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Europe, China and the expectations for human rights

Executive summary - The issue of human rights has been difficult to deal with in the official relationship between the EU and the Chinese government, and has also been controversial in public opinion and in the media. For instance, when Europe speaks of human rights, either explicitly or implicitly it means almost always civil and political rights, and argues that they are fundamental. China on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of economic and social rights and argues that human rights as conceived in Europe are dependant on a process of development which may be long term, and that the basic right to subsistence must come first.

In Europe there is a widespread view which argues that as economic development takes place in China there will be increasing demands for human rights. The theory argues that economic development is related to a transition from traditional to modern and then post-modern values. On the basis of global surveys of values, it is argued that changes in values bring about a shift from traditional to secular-rational values and from survival to self-expression values.

Contrary to beliefs widely held in Europe, this article will show that people in China have a very positive view of their human rights. Furthermore, when the data is analyzed by age group, occupation and education level, it shows that younger, economically better off and educated Chinese have a more positive view of their human rights. When Chinese are asked to give priorities, human rights values as they are defined in Europe are placed lower than they are by European respondents. Furthermore, younger, better off and more educated Chinese give significantly higher preference for priorities such as maintaining stability over human rights such as freedom of speech.

The evidence challenges expectations in Europe. The perceptions held in Europe of human rights in China appear to be at odds with those of Chinese themselves. This has implications for policies adopted in Europe, since a policy based on an assessment of conditions in China that is at variance with how Chinese see their own condition is unlikely to gain acceptance by those it claims to benefit.

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Europe, China and Expectations for Human Rights

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Abstract. This paper argues that the difference in perception of human rights between China and the EU is not confined to their official positions, but is also reflected in how Europeans and Chinese citizens see their human rights. There is strong evidence to suggest that the beliefs held in Europe on human rights and their likely development do not find much resonance in China itself. There is an implicit modernization theory behind widespread expectations that economic development in China will lead to increasing demands for human rights. The evidence based on international surveys suggests that this expectation is unlikely to be fulfilled. The priority given to human rights by the public in China is different from European views, and is likely to remain so. This in turn suggests that European policy on human rights in China is based on suppositions that conflict with how Chinese themselves see their world, and may therefore not be effective. Both Europe and China may have to accept that the others' public opinion may vary considerably from what they would like it to be. *Topics:* norms, human rights and EU-China relations.

1. Introduction

The issue of human rights has been one of the most sensitive elements in the EU-China relationship. It has been difficult to deal with in the official relationship between the EU and the Chinese government, and has also been controversial in public opinion and in the media. The question of human rights often appears to be the aspect of their relationship where the differences between Europe and China are the greatest and the most destabilizing. In recent times we have seen this with regard to specific issues such as Tibet, notably when President Sarkozy as holder of the EU Presidency met the Dalai Lama in 2008, and a generalized criticism in Europe of China on human rights surrounding the Beijing Olympics,

notably during the Olympic torch procession and when a boycott of the event by European leaders was widely advocated.

The concept of human rights is controversial between China and Europe. This paper will explore some of the implications resulting from the contention over human rights. The main purpose will not be to rehearse in detail the history of human rights policy in the EU-China relationship, or the differences in conception of human rights. The historical and cultural background to the development of the idea of human rights in Europe and China and the details of official human rights policies has been extensively discussed elsewhere.¹ The idea of human rights is used in different contexts by different users. At least on one level, in the institutional relationship, the concept of human rights may be considered to be defined by the official positions of the EU and the Chinese government, and by the international covenants and other instruments to which they are bound. In specialized academic debate in both Europe and China the discussion of human rights may be very different, and the definition far from a settled matter, with differences within as well as between Europe and China. In public discussion and opinion, the definition may be less rigorously defined, but it is often here that the differences seem sharpest. For many in Europe, the question is simple: Europe respects human rights, China does not. Public opinion in China may be more difficult to gauge, at least from Europe's point of view, though as this paper will argue, it is an important part of the equation. The policy implications for both the EU and China are important. In Europe there are not only assumptions and expectations about public perceptions of human rights in China, but also their relationship to other issues, notably economic development, and how they will evolve. Or, to borrow the words of Leonard Cohen, there is an expectation that Western ideas of human rights familiar in Manhattan and Berlin will take Beijing, and that they will they change the system from within. This paper will argue that these expectations are probably misplaced, and that there may actually be a growing gap between views on human rights held by Europeans and Chinese.

