

# 'CHOSEN TRAUMA' AND 'CHOSEN GLORY' – CHINA'S

## Wounded Nationalism and National Consciousness

*China's defeat against British military forces in the Opium War (1839–1842) heralded a quest for a Chinese modernity of its own. That China's modernity is, in the contemporary period, conspicuously formulated in terms that refer to the country's imperial past, shows how China's national consciousness is permeated with the mission to rectify the trauma of the 19th century. The present contribution describes the impact of this historical trauma on how China positions itself in the world.*

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"Through remembrance, history turns into myth. By this, it does not become unreal but, on the contrary, and only then, reality in the sense of a continual normative and formative force".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: Beck, 1992), 52.

## Introduction

In the document "Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu dang de bai nian fendou zhongda chengjiu he lishi jingyan de jueyi" (Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the major achievements and historical experience of the Party's century-long struggle), published on 16 November 2021, we read that "Since the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era. The main task facing the Party is to realize the first centenary goal, start a new journey to realize the second centenary goal, and continue to move forward toward the grand goal of realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation".<sup>1</sup> This evaluation of the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress that started on 8 November 2012 and on which Xi Jinping succeeded Hu Jintao as General Secretary of the 'Chinese Communist Party' (CCP), can serve as a succinct summary of how the Central Committee of the CCP evaluates the Party's economic and political achievements, and of how it projects CCP leadership into the foreseeable future. Taking the *longue durée* into account, this contribution outlines how the CCP leadership has instrumentalized the 'century of humiliation' (*bai nian guo chi*) that started with the country's defeat in the First Opium War (1839–1842) as 'chosen trauma' to claim its leading role in the realization of the "rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" as "second centenary goal" and 'chosen glory' for 2049 (the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China) after it has, in 2021, celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the CCP as its "first centenary goal".

<sup>1</sup> Xinhua she, *Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu dang de bai nian fendou zhongda chengjiu he lishi jingyan de jueyi (quan wen)*. [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-11/16/content\\_5651269.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-11/16/content_5651269.htm) (accessed January 31 2022).

## Historical background

In imperial China, the Confucian elite had traditionally been identified as the upholder of harmony and stability in the territory over which it ruled, i.e., 'all-under-heaven' (*tianxia*). When the government of the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–1911) was forced into the 'unequal treaties' (*bu pingdeng tiaoyue*) as a result of its defeat in the First Opium War (1839–1842), this not only called into question Qing leadership, but also the Confucian ideology. The importance of the fact that this defeat happened under a Manchu government, further, resulted in the growth of Chinese Han nationalism and the aspiration to create a Han Chinese state – a concept that was coined 'ethnic nation state' (*minzu guojia*) – modeled on Western political, social, and economic ideas. Also in the Republic of China that followed the Qing in 1911, Chinese nationalism grew in importance, especially in the context of World War I. When the Republican government in 1917 decided to join France and Great Britain against Germany, this was likely motivated by the conviction that, in case of victory, China could claim back the German concession areas in Shandong Province. Xu Guoqi in this respect claimed that "[t]he war provided the momentum and the opportunity for China to redefine its relations with the world [...] and thus position itself within the family of nations".<sup>2</sup> Chinese hope was, however, shattered when the 1919 Versailles Treaty stipulated that the German possessions were not returned to China, but transferred to Japan. Assessing the impact of World War I, John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman stated:

"The great World War of 1914–1918 disclosed the barbaric potentialities of Europe's arrogant civilization. [...] Ideas of several kinds of socialism, of the emancipation of women, and the rights of labor versus capitalists swept around the globe and flooded into Republican China. China's scholar-elite [...] instinctively took on the task of understanding and evaluating this revolutionary outside world at the same time that it struggled to reevaluate China's inherited culture."<sup>3</sup>

That is to say that as soon as the quest for 'modernity' had arisen in Republican China, the Chinese intellectuals voiced a critique of that same Western modernity, and were confronted with the issue of the (im)possibility to create a distinctive Chinese modernity. Also the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) put China's national cohesion to the test. After having been ruled by Japan for 50 years, the island of Taiwan was returned under Chinese rule in 1945, but the result of the civil war that ensued in 1945 was that, in 1949, two different political entities were created: the CCP may have come to power on the mainland, but this could not prevent the nationalist 'Guomindang' (GMD) from continuing to rule on Taiwan and some smaller islands in the Taiwan Strait. Just as the GMD had done after the fall of the empire, the CCP endeavoured to create a Chinese nation state, be it no longer one that was based on ethnic premises (*minzu*) but one that would be built on Marxist-Leninist concepts.

