with their immense population, they are bound to overtake the West in terms of economic power (Ferguson, 2012). In 2014, according to the IMF, the GDP (gross domestic product) of the Rest (emerging market and developing economies) in terms of PPP (purchasing power parity) accounted for 56.9 per cent of the world total (IMF, 2015, p. 149). The rising Rest, represented by the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), has stepped up its efforts to expand its international influence and demanded a reform of the prevailing liberal world order. The BRICS leaders made very clear in their joint statement of July 2014 that they 'believe the BRICS are an important force for incremental change and reform of current institutions towards more representative and equitable governance, capable of generating more inclusive global growth and fostering a stable, peaceful and prosperous world' (Ministry of External Relations of Brazil, 2014). In general, the BRICS countries demand better respect for state sovereignty, restriction of the use of force and unilateral intervention and to obtain commensurate decision-making power in the main global and regional institutions. They also share the concern that those American-led new regional trade arrangements under negotiation should be kept 'open, inclusive and transparent' and refrain from 'introducing exclusive and discriminatory clauses and standards' (Ministry of External Relations of Brazil, 2014).

The third challenge is from the rise of non-state actors. Joseph Nye identified two types of power shifts in this century: 'a power transition among states and a power diffusion from all states to non-state actors' (Nye, 2011, p. XV). If the above-mentioned two challenges are consequences of the power transition process, the third challenge stems from the power diffusion process. In the internet era, non-state actors, such as individuals, NGOs, religious groups, separatist movements and even terrorist networks, are all empowered to pose challenges to the internal order within sovereign states and to the international order among sovereign states.

These competing reordering attempts have produced disruptive impacts on the existing order, raising serious concerns about the prospect of world disorder. Iraq and Syria are already engulfed in civil wars. With the rise of ISIS, the dire situation in these countries is further exacerbated by the creation of a terrorist state which occupies significant territories of these two states. After Western military intervention in Libya in 2011 which brought down the Gaddafi regime, this country too is falling apart – with rival factions competing for power – and has become 'a pivot in the biggest global refugee crisis since World War II' (BBC, 2015). If these problems are generated from the conflicts among Western powers, strongman regimes in small countries and rebel or extremist religious groups, the traditional great power rivalries between the United States, its Western allies and emerging powers are also in the meantime becoming intensified. In Europe, Western countries imposed sanctions against Russia after it took over Crimea from Ukraine. A bloody civil war erupted between rebellious ethnic Russians in Eastern Ukraine and the

government forces, having already resulted in at least 6,362 deaths and 1.2 million people internally displaced at the time of writing (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2014). As Russia–West relations sank to a low not seen since the end of the Cold War, tensions also arose in China’s relations with the United States and its Asian allies, for example around maritime territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas.

## II. A Transformative Europe Facing Its Challenges

The countries of the European Community, later the EU, were a critical part of the American-led liberal order in the Cold War era. After the end of the Cold War, largely freed from the threat of the Soviet Union and facing fewer constraints from the United States, EC countries sped up the European integration process with the establishment of the European Union, strengthened the EU’s foreign policy capacity in the form of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and tried to shape the European and world order based on the EU’s own successful model. This enhanced order-shaping effort is inherently Western, as Europe shares with the United States the basic values of political liberalism and market economy. However, it is also substantially European, in view of the unique and transformative nature of European norms. After decades of European integration, the EU had embarked on a very distinctive path of development, and had acquired its salient post-modern and post-sovereign features.

The EU’s order-shaping efforts started from inside. Within the Union, the EU has transformed the nation-state system into a regional bloc with strong supranational features. It has created in Europe a zone of peace and prosperity. Robert Cooper thus claimed that the EU has turned itself into a post-modern entity characterized by the breaking down of the distinction between domestic and foreign affairs; mutual interference in (traditional) domestic affairs and mutual surveillance; the rejection of force to resolve disputes and the consequent codification of rules of behaviour; the growing irrelevance of borders; and security based on transparency, mutual openness, interdependence and mutual vulnerability (Cooper, 2000, p. 22). Or, as Robert Kagan argued, the EU has entered a ‘post-historical paradise’ and achieved Immanuel Kant’s ‘perpetual peace’ (Kagan, 2004, p. 3).