"Human rights are almost never defined in European media coverage."

2. Human rights in the EU-China Relationship

European media coverage of human rights in China tends to be highly critical. Discussion of the human rights issue has focused on a number of questions in recent years. There is coverage of specific cases of abuses, larger questions such as Tibet or the general criticism regarding human rights in China around the Olympics. There has also been reporting of human rights in countries in which China is considered to have a high degree of influence, such as Myanmar or Sudan. The coverage in the European media of human rights in China fluctuates with the news cycle. The violence in Tibet in March 2008 caused a peak in media discussion of human rights in Tibet. But the Olympics brought human rights to the fore throughout the year in a way that was unlike anything seen since 1989. While events in China, like those in Tibet partially explain this, quite clearly it was also the result of the efforts by Western interest groups to raise awareness of human rights problems in China that helped to push the news agenda.

European media coverage of this issue is almost uniformly negative, focusing on the problems in China from the Western perspective. Most European reporting is focused on political and civil human rights. Human rights are almost never defined in European media coverage, but the context makes clear that this is the meaning attached to the concept. Broader questions of human rights as they might be conceived even in the West, such as economic and social rights, are generally ignored. The wider context of human rights developments in China is also not discussed. Discussion of human rights in China is often associated with description of China as a dictatorship or totalitarian. A popular comparison was between the Beijing Olympics of 2008 and those in Berlin in 1936. Many commentators in the European press both attacked the human rights record of China, and also their own government for failure to address the issue, either by allowing athletes to participate in the games, or by not boycotting Olympic ceremonies. The Olympic Torch relay began the season of commentary earlier than would otherwise have been the case.²

Some commentators recognized that Chinese may not perceive human rights as Europeans do, but nevertheless still asserted that they are oppressed. "The Chinese are not "free", but outside Tibet - and with a few other high-profile exceptions - they wear their oppression lightly. I detected no great clamour for democracy at this stage in the country's development. Security and prosperity come higher on most people's wish list."³ This commentator was a rare voice who questioned the idea that European values on human rights were applicable in China: "The expectation that China should be like the West, because it is getting rich like the West, is as facile as the thesis that capitalism necessarily leads to liberty. Of all liberal fallacies, none is more curious than the assumption, applied to countries such as Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan, that they can become democracies at the flick of switch."⁴ Politicians who were willing to defend China on human rights were rare in 2008. Those such as David Livingstone, the former mayor of London, who said, "We have got to the point where we have a different set of human rights than the Chinese have, but the Chinese are making the right progress and they are making it in their own way,"⁵ were swimming against the tide of media and public opinion.

The problem may be two-fold. There are differences in the conception of human rights themselves resulting from their divergent cultures, histories and official policies. But human rights are not concepts or a set of issues to be considered in isolation, they are one element of a complex of problems that require the setting of priorities. Since the 1990s

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the Chinese government has officially accepted much of the international conceptual and formal institutional framework in which human rights are discussed that had previously been the preserve of Western critics of China. While previously it was

ignored or rejected, China appeared to accept the international discourse on human rights following its first Human Rights White Paper, which was published in 1991. By signing the main United Nations human rights covenants, China emphasized its entry into the arena of international legal

institutional framework of human rights, even if the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights has not been ratified. China also is a part of the United Nations process on human rights, and in the case of Europe has considerable interaction with the EU and Member States on the question through official dialogues. However, the apparent acceptance of the international discourse, and definitions, of human rights, has not produced a meeting of minds.