2 Guoqi Xu, *Strangers on the Western Front. Chinese Workers in the Great War*. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 9. In practice, more than 100,000 Chinese workers were active in the logistical support of the French (40,000 men) and the British (95,000 men) army.

3 John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China A New History, Second Enlarged Edition* (Cambridge MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 267.

## China's Strategy: 'Grand' or 'Persistent'?

Avery Goldstein has discerned two major phases in the People's Republic of China's (PRC) foreign policy: the period from the establishment of the PRC in 1949 to 1992 that focused on the acceptance and survival of the PRC as a nation state, and the period since 1992 in which the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' (*Zhonghua minzu weida fuxing*) takes central position.<sup>4</sup> Sulmaan Wasif Khan has hereby characterized Chinese foreign policy as, at heart, 'defensive'.<sup>5</sup> This assessment is to be explained by both internal and external factors. In the context of the Cold War during which the division between the capitalist West vs. the communist East constituted a forceful geopolitical discourse, the members of the European Communities anchored their geopolitical identity in the transatlantic community that continued to recognize the GMD as legitimate ruler of China. It was, therefore, also the GMD government that represented China in the United Nations. In these circumstances, the PRC, well aware of the dire state of its economy and in need of international help, forged an alliance with the Soviet Union. The 'Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance' (*Zhong-Su youhao tongmeng huzhu tiaoyue*) that was signed on 14 February 1950 had to help rebuild the Chinese economy, a prerequisite for the PRC to survive as a nation state. That the Soviet leadership discontinued the Treaty in 1958 when it was confronted with the disastrous outcome of the Great Leap Forward (*da yue jin*) helps to explain why, after 1958, the PRC started to present itself as the 'third way' of economic and political development. This policy was 'materialized' in ideological support for the independence movements and revolutionary groups that opposed several established African and Latin American regimes.<sup>6</sup> The 1958 debacle also brought more moderate voices within the CCP to the forefront, a development that enabled a rapprochement to the Western world and that would eventually lead to the establishment of diplomatic ties with the majority of the European countries in the 1970s and with the United States (US) in 1979. That the PRC had been voted into the United Nations on 25 October 1971, with this replacing the GMD government of Taiwan as legitimate representative of 'China' – a political fact in which, as had been hoped for, the African countries played a major role – was of fundamental importance herein.<sup>7</sup>

The international recognition of the PRC as a sovereign nation state and of the CCP as its ruling party allowed the Chinese leadership to tread new economic paths while maintaining the primacy of CCP rule. Improving the living standards of the Chinese people through economic modernization – the so-called 'reform and opening-up' (*gaige kaifang*) policies that were launched in 1978 – was thought to be the instrument to achieve national cohesion and was seen as the guarantee for the CCP to remain in power. An economic decline, so was the conviction, would make the country vulnerable to outside forces and might jeopardize the consolidation of China's socialist system.<sup>8</sup> China's choice to pragmatically engage in economic collaboration with the West while maintaining its authoritarian political system – the so-called 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' (*you Zhongguo tese de shehui zhuyi*) – incarnates a transition from Mao Zedong's (1893–1976)

4 Avery Goldstein, "China's Grand Strategy under Xi Jinping, Reassurance, Reform, and Resistance," *International Security* 45, no. 1 (2020): 168-179.

5 Sulmaan Wasif Khan, *Haunted by Chaos. China's Grand Strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2018), 218.

6 See: Bruce D. Larkin, *China and Africa 1949–1970. The Foreign Policy of the People's Republic of China* (Berkeley, etc.: University of California Press, 1971), 167-193.

7 The PRC was voted into the UN with 34 per cent (26 countries) of its votes from African countries, thus passing the required two-thirds majority. Ten of the fifteen African countries that supported Taipei changed to the PRC in the next few years. See: Liang-tsai Wei, *Peking Versus Taipei in Africa 1960-1978* (Taipei: Asia and World Institute, 1982), 380-396.