This internal success offers Europe a unique normative/transformative power to influence the outside world. In Europe, as a ‘transformative power’ (Grabbe, 2006, 2014) or through a process of ‘normative Europeanization’ (Brommesson, 2010), the EU is able to use the accession process to Europeanize public policy-making in candidate countries and/or new Member States. Backed by its enormous economic power and the appeal of its internal governance model, the EU’s neighbours have lined up in their efforts to join the Union or to be associated with the Union as closely as possible. In the process, they have been attracted, induced or pressured to adopt European norms.

Beyond its immediate neighbourhood, the EU also embarked on a path to use its normative power to transform the world. For Ian Manners, the norms which Europe has developed in its integration process represent future trends or universal norms already enshrined in global covenants. These include five ‘core’ norms – peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms – and four ‘minor’ norms – social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development and good

governance. By presenting the EU as a normative power, Manners indicates that the EU 'acts to change the norms in the international system, and the EU should act to extend its norms into the international system' (Manners, 2002, p. 252). Manners also puts forward six mechanisms of norm diffusion— contagion, informational, procedural, transference, overt and cultural filter (Manners, 2002, 2013). Arguing for a more pragmatic version of normative power, Zaki Laidi believes that norms, especially constructed norms, reflect the economic, social and cultural preferences that are at stake. In a more competitive world, Europe is in a much more defensive position than one might believe. Therefore, Europe's 'priority is thus not to export its values in the name of some outmoded messianic mission, but to obtain recognition from the international system for the preferences on which its originality is based' (Laidi, 2008, p. 51). By globalizing EU norms, such as environmental standards, the EU could create a level playing field for European business and other nonmarket social values.

But this normative/transformational Europe has encountered limitations from within and outside. Internally, Europe's economic woes from 2009 onward have seen the rise of far-right and far-left populist political forces, and deepened frictions between the sovereignist countries, such as Greece, Hungary and the UK, and the Unionist countries. This has weakened the normative power of the European model's attractiveness to the rest of the world, albeit only relatively. A 2014 BBC world opinion poll indicates that among people surveyed in more than 20 countries around the world, those who held positive views of the EU's influence in the world had declined from 51 per cent in 2006 to 46 per cent in 2014, while those who held negative views of the EU's influence in the world climbed from 19 per cent to 30 per cent during the same period (BBC World Service Poll, 2014). Moreover, Europe's capacity to use its financial resources to help diffuse norms around the world is also negatively impacted. As the world's leading donor, the EU and its Member States contributed 58.2 billion Euros of Official Development Aid in 2014, 0.42 per cent of EU GDP, which fell far short of the 0.7 per cent target to which the EU committed at the beginning of this century in the context of the United Nations Millennium Goals. The overall level of aid has stagnated among the big Member States: 'France has cut its aid budget for the fourth year in a row, while Spain's aid spending has been halved since 2011 and is now at its lowest since 1989' (Fox, 2015). On the receiving end, many of those countries in which Europe has been deeply involved, such as Libya, Syria and Ukraine, appear to have become new sources of instability and chaos. Radical terrorist groups, and especially ISIS, have expanded their presence in multiple countries. Illegal immigration has increased dramatically. Europe's neighbourhood is now in its most precarious period since the end of the Cold War. Instead of having built a 'ring of friends' around it, the EU is now surrounded by a 'ring of fire' (*The Economist*, 2014), or an 'arc of instability' from an official EU view (EEAS, 2015).

### III. An Order-taker China turning into an Order-shaper

In the early years of the Cold War era, China was a junior partner of the Soviet Union. After a military clash over border disputes between the two communist giants in 1969, the Soviet Union was seen in China as the most dangerous security threat. China started to mend its relations with the United States and other Western countries at the beginning

of the 1970s. China's geopolitical swing from the Eastern bloc to the Western bloc shifted the power balance between the two blocs, to the detriment of the Soviet order.

In the post-Cold War era, in a globalized Western liberal order led by the United States, Chinese foreign policy has 'adopted a low profile posture, and is basically defensive and reactive' (Cui, 2014, p. 8), with the role of 'a passive recipient of the world order' (Odgaard, 2013). China has tried not to confront the Western powers and cultivated partnership relations with them, liberalizing its economy in order to join the WTO in 2001. It even joined many international human rights treaties, even though it still has not ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which it signed in 1998.