Even if the definitions embodied in international frameworks are apparently accepted as valid by China as well as Europe, there are still fundamental differences in how they are viewed. For instance, when Europe speaks of human rights, either explicitly or implicitly, it means almost always civil and political rights, and argues that they are fundamental. China on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of economic and social rights and argues that human rights are dependant on a process of development which may be long term, and that the basic right to subsistence must come before less essential rights. How rights fit into the complex is one of the key dividers. In Europe human rights are also seen as part of a development process, although somewhat differently. Broadly speaking, there is a belief that economic development and human rights go together. These expectations inform either explicitly or implicitly European views of human rights in China. The EU has set out its position in policy documents concerning China:

The Chinese leadership has repeatedly stated its support for reform, including on basic rights and freedoms. But in this area progress on the ground has been limited. The EU must consider how it can most effectively assist China's reform process, making the case that better protection of human rights, a more open society, and more accountable government would be beneficial to China, and essential for continued economic growth.

Democracy, human rights and the promotion of common values remain fundamental tenets of EU policy and of central importance to bilateral relations. The EU should support and encourage the

development of a full, healthy and independent civil society in China. It should support efforts to strengthen the rule of law - an essential basis for all other reform.

At the same time, the EU will continue to encourage full respect of fundamental rights and freedoms in all regions of China; freedom of speech, religion and association, the right to a fair trial and the protection of minorities call for particular attention - in all regions of China. The EU will also encourage China to be an active and constructive partner in the Human Rights Council, holding China to the values which the UN embraces, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.⁶

The EU position here is that greater respect for human rights is not just important in itself, but that it is necessary for economic development. The pragmatic argument is perhaps intended to be persuasive in China, by giving human rights a positive spin they seem less of a threat than they might otherwise be. However, the view that human rights are necessary for economic development contrasts with another common position to be found in Europe, which is that demands for human rights in China will necessarily follow economic development.

The UK's Business Secretary, Lord Mandelson, who was previously the EU Trade Commissioner and is someone who could be said to know more about dealing with China than many European politicians, following a speech in September 2009 at the Central Party School in Beijing argued that China should improve its human rights record. He was reported as saying, "My view is that as standards of living rise in China then we are going to see [the desire for] all these rights rising across society; people will wish to live more freely."⁷ This, he argued would be beneficial to China: "As development becomes more inclusive and people become richer, so too will their desire for [self] expression. As their desire to express themselves becomes stronger so will their creativity become stronger which will be a major driver of economic growth in China." Mandelson also articulated the common European understanding that human rights are not relative, but

apply no matter what the level of development of a society. Mandelson's arguments reflect the common European view that human rights mean civil and political rights, they are universal, and that they are linked to economic development. Lord Mandelson managed to argue both that human rights must follow economic development, and that they are good for growth. Such views are repeated by other commentators. One economist wrote on the role of China in the world economy, "This broadening out of China's economy will keep driving growth - meaning the People's Republic, more and more, will act as the world's commercial locomotive," and went to say "It also means that as China's economy keeps delivering, so its political freedoms will eventually follow. And that trend, more than any external influence, will improve its record on human rights."⁸ Europeans often appear to believe they have both morality and history on their side when it comes to human rights. Human rights are both morally right and historically inevitable, at least so long a economic growth takes place, as it has in China. Their policy, with timid soft power, is to give history a push in the right direction.

The Chinese government, while perhaps not seeking to halt the march of history, seems determined to control the speed and direction of its progress. The Chinese position also argues that human rights are dependant on economic development. But it argues for a hierarchy. In its official policy pronouncements, the Chinese government does not directly reject Western concepts of human rights. It does, however, emphasize different rights over those that are the focus of most Europeans. At the very beginning of its entry into the discussion of human rights, the Chinese government asserted that, "It is a simple truth that, for any country or nation, the right to subsistence is the most important of all human rights, without which the other rights are out of the question."⁹ China has subsequently stuck to this simple truth that economic and social rights have precedence over civil and political rights. Other rights can be enjoyed once the basic rights have been fulfilled, and

"China has subsequently stuck to this simple truth that economic and social rights have precedence over civil and political rights. Other rights can be enjoyed once the basic rights have been fulfilled."

China has still barely advanced beyond being in a position to satisfy even all of the rights to subsistence, hence to focus discussion on the rights to which European's give priority is premature at the very least.