8 Khan, *Haunted by Chaos*, 176.

'revolutionary nationalism' to 'developmental nationalism'. One might even argue that 'developmental nationalism' became China's 'grand strategy'.<sup>9</sup> This pragmatic attitude and the knowledge that a stable international context over a prolonged period of time is conducive to economic collaboration, also explains Deng Xiaoping's (1904–1997) famous motto 'observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide the capabilities and bide the time; never claim leadership; make some contributions' (*lengjing guancha; wen zhu zhenjiao; chenzhe yingfu; taoguang yanghui; shan yu shou zhuo; jue bu dangtou; you suo zuowei*) for the country's international policies.<sup>10</sup>

The Tiananmen crisis of 1989, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the end of the communist regimes in Europe importantly revealed the vulnerability of the CCP as ruling party and made Chinese leadership rethink its international position.<sup>11</sup> This explains China's shift towards South-East Asian countries and their important overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*) populations. Chinese leadership's attempt to call on the *huaqiao* to contribute to the economic build-up of the home country was famously phrased as follows by Deng Xiaoping: "No matter what clothes they wear or what political stand they take, all Chinese have a sense of pride and identification with the Chinese nation and would want the People's Republic of China to become strong and prosperous".<sup>12</sup> This statement is both a clear illustration of China's turn to the non-Western world and a witness of the continuation of the country's 'developmental nationalism'. It is also in the aftermath of the Tiananmen crisis that China renewed its approach to the African countries that now became important economic partners.

The birth of independent states in Central Asia that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union – the Chinese leadership's conviction that this dissolution was due to the Soviet army's lack of loyalty to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union explains the return of ideology in the 'People's Liberation Army' (*Renmin jiefang jun*; PLA), also in the Xi Jinping era –<sup>13</sup> was perceived as entailing the risk of a possible rise of ethno-nationalism in China's own western region. Such an ethno-nationalism might easily find support, so it was thought, in radical forms of Islam, pan-Islamism or, the majority of the Muslims in China's western regions speaking Turkic languages, a form of pan-Turkism.<sup>14</sup> Be that as it may, the power vacuum created by the disappearance of Soviet control over Central Asia also opened important geostrategic and geo-economic opportunities for China – it was task to forge political and economic ties with the five Central Asian republics before other powers did.

9 Mary Matossian, "Ideologies of Delayed Industrialization," in *Political Development and Social Change*, ed. Jason L. Finkle and Richard W. Gable (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1971), 113-122 in this respect claims that a pragmatic attitude that accepts those Western elements that are supportive of national interest and strength are of primordial importance for 'developmental nationalism' to be successful.

10 Also see: Zhimin Chen, "Nationalism, Internationalism and Chinese foreign Policy," *Journal of Contemporary China* 14, no. 42 (2005).

11 David Shambaugh, *China's Future*. (Cambridge/Malden: Polity, 2016), 104-105, 107-110.

12 Xiaoping Deng, *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (1982-1992)* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1994), 111.

13 As Sulmaan Wasif Khan, *Haunted by Chaos*, 206 states: "China would have to strengthen political training in the troops, make sure the men with guns were properly versed in ideology."

14 Thierry Kellner, "China's Rise in Central Asia: The Dragon Enters the Heart of Eurasia," in *Interpreting China as a Regional and Global Power. Nationalism and Historical Consciousness in World Politics*, ed. Bart Dessein (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: PalgraveMacmillan, 2014), 217.

## 'All-under-heaven' and China's 'Belt and Road Initiative'

The larger than homeland ambitions of a China that has regained optimism, self-confidence, and ambition, has recently been incarnated in the Confucian inspired term 'harmonious world' (*hexie shijie*). A reappraisal of Confucianism does not only have to bestow the Chinese citizens with a feeling of 'sense,' but also gives the Chinese state a new *raison d'être*, both in its homeland affairs and in its 'all-under-heaven' aspirations.<sup>15</sup> That is to say, China's economic success, combined with a power balance in the world that shifts to the favor of the 'non-West,' have arguably bolstered China's aspiration to regain a central role in the world. After the 'century of humiliation' had been instrumentalized as 'chosen trauma' in order to rally the Chinese people around the CCP leadership and its nationalist goal,<sup>16</sup> the current State President Xi Jinping's 'rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (*minzu*)' can thus be seen as the 'chosen glory' that has to make up for this 'chosen trauma'.<sup>17</sup>