Acting as an order-taker in the global context, China has concentrated its efforts on its internal reforms and development, aiming to build a strong domestic order first, in the knowledge that 'Changing itself is the main source of Chinese power and it is also the main way for China to influence the world' (Zhang, 2002, p. 17). Twenty years after the end of Cold War, China has emerged as the second largest economy in the world, overtaking Japan in 2010. In 2014, it had a \$10 trillion economy in nominal terms – almost 60 per cent of the US or EU economy, and twice the size of the Japanese economy. In terms of PPP, the IMF estimates that the Chinese economy surpassed the US economy in 2014. As a new centre of economic gravity, China can further boost its already established political and military clout, symbolized by its veto-wielding seat in the United Nations Security Council, to make China a comprehensive power and a new force in the shaping of world order.

China achieved its development from within the liberal world order. In view of that, China has strong stakes in many aspects of this order and should have no major reasons to disrupt it. As Chinese premier Li Keqiang said to the *Financial Times*, 'China has been a beneficiary of the current international system in terms of both peace and development'; therefore 'there is no such thing as breaking the existing order' (Chinadaily.com.cn, 2015). At the same time, China thinks that aspects of the current world order need to be reformed. China complains that the prevailing definitions of this order's basic norms tend to reflect more the interests and preferences of the Western powers, such as the prioritizing of democracy and human rights over sovereignty and development. China also opposes the tendency toward power politics in the international system, with the dominant Western power frequently resorting to use of military force and economic sanctions to intervene in domestic affairs of the developing countries. Moreover, China wants to reform some of the arrangements in the international system, which tend to reinforce Western predominance and marginalize developing countries, and which are increasingly unjustifiable in the context of the 'rise of the Rest'.

Therefore, internationally, China has been engaging in order-reforming activities. Two basic strategies have been adopted: 'reform from within' and 'reform from outside' (Chen, 2014; Li and Su, 2015; Pang, 2015). A 'reform from within' strategy aims to reform the US-led existing international institutions through concerted co-operation between the emerging and established powers. Since China has substantial stakes in the existing world order, such an approach is the most natural and the least risky. The results of this strategy, to Chinese eyes, are not very satisfactory. On the positive side, the G20 has been set up as the central forum leading world economic governance. On the negative side, the long-delayed 2010 IMF reform has cast shadows on Chinese confidence in the

'reform from within' strategy. Answering the global call to boost the lending capacity of the IMF in the context of economic and financial crisis in the Western countries, China committed to increase its financial contribution to the IMF in exchange for enhanced decision-making power in the IMF. That was the essence of the 2010 IMF quota reform. However, the US Congress blocked this reform in the following five years, which turned an increasingly impatient China toward the second strategy, 'reform from outside'.

In this author's view, four substrategies can be identified under the heading of the general 'reform from outside' strategy. The first substrategy is the creation of 'plurilateral regional orders' among like-minded countries. These orders emerge in areas where the existing order is weak or absent, with the purpose of promoting autonomous regional co-operation and stability. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a good example in this category. The organization serves the purpose of promoting regional trust, co-operative security and the joint fight against terrorism, separatism and religious extremism in China, Russia and four other central Asian countries, on the strict basis of inter-governmental co-operation and respect for each other's sovereignty. It is designed not to challenge the existing order, but to strengthen the regional order.

The second substrategy is to create 'plurilateral embedded orders', where like-minded countries create new international arrangements to provide additional governance resources which are in short supply from the existing order, and are designed explicitly to complement the existing order. China supported the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization (CMIM) and became one of the two largest fund contributors, along with Japan. CMIM acts as a kind of regional contingency fund backed by \$240 billion, but with a 70 per cent IMF-linked portion in 2012, which means most of its loan decisions shall be tied to IMF decisions (AMRO, 2012).

The third substrategy is to create 'plurilateral parallel orders', supported by new institutions outside the existing order created by like-minded countries. These new arrangements can bring in additional governance resources and capacities, and in doing so may contribute to the overall enhancement of regional and global governance. However, since they have duplicated functions with existing mainstream institutions and yet operate independently, they have the potential to develop into alternative or rival institutions to those currently in existence. In 2014, two such institutions were announced: the Shanghai-based New Development Bank (NDB), created by the BRICS countries with initial capital of \$50 billion, and the Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), with registered capital of \$100 billion, whose founding members include 57 countries around the world. Both institutions will have their headquarters in China, a clear indication of their connections with the country. The two institutions differ in their design: in the NDB all founding parties will make an equal contribution and will have equal decision-making power, while in the AIIB China will be the biggest contributor of capital, and hence have the most voting power.