These, in broad terms, are the positions, or expectations, in Europe and China. The position that demands for human rights are linked to economic development is common in the West. There are academic theories that provide a model to explain how this relationship works. One such theory is modernization theory, which regained popularity as a result of the "third wave of democratization" and the apparent intrinsic relationship between economic development and democracy.¹⁰ Its essential thesis is that economic development and changes in values are linked. As the development of a nation's economy passes through different stages there are accompanying changes in values. This model does not have to be as deterministic as some popular analyses arguing that economic development causes changes in values or the spread of democracy. In one of its best-known forms, the model proposed by Robert Inglehart and others, has been used to analyze the changes in values and the spread of democracy around the world, including in Asia, in recent decades.¹¹ Inglehart himself does not subscribe to a crude economic determinism, and has said that other factors may play a role. "Our thesis is that economic development has systematic and, to some extent, predictable cultural and political consequences," he claimed, "These consequences are not iron laws of history; they are probabilistic trends. Nevertheless, the probability is high that certain changes will occur, once a society has embarked on industrialization."¹²

Inglehart and his collaborators, avoid describing changes in values as being determined by economic development, preferring to describe them as being "linked" or "in coherent and even, to some extent, predictable patterns"¹³. In its more recent form, the theory has argued that while industrialization produced a shift in values from traditional societies, the advent of advanced industrial societies has produced post-modern values. Inglehart and his collaborators have described a shift from traditional to secular-rational values and from survival to self-expression values which accompany this process. In part this shift implies greater emphasis on values of self-expression and democracy.

In essence the theory argues that increasing wealth in a nation leads to demands for political reform, democracy or human rights. The theory, or something close to it, has gained a certain currency beyond the academic world and appears to inform many opinions on the relationship between economic and political development. The idea that demands for human rights will increase as economic growth in China continues reflects the prevalence of this analysis. The argument has been restated recently by Inglehart and Welzel with specific reference to China: “[a]lthough many observers have been alarmed by the economic resurgence of China, this growth has positive implications for the long term. Beneath China’s seemingly monolithic political structure, the social infrastructure of democratization is emerging, and it has progressed further than most observers realize. China is now approaching the level of mass emphasis on self-expression values at which Chile, Poland, South Korea, and Taiwan made their transitions to democracy.”¹⁴

It is not the purpose of this paper to analyze the application of modernization theory to China’s political development. The purpose is to explore the implications of the widespread expectation concerning human rights in China as exemplified by the comments of Lord Mandelson, which appears to inform much thinking on the subject in Europe. As we have seen, in Europe there is 1. a belief that the human rights situation in China is bad and that it must improve 2. an expectation that Chinese themselves will demand improvement in their human rights as Europeans define them, especially if economic development continues or that 3. human rights as they are conceived in Europe are beneficial or even necessary for economic development. Will the path that has been followed as wealth grew and values changed in the US, Europe and some parts of Asia be followed by China as the modernization theory argues? Or, to paraphrase the words of Leonard Cohen, after China has given 20 years of sacrifice for economic growth, will the values that have taken Manhattan and then Berlin, next take Beijing and change the system from within?

This paper will argue that the difference in perception of human rights between China and the EU is not confined to their official positions, but is also reflected in how Europeans and Chinese see their human rights. There

is strong evidence to suggest that the beliefs held in Europe on human rights and their likely development do not find much resonance in China itself. Europeans often say that China must recognize that human rights are important to Europe, and that European public opinion demands that governments and the EU take action, but the reverse may also be true. Europe will have to accept that the weight given to human rights in China is different, and that the demands of Chinese public opinion also are not the same. This in turn suggests that European policy on human rights in China is based on suppositions that conflict with how Chinese themselves see their world, and may therefore not be effective. Chinese officials often argue that Europeans do not understand China, and that European views expressed on human rights in China are based on ignorance. Both Europe and China may have to accept that the others’ public opinion may vary considerably from they would like it to be.