That, compared to the 'hide the capabilities and bide the time' motto of the Deng Xiaoping era, Chinese foreign policy has indeed taken a more pro-active stance is, among others, clear from the grand development initiative that is the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (*yi dai yi lu*; BRI), launched in 2013. The BRI therefore arguably initiated a third phase in China's foreign policy after the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao periods in which the motto had been 'peaceful rise / peaceful development' (*heping jueqi/heping fazhan*).

The official statement that the aim of the land and the sea connections that the BRI entails is "improving connectivity throughout Asia, Europe and Africa through a policy of financing and building transport infrastructure across Eurasia, the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean,"<sup>18</sup> points at the important strategic goal of the BRI: implementing an alternative continental route to the west that can reduce China's dependence of trade and energy imports on the maritime routes that go through the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea. From a geopolitical and geo-economic perspective, the BRI can also be seen as a continuation of the 'Shanghai Cooperation Organization' (*Shanghai hezuo zuzhi*; SCO) that was established in 2001 as a successor to the 'Shanghai Group' that was, itself, established in 1996.<sup>19</sup> Comprising China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, this first-ever organization of global governance established on Chinese initiative started as an organization aimed at combatting terrorism, separatism, and extremism,<sup>20</sup> but has gradually developed to be an

15 According to Yongnian Zheng and Tok Sow Keat, *'Harmonious Society' and 'Harmonious World': China's Policy Discourse under Hu Jintao* (The University of Nottingham, China Policy Institute: Briefing Series 26, 2007), 2, China needs a more pro-active role when it wants to shape its own destiny, both internally and externally. The concept 'harmonious world' is hereby seen as applicable to both China's domestic and its foreign policies.

16 This is, e.g., visible in such statements as "Western hostile forces have not given up the wild ambition of trying to subjugate us, intensifying the political strategy of Westernizing and dividing up China," made by then Chinese State President Hu Jintao in a speech he delivered on 24 December 2004 on the main tasks of the PLA. Quoted in: Alison A. Kaufman, "The 'Century of Humiliation,' Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order," *Pacific focus* 25, no. 1 (2010): 12-13.

17 For the notions of 'chosen trauma' and 'chosen glory' see: Volkan Vamik, "Chosen Traumas and Their Impact on Current Political/Social Conflicts," in *Social Trauma – An Interdisciplinary Textbook*, ed. Andreas Hamburger, Camelia Hancheva, Vamik D. Volkan (Cham: Springer, 2021), 21-22.

18 Xinhua. *Vision and actions on jointly building Belt and Road*. <http://2017.beltandroadforum.org/english/n100/2017/0410/c22-45.html> (accessed on February 13 2022).

19 Fabio Indeo, "The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Central Asia: Building New Relations in a Reshaped Geopolitical Scenario," in *China's Belt and Road Initiative. Changing the Rules of Globalization*, ed. Wenxian Zhang, Ilan Alon, Christoph Lattemann (Cham: Palgravemacmillan, 2018), 136.

20 Mirzokhid Rakhimov, "Contemporary Central Asia: Balancing Between Chinese and Trans-Asian 'Silk Road' Diplomacy," in *China's Global Rebalancing and the New Silk Road*, ed. B.R. Deepak (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 121.



instrument to advance trade and economic cooperation as well.<sup>21</sup> Further economic development through the BRI is meant to reduce security threats and to stabilize the Central Asian region and the country's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.<sup>22</sup>

Answering the question of whether China's BRI is part of a 'grand strategy' is partly determined by the assumption that China's geopolitical strategy is like the Asian board game *Go*. Whereas, as stated by Tanguy Struye de Swielande, "Western strategic culture favors games like chess, where the confrontation is direct and the objective is the defeat of the adversary",<sup>23</sup> Asian culture would be characterized by a preference for an indirect approach. Tanguy Struye de Swielande continues: "In the Game of *Go*, the actions are at first glance not related. The logic of the actions reveals itself at a later stage. Success is not the result of one shot, but rather of multiple actions in the service of one grand strategy, and the emphasis is more on strategies of relations and less on strategies of confrontation".<sup>24</sup> The following characterization of the *modus operandi* and the rationale behind the BRI by Wu Zelin may indeed be illustrative of the Game of *Go*:

"[U]nlike European integration which is oriented towards institutional development, the functional cooperation of the 'BRI' is guided by project construction. This is a 'bottom-up' integration model starting from 'a point' to 'a line' and then from 'a line' to 'a plane' [...] This 'project' is like a jigsaw puzzle scattered around a room full of debris. Only when we start to link these points together can we see how these pieces together make up the grand economic scene in the 21<sup>st</sup> century".<sup>25</sup>

It is important to note that China emphasizes that initiatives such as the BRI do not seek to overthrow the existing global order, but instead want to make changes that are necessary to make the existing system more in accordance with the new realities. Avery Goldstein called this the 'reform' aspect of China's foreign policies in the Xi Jinping era. In this sense, Avery Goldstein assesses the BRI as of less strategic significance than it is mostly portrayed to be. He enumerates the following reasons for this: (1) the BRI may be nothing more than an outlet for Chinese companies faced with problems of excess capacity because of declining domestic demand for large-scale infrastructure projects; (2) many BRI investments are not new projects, but are expansions of China's already bigger international economic footprint that emerged after Jiang Zemin's call at the turn of the century for China's businesses to 'go out' (*zouchuqu*); (3) before Xi Jinping succeeded Hu Jintao, there were already suggestions that China should 'march westward' (*xi qu*) to evade friction with the US and its allies in maritime East Asia; and (4) many BRI projects were initiated by enterprising local officials and businesses pursuing their self-interest rather than serving a larger national purpose.<sup>26</sup> This assessment is corroborated by the observation by Jasper Roctus that, similar to the earlier 'reform and opening-up' policies that were essentially an empty box, inviting Western countries to engage with China, also the BRI is a deliberately 'empty' concept, an "ambiguous heading

21 Fabienne Bossuyt, "Engaging with Central Asia: China compared to the European Union," in *China, the European Union, and the developing world: a triangular relationship*, ed. Jan Wouters, Jean-Christophe Defraigne and Matthieu Burnay (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2015), 230. Note that India and Pakistan joined the SCO in 2016, showing the potential of the SCO to become a broad multilateral platform for security and economic cooperation throughout multiple regions in Asia.

22 Anastas Vangeli, "China's New Silk Road and Its Impact on Sino-European Relations," *EU-China Observer* 1, no. 15 (2015): 21.

23 Tanguy Struye de Swielande, "The Indo-Pacific: The New Great Game between China and the United States," in *Interpreting China as a Regional and Global Power. Nationalism and Historical Consciousness in World Politics*, ed. Bart Dessein (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: PalgraveMacmillan, 2014), 176.

24 Ibid.

25 Zelin Wu, "Functional Logic of the Belt and Road Initiative: Interpretation from the Perspective of Geo-economics," *The Belt & Road Studies* 3 (2019): 94.

26 Goldstein, "China's Grand Strategy under Xi Jinping," 186.

for a hotchpotch of many divergent local experiments".<sup>27</sup> That is to say that, looked at from the *longue durée*, the BRI is merely a continuation of the 'developmental nationalism' of the Deng Xiaoping era that for China is tantamount for continued economic development and maintained national cohesion.

The contemporary rising tensions between the US and China over limited reciprocity in terms of market access, China's use of state-backed enterprises to gain a competitive advantage, and disappointment about the fact that, in China, the democratization process as a result of economic development does not seem to be realizing, have undeniable also started to encroach on the relation between the European Union (EU) and China. Just like in the US, also in the EU the debate on economic self-reliance and diversification in supply chains is prominently present. This is, among others, evident from the EU's '*open strategic autonomy*' policy that is meant "to balance the benefits of economic interdependence with growing demands to manage Europe's exposure to the risks it entails".<sup>28</sup>

Knowing that a nationalist aspect has permeated China's policies ever since the 'century of humiliation,' the contemporary call for self-reliance and decoupling that is getting louder now that China has, among others, been characterized as "a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance"<sup>29</sup> – a situation that has been aggravated by the ongoing Covid-19 crisis in which Western economies have been painfully confronted with the negative impact of their dependence on China – entails the risk that it further enhances nationalist forces in China. This brings us to one of the paradoxes of the Xi Jinping era. China may have come of age as an economic and increasingly also political and military great power, a decoupling could cut it off from the necessary technology it needs for further economic growth. An impediment to economic growth could negatively impact the country's national cohesion.