There is a fourth substrategy. Unlike the previous three plurilateral institutions, this last one aims to shape China's broad neighbourhood through 'China-sponsored bilateral networks', or China's Silk Road initiative. In Chinese jargon it is called 'One Belt One Road' (OBOR); this refers to the continental Silk Road Economic Belt initiative linking China via central Asia and Russia to Western Europe and the Maritime Silk Road Initiative to connect China with countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East and countries around the Mediterranean sea. These initiatives were announced in late

2013, with the purpose of strengthening connectivity and bilateral co-operation between China and 60-odd countries along the 'Belt' and the 'Road'. The initiatives stemmed from growing confidence that China could provide benefits to neighbouring countries through its own development, as demonstrated by Chinese president Xi Jinping's open welcome to all countries to 'get on board the express train of China's development' (China.org.cn, 2014). Intensive consultations between China and these countries have been conducted to integrate the development strategies of all states involved, in order to identify key infrastructure projects which could be financially supported by China through a newly announced Silk Road Fund of \$40 billion, or by the AIIB. While there are concerns in China about the financial risks involved with this strategy and suspicions from outside about the real intention of these Chinese initiatives, nevertheless, this ambitious initiative does have the potential to reshape the geo-economy in the Eurasian continent and Pacific Asia.

#### IV. China and the EU: Two Order-shapers in Different Directions?

Both the EU and China have the will and, importantly, the capacity to shape the outside world. However, as the two most unusual powers in the world, the EU and China differ in a number of their key preferences for a desirable world order, which problematizes their collaboration in order-shaping efforts.

##### *Post-sovereign Union vs Sovereign State*

The first difference between the two comes from their very nature as international players. The EU is a union of nation-states, a hybrid collective actor. The EU can be regarded as a single actor in some policy areas, where sovereignty of its Member States has been transferred to the Union institutions. At the same time, in other areas, particularly those of foreign policy and defence policy, the EU could be seen as a cluster of actors, including EU institutions and Member States. Depending on different policy domains, the EU could be seen as *the EU acting on behalf of its people and Member States*, like in trade negotiations; or *the EU with Member States*, when there is a common position in the foreign and security policy, the EU institutions concurrently act along with the Member States; or *the EU through Member States*, when the EU has to act through Member States, like in the UN Security Council; or *the EU and Member States*, when un-coordinated Member States act with or without the EU institutions when there is no common position among the Member States in foreign and security policy. Even with this hybrid nature of EU actorness, it still has the highest level of integration among all associations of states. As a substantially post-sovereign union, it welcomes mutual interference in domestic affairs, major transfer of sovereignty and strong rule-based international institutions in governing world affairs. One Chinese scholar has thus labelled the EU's approach to global governance as 'constitutionalism based on human rights', in contrast to China's approach of 'egalitarianism based on sovereignty' (Zhao, 2012).

Unlike the post-sovereign Europe, China is the largest sovereignist state in the world. China has a long tradition of statehood. In Francis Fukuyama's view, in terms of internal governance, China could be seen as the first country to create a modern state: a



centralized, uniform system of bureaucratic administration that was capable of governing a huge population and territory (see Fukuyama, 2011). However, in terms of China's relations with surrounding nations, sovereignty is a much later concept. Historically, the external relations of the Chinese state were dominated by 'the concept of Sinocentrism and an assumption of Chinese superiority', and were 'hierarchic and nonegalitarian' (Fairbank, 1968, p. 2). After its bitter experience in the modern era as a victim of colonialism, obtaining equal sovereign state status has become the paramount aim for its people and political forces, and 'the mother principle that directs China's foreign policy' (Pan, 2012, p. 22). A strong sovereign state is seen as a guarantor of its national independence and a precondition for national revival, like many post-colonial new states. Therefore, in its relations with other states, sovereignist China prioritizes the defence of state sovereignty and non-interference with domestic affairs, and prefers international co-operation based on consensus rather than supranational governance.