2. How Chinese and Europeans Assess Their Rights

The assertion by politicians or journalists to support the idea that demands for human rights will follow economic growth in China often appears to be based on no more than an implicit belief that it has happened elsewhere, especially in Asia, so China will inevitably follow. Modernization theory as proposed by Inglehart and his collaborators is more rigorous in its approach and makes considerable use of survey data from the World Values Survey (WVS) to support its thesis. China has been included in the WVS since the 1990s, and this provides a considerable amount of data on the values of Chinese.¹⁵ The two most recent waves of the survey carried out in China in 2001 and 2007 have included a question that specifically asks Chinese respondents to assess the human rights situation in their own country. This question, along with others also asked in some European countries, provides insight into perceptions of human rights in China and Europe. The data suggest that there are fundamental differences in these perceptions.

The WVS asks a question on the degree to which human rights are respected in the respondent’s country.¹⁶ The question asked whether in the

respondent's country there was a lot, some, not much or no respect for individual human rights. The answers from China and a sample group of countries in Europe challenge common European beliefs about the Chinese human rights situation. Although in Europe there are high percentages of respondents who are moderately positive in their view of how their human rights are respected, the numbers who believe that there is a lot of respect for human rights are generally very low compared to China. In China in 2007, 24% of respondents answered that there was a lot of respect for individual human rights, and only 2.3% said there was no respect at all. This compared with 14.5% in Germany who said there was a lot of respect for human rights, 16.3% in Sweden and 4.5% in Poland. In China, 64.5% of respondents gave positive answers to the question, similar to and in some cases more than the proportion in European countries. Indeed, in China only 11.4% said there was not much or no respect for human rights, a percentage that was considerably less than that for most European countries.

	Total	A lot	Some	Not much	None at all	Don't know
Italy	1012	4.4	50.8	37.6	4.2	2.3
Sweden	1003	16.3	67.4	14.9	0.5	0.9
Poland	1000	4.5	59.7	30.5	4.4	0.8
China	2015	24.0	40.5	9.1	2.3	23.5
Taiwan	1227	9.4	56.4	30.8	2.7	0.6
Germany	2064	14.5	51.5	29.3	1.8	2.5

Table 1. Respect for Human Rights in China and European Countries (percent). Source: WVS.¹⁷

The data shows that in China there are many more people with a strongly positive view of their existing human rights than their European counterparts. By contrast, in Europe, there are significant percentages of respondents who believe that there is not much respect for human rights, while in China there are very few. At the very least, these figures appear to question the notion that the Chinese people are in a state of widespread incipient revolt over human rights issues, only waiting for the right moment in order to assert their rights. Of course, the question asked and the

responses raise even more questions than are answered. What is "a lot of respect", "some", "not much" or "none"? A lot of respect compared to what: an objective standard as set out in the UN covenants, how much the respondent personally would like, or compared other countries or to the past? At least on the surface this last may be important in China where memories of events such as the Cultural Revolution may colour perceptions of at least some Chinese. Equally important, the question provides no definition of human rights, which leaves open whether those rights that Chinese say they believe are respected a lot are the same as those that Europeans believe are not respected quite so much. Even if these questions cannot be answered on the basis of the survey data, they provide strong evidence that there are marked differences between Europe and China.

3. How Chinese and Europeans See Using Their Rights

Perceptions of human rights do not just concern an abstract belief about whether they may exist or are respected, they are also about whether they can be exercised. Civil or political rights that Europeans focus on are to be exercised. Are they exercised or are citizens willing to exercise them? For Europeans the question of human rights often revolves round issues of freedom of speech or expression. The WVS asks questions on political activity outside the formal sphere of elections, such as signing petitions, participating in boycotts and demonstrations that can be taken as a measure of demands to exercise these rights.¹⁸ The data indicates that such forms of activity are seen very differently in China and Europe.