To this has to be added that the heritage of the 'century of humiliation' also regards issues which China considers to be its 'core interests'. Currently most prominent in this category is the Taiwan issue that, from a PRC perspective, is part of the traditional 'all-under-heaven' and is as such comprised within its 'harmonious world' concept. Reflecting on the cross-strait relations since the Deng Xiaoping era, Sulmaan Wasif Khan observes that the better the promise of 'one country, two systems' (*yi guo, liang zhi*) – a concept first put forward in the 1980s to grant Taiwan total internal autonomy in the framework of a status as 'Special Administrative Region' – was held in Hong Kong, the more likely it would be that the US would not object to applying this possibility also for Taiwan.<sup>30</sup> Current developments in Hong Kong, however, encourage Taiwan not to seek closer alliance with the PRC, but to seek closer contacts with other partners in the region so as to balance the mounting Chinese power.<sup>31</sup> The sting herein may be that the Chinese population is not only increasingly demanding towards its leaders on economic welfare, but that it also wants to be treated respectfully in the international system.

27 Jasper Roctus, Remolding China's 'Empty' Belt and Road Initiative: An Opportunity for the EU. Egmont Security Policy Brief. No.128 (2020), 4.

28 Tobias Gehrke, "Threading the Trade Needle on Open Strategic Autonomy," in *Strategic Autonomy and the Transformation of the EU New Agendas for Security, Diplomacy, Trade and Technology*, ed. Niklas Helwig 67 (2021), 91.

29 European Commission, *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council. EU-China – A strategic outlook*, (2019), <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf> (accessed on January 29 2022).

30 Khan, *Haunted by Chaos*, 148.

31 Stefan P. Fleischauer, "Non-state negotiations between China and Taiwan – on the road to European-style integration?" in *Chinese (Taiwan) Yearbook of International Law and Affairs*, 26 (2008), 12.

## By way of Conclusion: What about Europe?

Taking into account that the BRI lacks a strategic moment now that doubt about and criticism on the BRI have arisen in some countries that already engaged in BRI projects, and taking into account that Europe is one of the major aims of the whole BRI project, the EU has the power to give the project the necessary credibility. Seen from this perspective, the BRI might be the perfect opportunity for the EU to implement a policy of 'principled pragmatism' in order to "remold the project from within by making conforming to EU standards a requirement for joint initiatives".<sup>32</sup> The possibility for a policy of 'principled pragmatism' is implied in the document '*EU-China – A strategic outlook*' already referred to, that not only characterizes China as a 'systemic rival,' but also as a cooperation partner, a negotiation partner, and an economic competitor.<sup>33</sup>

A policy of 'principled pragmatism' is also possible with respect to Taiwan that, as a result of the EU's tight adherence on the 'One China Policy' has remained relatively invisible in Europe. It may be so that, in the past, the European Parliament has maintained a policy in which political engagements were merely in the service of the economy,<sup>34</sup> recent developments appear to lead the EU to review its position. An EU attitude of 'principled pragmatism' may here mean that – in the spirit of Robert Schuman – continued economic engagement with both the PRC's BRI and with Taiwan should not be an obstacle for the EU to show its appreciation for Taiwan's adherence to the rule of law and as a defender of human rights and democratic values. This would also boost the validity of the EU as a normative power. ●

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32 Roctus, *Remolding China's 'Empty' Belt and Road Initiative: An Opportunity for the EU*, 5.

33 European Commission, *EU-China – A strategic outlook*, 1.

34 Françoise Mengin, "A Functional Relationship: Political Extensions to Europe-Taiwan Economic Ties," *The China Quarterly* 169 (2002): 136-153.



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