### *Post-industrialized democracies vs. developmental party-state*

The EU and China's different internal social, political and economic systems lead the two players to view the best way to manage domestic governance differently, and also create problems in EU–China co-operation in their efforts to shape the outside world. Europe in general has embraced political liberalism, seeing democracy, competitive elections, press freedom, vibrant civil society and human rights as basic components of internal good governance. In China, with its strong statist tradition and a twentieth-century revolution led by the Communist Party of China (CPC), a party-state has been in place since the founding of the PRC. Its political system prioritizes party leadership in the society. Under Deng's market reform and open door policy, 'the party shifted its focus from revolution to performance legitimacy' (Zheng and Lye, 2005, p.190), and became a driving force of China's modernization. Knowing its political system is quite different from those in European countries, China advocates sovereignty, non-interference with domestic affairs, the value of diversity and the right of each country to choose its internal political and social systems, hoping that China can find room for political co-existence with European countries. From the EU side, though normative foreign policy toward China has proven ineffective to push changes in the country (Mattlin, 2012; Kavalski, 2013), the EU has maintained a decades-long arms embargo against China since 1989 and included a human rights component in its policy toward China, causing political tensions in the relationship from time to time.

In economic aspects, a post-industrialized Europe has huge economic complementarities with a developing China. With China's economic opening-up and liberalization, particularly after China joined the WTO in 2001, China and the EU have built one of the strongest economic relationships in the world: the EU as China's largest trade partner and China as the EU's second largest trade partner. However, three issues still stand out in this regard. The first relates to the role of the state in the Chinese economy. China complains that the EU has failed to grant it full market economy status even after China's development of a market economy with Chinese characteristics. The EU complains that European companies do not have equal access to the Chinese market (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2014, pp. 23–9). The second issue is the much lower standards prevalent in China's economic management compared to the

EU. Standards of labour, environment, food quality, etc., are all lower in China, which gives Chinese producers price competitiveness in the global market and is perceived as a challenge to the sustainability of the European social welfare system. The third is the EU's complaint that China is still too focused on its own domestic economic development, offering insufficient contribution to global governance, such as the fight against climate change.

### *Alliance vs. partnership*

After the Lisbon Treaty, the EU acquired certain features of a security alliance: mutual military assistance in the context of a terrorist attack (Art 222 TFEU), and mutual assistance of all means in case a Member State is the victim of armed aggression (Art 42 TEU), though in the latter case the mutual assistance obligation shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of the Member States. Obviously, the EU is not yet a full-fledged security alliance, since the neutral states in the EU can still maintain their neutral status, and those Member States which are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) may still prefer to act first in the framework of NATO. Nevertheless, in view of the evolution of the EU and the fact that most of the EU members are also NATO members, it could be said that the EU and a majority of its Member States are alliance-prone, seeing security alliances as the central mechanism of their national and European security and an instrument which allows them to exercise joint regional and global leadership along with the United States.

In the earlier Cold War years, China forged a security alliance with the Soviet Union, and that alliance ceased to function after the border conflict of 1969. Although legally China still has an alliance treaty with North Korea as a historical legacy, China's general foreign policy principle has been non-alliance since the beginning of the 1980s. From the mid-1990s, China started to pursue a partnership strategy to forge closer non-alliance co-operation with countries around the world. Backed by its military deterrence capacity, China believes that it might be able to develop co-operative relationships in the form of various partnerships, to achieve the necessary international co-operation in the context of globalization while avoiding the security dilemma created by alliance politics. With regard to the existing military alliances around the world, as Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Geng Yansheng once indicated, the Chinese government acknowledges they are 'a product of history' but views 'any strengthening and expansion of military alliances [as] an expression of a Cold War mentality', which 'does not help to enhance mutual trust and co-operation between countries in the region, and could ultimately harm the common interests of all concerned' (Li and Li, 2011). Accordingly, China openly criticized NATO's military intervention in the Kosovo conflict in 1999 and its military operation supporting regime change in Libya in 2011.

## **V. China and the EU as Building Blocks of a Working World Order**

In light of the important differences between the EU and China, how can the two players possibly develop a relationship in their efforts to shape the world order? This section argues that there are at least three ways in which the EU and China

can positively associate themselves and become the building blocks of a working world order.

### *Parallel Order-shaping from a Distance*

The EU and China both have global reach and influence. Nevertheless, they are in the first place order-shapers within their own boundaries and in their own regions. Separated and mitigated by sheer distance, neither the EU nor China constitutes a crucial actor in each other's neighbourhood. Therefore, without the presence of major conflicts of geopolitical or geo-economic interests between them, the EU and China can build their parallel internal and regional orders even if their preferences for order-shaping differ in a number of important ways.