According to the latest round of survey data, only 5.9% of people in China have signed a petition. This compared with 66.4% of people in France, 65.9% in the UK and 77.6% in Sweden who have signed a petition. By contrast, 47.3% of people in China said they would never sign a petition. In most European countries the proportion of respondents who say they would never sign a petition generally ranges between 10-20%, although a notable exception is Sweden where only 5% said they would never sign one. In China it would appear that there are few people who do exercise what

could be considered a simple form of the basic right to freedom of expression. However, the survey results leave open the issue of what is meant by signing a petition, and how it is perceived by those who undertake such an action. Petitioning authorities for redress of wrongs has a long history in China. Although the survey used the normal translation of the current Western idea of a petition (请愿书 qingyuanshu), the historically and culturally influenced conception of signing a petition in the West may be very different from how such an act is seen in China, where the significance of petitioning the emperor, or even the Chinese government as is still done today, for redress carries a burden of implications that may be much weightier for the individual than in Europe. While in Europe organizing or signing a petition is often the first resort for those seeking the righting wrongs, in China petitioning authorities for instance through the current official system of “letters and visits” has often been the last.

	Total	Have done	Might do	Would never do	Don't know
France	1001	66.4	22.8	10.3	0.3
UK	1041	65.9	22.5	8.3	2.7
Italy	1012	52.1	30.9	13.4	3.0
Netherlands	1050	42.1	34.7	15.1	4.9
Sweden	1003	77.6	16.6	5.0	0.7
Poland	1000	22.5	28.7	44.8	4.0
China	2015	5.9	44.0	47.3	2.1
Taiwan	1227	10.1	18.0	71.9	-
Germany	2064	48.4	29.1	19.5	2.0

Table 2. Political Action: Signing a Petition (percent). Source: WVS.

The figures for participation in boycotts are similar. Boycotts have a long tradition in China’s modern history going back to the early 20th century, but significantly higher proportions of people in Europe say they have participated in a boycott than in China, although the margin of difference is lower than for petitions. Over half of Chinese said that they would not participate in a boycott. Here, however, the difference with Europe was less marked, with high proportions in some European countries also saying they

would not participate in a boycott. In China 41.6% of respondents said they might join a boycott, much higher than the figure in Taiwan and Poland, and not very different from Germany. The apparent willingness to consider participation in a boycott may also have its historical and cultural roots in China, where such actions have a considerable history, most notably as forms of protest against the actions of foreign powers in China.

	Total	Have done	Might do	Would never do	Don't know
France	1001	13.9	41.7	42.6	1.6
UK	1041	16.2	35.7	42.3	4.4
Italy	1012	18.6	47.0	28.6	5.2
Netherlands	1050	11.9	36.9	38.7	8.6
Poland	1000	4.7	18.5	71.9	4.9
China	2015	3.3	41.6	52.2	2.1
Taiwan	1227	2.6	16.6	80.7	0.1
Germany	2064	8.9	38.2	47.4	4.3

Table 3. Political Action: Joining a Boycott (percent). Source: WVS.

At the very least the data suggests that while people in China believe that their human rights are respected, there is some reluctance to participate in certain types of activity that in Europe would be considered an expression of fundamental human rights. However, the implication we can draw from this is not necessarily the obvious conclusion that this reluctance is the result of suppression of human rights in China. In Taiwan only 10.1 percent of respondents said that they had signed a petition, and a huge majority of 71.9 percent said that they would never sign one. Similarly, in Taiwan, only 2.6 percent of respondents said that they had participated in a boycott, and over 80 percent said they would never participate in one. Furthermore, only 5.8 percent of respondents in Taiwan said they had participated in a demonstration, and 74.6 percent said they would never do so. The comparative figure for mainland China is not available, since this question was not asked in the survey. The level of participation in demonstrations in Europe is very different. Perhaps not surprisingly, in Europe the French are among the most enthusiastic demonstrators, with

37.5 percent saying they have participated in a demonstration. There are considerable variations in Europe on this question. In the UK, only 16.6 percent of respondents said they have participated in a demonstration, and 38.6 percent saying they would never participate in one, while in Poland as many as 53.6 percent said they would not do so. Nevertheless, across Europe there appears to be a greater propensity to exercise this right than in China. The survey data appears to indicate that in China exercising some of the rights that are might be considered to be important expressions of the existence of human rights is not seen in the same way as Europe. Furthermore, the similarity in data from the mainland and Taiwan, which by most Western standards is democratic, and even in some cases Poland or Germany, suggests that the view on exercising these rights may be determined by complex factors that are not simply the result of repression, but is the result of historical or cultural influences that are much deeper than existing political systems.

	Total	Have done	Might do	Would never do	Don't know
France	1001	37.2	31.6	30.4	0.5
Great Britain	1041	15.9	43.0	37.0	2.8
Italy	1012	34.3	31.5	29.5	4.1
Netherlands	1050	18.5	33.7	39.6	4.5
Poland	1000	9.6	28.8	56.4	5.2
China	2015	-	-	-	-
Taiwan	1227	5.8	19.5	74.5	0.1
Germany	2064	29.5	37.4	28.9	3.1

Table 4. Political Action: Attending Lawful/Peaceful Demonstrations (percent). Source: WVS

4. Changing Views on Human Rights

A static snapshot indicates the differences at one moment in time. A key question in the EU-China relationship is the future evolution of human rights. Both the EU and China have a view on how human rights should

develop. The expectations of many in the EU are based on a view of how Chinese views of human rights will evolve. The data from the WVS provides an indication of how this is occurring. The apparent evolution that is taking place challenges some of the common assumptions made in Europe.

One of the noticeable differences between Europe and China on the question relating to the respect for human rights is the very high proportion of “don’t knows” among Chinese (see Table 1). These don’t knows in themselves may be as important as the definite answers. Are they genuine don’t knows, or a reflection of a reluctance to answer that in itself indicates something about human rights in China? The data suggests that the don’t knows are not a function of fear, but of age, education and employment, and are an important factor in assessing the development of perceptions of human rights in China, and the likelihood that the expectation of increasing demands for human rights will be fulfilled.

If we accept the expectation that economic development in China will lead to increased demands for human rights, then we could expect that younger, better educated and economically better off Chinese would have different, and probably stronger, views on human rights than their older, less educated and economically worse off compatriots. In fact, the picture is more complex than this, and the evidence suggests that what happens to all the ‘don’t knows’ is very important in the development of views of human rights in China.

In the survey of 2007 in China in response to the question on respect for human rights, 23.5 percent of respondents gave don’t know as their answer, far higher than any country in Europe. These don’t knows are not distributed evenly across the population of China: 28.7 percent of respondents aged 50 or more gave don’t know as their answer, in the 30-49 age group this fell to 23.1 percent and for the 15-29 age group it was only 11.3 percent. Younger Chinese have more definite views on human rights than their elders. The ‘don’t knows’ are also a function of education and economic status. In the survey, 29.8 percent of agricultural workers and 27.8 percent of unskilled manual workers gave don’t know as an answer compared to only 10 percent for professionals. At the same time, 43.3

percent of those with no formal education gave don't know as an answer, while the figure was only 9.5 percent for those with university education.

If in 2007 the 'don't knows' were much fewer among the younger Chinese, what answers do the young have that their elders don't? Among the 15-29 age group 12 percent of respondents believe that there is not much respect for human rights, compared to 5.7 percent among those aged 50 or more. There is certainly a larger percentage of young who believe that human rights are not respected, but there are also many more young who believe that they are respected: 48.5 percent of those aged 15-29 compared to 37.6 percent of those aged 50 or more. Compared to those positive views of human rights, those with negative perceptions remain a small minority even among the young. Even though slightly more of those aged 15-29 believe that there is no respect at all for human rights, they still only account of 3.3 percent of respondents.

	Total	15-29	30-49	50 +
There is a lot of respect for individual human rights	24.0	23.9	22.4	26.0
There is some respect	40.5	48.5	40.5	37.6
There is not much respect	9.1	12.0	11.1	5.7
There is no respect at all	2.3	3.3	2.5	1.8
Don't know	23.5	11.3	23.1	28.7
No answer	0.4	1.0	0.4	0.3
Total	2015	301	929	785

Table 5. Respect for Human Rights in China by Age Group (percent). Source: WVS.