As domestic order constitutes a critical component of the wider world order, and China and the EU are respectively the first and third most populous entities in the world, building peaceful, prosperous and just societies in China and in the EU could itself be a major contribution to the world. The EU has made war inconceivable among its Member States, and most of its peoples enjoy a high level of material welfare and freedom. Through its extraordinary economic growth between 1990 and 2005, the numbers of China's poor declined from 683 million to 212 million people, a decrease of 471 million. In other words, China had achieved its target of halving the number of poor in the country ahead of schedule, and this decrease accounted for 76.09 per cent of global total poverty reduction over the same period (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China and United Nations System in China, 2013). The respective governance improvements in the EU and in China, no matter how different they might appear, have not only served the interests of people living in these two entities, but also contributed to the world at large.

In their own regions, the EU and China also demonstrated that they could be positive forces for a working regional order. The EU, through its enlargement process, has accepted 16 new Member States since the end of the Cold War, and in so doing has expanded the zone of peace and prosperity in Europe. China has become the top trading partner of almost all of its neighbours, which has contributed to the economic dynamism of the countries around China.

Nevertheless, the EU and China should not be too complacent about their respective roles in their internal and regional orders. First, both the EU and China are facing internal challenges. The EU has to manage its problem of divergent economic performance, as the southern members are suffering serious economic growth problems. It also has to address rising extremism, as indicated by the results of European Parliament elections in 2014. China, meanwhile, has to address growing income disparity and environmental degradation amid a slow-down of its economic growth, and must strengthen efforts to build a rule-of-law society to ensure the rights of its citizens that are enshrined in its constitution. Second, both the EU and China have to carefully manage relations with their neighbours. The EU's neighbourhood is becoming more unstable: tensions with Russia have reached their highest level since the end of the Cold War. On the Chinese side, it also has to balance its desire to safeguard its maritime interests with the need to maintain regional stability, as maritime disputes between China and a number of offshore neighbours are on the rise. Third, the EU and China also need to manage mutual

approaches to each other's neighbourhoods. Europe still has great economic interests in Asia, apart from that in China; Europe is urged by the United States to support its 'pivot to Asia', a strategic move perceived by many in China as attempt to constrain the growing Chinese influence in the region. For China, especially under the new 'One Belt One Road' Silk Road initiative, Chinese economic involvement in Europe's neighbourhood is strengthening at a rapid pace, and its interests in North Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe are on the rise. As they approach each other, their respective internal and regional order-shaping efforts might be subject to the influence of the other side, which implies that more concerted order-shaping efforts between the EU and China are needed. Under these new circumstances, Europe and China need to reinvent themselves to ensure their future internal and regional success, as they did in the past.

### *Complementary Order-shaping*

The different approaches to order-shaping in the EU and China may also have merit under certain circumstances. In managing inter-state or intra-state conflicts, external pressures and inducements need to be applied at the same time, with the involvement of multiple external players. Compared to China, the EU is more willing to use coercive measures, mostly in the form of sanctions, to impose a change in the calculations of the relevant parties involved in conflicts. China, given its non-interference and sovereignty principles, does not favour unilateral sanctions from third parties, and prefers private diplomacy and influence through persuasion and inducement. These different approaches set them apart, or even place them in open confrontation. The management of the Darfur crisis in Sudan is a case in point. From 2004, the humanitarian crisis in Darfur attracted massive attention in the West, and Western governments were under public pressure to take action against the Sudanese government, which was accused of being responsible for the dire humanitarian situation in Darfur. As the biggest provider of investment in Sudan and defender of the sovereignty principle, China opposed external sanctions against Sudan and unilateral foreign military intervention. However, with the prospect of European sanctions looming large, by utilizing private diplomacy China was able to persuade the Sudanese government to accept a UN–AU joint peacekeeping force to be deployed in southern Sudan, which paved the way to end a bloody civil war and later to support the relatively peaceful secession of South Sudan. The Darfur experience exposed the startling difference of the crisis management approaches between the EU and China, and on appearance, it was seen that 'China and Europe do not act as partners in managing the Darfur crisis'. At the same time, the two sides can be 'complementary': while one side puts pressure on the local government, the other side acts as mediator (van der Meulen and van der Putten, 2009, pp. 21, 41). This view was echoed by the then British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett: 'on Sudan, I know there has been some criticism of China, but actually China has played really quite a positive role, particularly in the negotiation of the Darfur peace agreement' (Dickie, 2007).

We can also identify this complementarity in Europe and China's military involvement in Mali. In early 2013 – in the context of the imminent threat of rebel armed forces taking over the state of Mali – on the invitation of the Mali government and not waiting for a common EU decision, France launched Operation Serval, a military operation to push back the rebel offensive. Shortly after, the United Nations Security Council unanimously

passed Resolution 2100 and a UN peacekeeping mission coded as MINUSMA was established with mandates to stabilize key population centres and support for the re-establishment of state authority throughout the country (United Nations Security Council, 2013). As France prepared to reduce its troop presence in Mali and left the main peacekeeping task to the UN peacekeepers, China decided to make a substantial force contribution: a contingent composed of an engineer detachment, a guard detachment and a medical detachment. This was the first time China had dispatched an armed security force to take part in the UN's peacekeeping operations (Ministry of National Defense of China, 2013). In this way, China and the European states exhibited a kind of division of labour, and in a co-ordinated way acted with their comparative strengths in crisis management: the European countries taking a more demanding military role at the crisis intervention stage, and China assuming the task of peacekeeping thereafter.

### *Concerted Order-shaping*

More importantly, two developments are facilitating expanding convergence between the EU and China in their order-shaping efforts, which could lead to a more concerted relationship in the future. First is the return of the developmental agenda in Europe and the move beyond developmentalism in China. The EU has enjoyed a comfortable economic situation in the past. With its advanced technology and economic competitiveness, European countries have developed high-level welfare systems and place more emphasis on quality-of-life issues. The Greek crisis and subsequent economic problems faced by many EU countries have pushed the growth and development agenda to top priority in the EU. A Eurobarometer survey in spring 2014 found that, when asked to cite the two most important issues facing the EU at the moment, the top three results were economic in nature: the economic situation (39 per cent), unemployment (34 per cent) and public finance (25 per cent). In contrast, only 8 per cent chose the EU's influence in the world (Eurobarometer, 2014). As the EU is becoming more modern, less post-modern and more like other countries in the world, China is moving beyond developmentalism to deemphasize growth and focus more on quality-of-life issues. For example, given the unbearable level of heavy smog hanging over major Chinese cities, the Chinese government is now under heavy domestic pressure to speed up the process of improving energy efficiency and expand the use of clean energy. An analysis by Greenpeace suggests that coal consumption in China fell by almost 8 per cent and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by around 5 per cent in the first four months of 2015, compared with the same period in 2014. The reduction in emissions from 2014 to 2015 is roughly equal to the total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of the UK over four months, and the reduction in coal use is equal to four times the UK's total consumption (Myllyvirta, 2015). A number of major food security scandals also prompted the government to strengthen food security regulations nationwide. These mutually approaching tendencies are narrowing preference differences between the EU and China, leading to a much better concerted relationship between them on wide-ranging bilateral and multilateral issues. If China's Silk Road initiative has sought to work with individual EU Member States in the initial stages, China is now also keen to develop synergy with the EU's flagship initiative, the Investment Plan for Europe, with a mutual willingness to establish a 'possible China–EU co-investment vehicle' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, 2015a).

The second development is the new pragmatism in Europe and globalism in China. Facing internal problems and a turbulent neighbourhood, the EU is preoccupied with finding solutions to internal growth and cohesion problems, as well as the task of stabilizing its neighbourhood. As a result, the EU is becoming more pragmatic in its drive to transform the rest of the world and its relations with China; and in academic studies, the concept of normative power Europe is also being fundamentally challenged, with a call to move away from 'Eurocentricism' or 'civilizational primacy' toward 'provincializing', 'engaging' and 'reconstruction' in the 'non-European world' (Fisher Onar and Nicolaïdis, 2013). It was the EU Commission President and the French President who first proposed the idea of a G20 summit to engage emerging powers on an equal footing in the aftermath of the Western economic and financial crisis. European countries all agreed to the 2010 IMF reform, which allowed some voting rights to be transferred mostly from Europe to China and other emerging countries. Trade disputes such as the solar panel disputes, though initially very confrontational, were eventually solved through a constructive compromise. Under former EU High Representative Catherine Ashton, the EU has stepped up efforts to expand military-to-military co-operation and dialogue with China, including joint exercises at the operational level, such as the naval anti-piracy joint exercise in the Gulf of Aden. Upon the deadline of 30 March 2015, 14 of the 28 EU Member States decided to be founding members of the China-sponsored AIIB, disregarding the explicit initial opposition from the United States government (Branigan, 2015).

On the Chinese side, with the arrival of new leadership under president Xi Jinping, Chinese foreign policy became more proactive, and the country is now prepared to take on greater responsibility internationally. Earlier in 2005 China endorsed the World Summit document which embraced the idea of 'responsibility to protect', indicating that China is willing to accept that certain crimes committed at home are not immune to international intervention, which implies a loosening of its rigid view of state sovereignty. China also supported a number of UNSC resolutions under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, which include coercive measures such as sanctions and military interventions. A trip to France on 1 July 2015 saw the Chinese representative announce its Intended Nationally Determined Contributions on Climate Change, pledging a peak of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions around 2030 and other action targets, in an effort to boost the Paris Conference's chances of reaching a 'comprehensive, balanced and powerful agreement' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, 2015b). Clearly, we have seen strong signs of mutual accommodation and convergence between the EU and China in their views on a desirable world order. Therefore, it seems that the EU and China have ample room to explore concerted efforts to provide individual and joint contributions to the general public good of the world.

## VI. Conclusion

China and the EU constitute two of the three largest entities in today's world in terms of aggregate population, military spending and economic size. Although China turned to a more cautious and realistic view of the EU in world affairs after the financial crisis, a recent study of Chinese official media coverage of the EU indicated that, Chinese tend to hold a relatively higher expectation of the EU, while other Asian countries often

perceive the EU as distant and ineffective, resulting in a clear 'Expectation Deficit' (Zhang, 2016). A China–EU partnership therefore could constitute an important platform for both sides to facilitate the building of a workable world order, especially in a world now plagued by competing reordering strategies and risks of disorder.

Both the EU and China have immense tasks to undertake in tackling their internal problems. For the EU and its Member States, daunting challenges need to be dealt with, such as revitalizing the economy, creating jobs, combating extremism and coping with a large wave of refugees from a chaotic neighbourhood. For China, the context of slower economic development means even bigger challenges in coping with multiple problems at the same time, ensuring sustainable development, protecting the environment, promoting social justice and building a rule-of-law society. Successful internal governance in the EU and China would provide the world with two zones of peace and stability, and create positive externalities for the outside world.

They also need to manage the system-shocks that their powers have generated in their own regions, to avoid unnecessary geopolitical rivalries with other regional powers in their neighbourhood and to check their ambitions for regional dominance. Responsible regional policies from both the EU and China, along with sound internal governance, would produce positive parallel order-shaping effects. China's efforts to promote regional co-operation, in the form of either autonomous regional institutions or embedded institutions tied to global existing institutions, could well serve the parallel order-shaping efforts from the China side.

Furthermore, the two need to build on their past successes and make themselves greater contributors to a more peaceful, prosperous and just world at large. Through the Silk Road initiative, China's bilateral networks are extending to Europe. If the EU and its Member States could develop co-operation with China in mutually beneficial projects of infrastructure construction, it would not only open up new room for EU–China co-operation, but also offer the opportunity for the two to join forces to promote stability and development in the vast areas in the Eurasian continent between them. Globally, more convergence in their preferences would lead to stronger concerted order-shaping partnership between the EU and China. The EU, its Member States and China can push necessary reforms within the existing main global institutions, so that these institutions could be renewed and reinforced. Even as China pushed the building of some new parallel institutions like the AIIB, the strong European memberships in the AIIB will create substantial membership overlapping between these new and old institutions, to reduce the future possibility of rivalry between them. In December 2015 the US Congress finally approved the IMF 2010 reform, which allowed China to obtain the third largest voting rights in the IMF, and assured China that its 'reform from within' is still valid and feasible. Lastly, even if differences persist, the complementary order-shaping scenario also informs us that if there is strategic management of these differences, they could also be assets for building a better world. In a word, the EU and China, along with stakeholders in the wider international system, do have the possibility to assume more of a 'building-block' role in their efforts to shape future world order. Having said that, we need to be aware that, with the persisting different preferences between the two sides regarding the internal and global governance, co-operative order-shaping between the EU and China will always be a difficult task.

*Correspondence:*

Zhimin Chen

Fudan University

School of International Relations &amp; Public Affairs

220 Handan Road, Shanghai 200433, China.

email: zhmchen@fudan.edu.cn

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