Education also makes a difference, but again not in a simple way. While 43.3 percent of those with no formal education, and 26.8 percent of those who have only completed compulsory elementary education in China gave don't know as their answer, only 9.5 percent of those with university education did so. But both positive and negative opinions increase with higher levels of education. On the opposites of the educational scale, only 4.6 percent of those with no formal education believe there is not much respect for human rights, while 23.0 percent of those with university

education believe this to be the case. On the other hand, 26.0 percent of those with no formal education believe there is some respect for human rights in China, while 50.0 percent of those with university education believe there is. The proportion of those with a strongly positive view of human rights does decline slightly with higher education levels, but the proportion of those with a strong negative view is virtually the same across all levels of education at less than 3 percent of respondents. Education in China it would seem, gives people opinions on human rights, but they are not necessarily negative. In fact, they are more likely to be positive.

	Total	None ¹⁹	Elem ²⁰	Second tech ²¹	Second adv ²²	Higher ²³
a lot of respect	24.0	22.6	24.7	23.5	26.7	15.1
some respect	40.5	26.0	39.2	50.2	48.6	50.0
not much respect	9.1	4.6	7.0	15.5	9.1	23.0
no respect at all	2.3	2.7	1.9	2.4	2.4	2.4
Don't know	23.5	43.3	26.8	8.4	12.6	9.5
No answer	0.4	0.8	0.4	-	0.5	-
Total	2015	526	515	251	572	126

Table 6. Respect for Human Rights in China by Educational Level (percent). Source: WVS.

Why this should be so is not answered by the survey data. The most obvious answer, and one that is given considerable credence in Europe, is that the apparent passivity, or acceptance of a government position on human rights, is a matter of propaganda or indoctrination. The Chinese government indoctrination machine, especially in education, results in an acceptance of the government position. But such a simple assertion would appear to be belied by the fact that education appears to change don't knows into both negative and positive views. If indoctrination is the intention, the outcome is far from certain.

The effect of the occupation of respondents is similar. Almost 30 percent of agricultural workers gave don't know as the answer, as did 27.8 percent of unskilled manual workers. However, only 10 percent of

professional workers were 'don't knows'. Among agricultural workers and unskilled manual workers, slightly more than one third believe that human rights are somewhat respected. This rises to 54.2 percent among professional workers, although among this group there are fewer who have strongly positive views than among the agricultural and unskilled manual workers. There are more professional workers with negative views of human rights than among the agricultural and unskilled workers, but the proportion remains small. Those who believe that there is no respect for human rights, account for 2 percent of agricultural and unskilled manual workers, and 4.2 percent of professionals.

	Total	Empl./ manager ²⁴	Prof. worker ²⁵	Manual skilled ²⁶	Manual semi- skilled ²⁷	Manual unskilled ²⁸	Agr. ²⁹
a lot of respect	24.0	22.0	17.5	17.9	18.9	29.0	25.8
some respect	40.5	48.4	54.2	55.1	58.9	34.0	34.9
not much respect	9.1	8.8	14.2	12.8	4.4	7.4	7.1
no respect at all	2.3	5.5	4.2	3.8	3.3	1.9	2.0
Don't know	23.5	14.3	10.0	9.6	12.2	27.8	29.8
No answer	0.4	1.1	-	0.6	2.2	-	0.4
Total	2015	91	120	156	90	162	1092

Table 7. Respect for Human Rights in China by Professional (percent). Source: WVS.

Although education and economic status appear to affect views on human rights, this is not a simple cause and effect leading on one outcome. Greater education and economic welfare bring about an increase in both positive and negative views of human rights, but the net effect is apparently to cause the former to predominate over the latter. These findings are reinforced by data from other surveys. The data from the East-Asian Barometer (EAB) does not provide the comparative perspective as the WVS, but some of the questions it contains nevertheless provide insight into views related to human rights issues.³⁰ In the EAB survey, respondents are asked to give their view on how the situation with regard to whether people are free to say what they think at the present moment compares to how it was

before 1978.³¹ In the survey for 2002 in China 72.5 percent of respondents gave positive answers to this question, saying that the situation was somewhat better or much better than before. Only 2.7 percent said that it was somewhat or much worse than before. In general, the view was more positive the higher the level of education of the respondents. Of those who were illiterate 48.9 percent said the situation was somewhat better, while 58.2 percent of those with tertiary education gave the same reply. At the same time, while only 11.5 percent of those who were illiterate said the situation was much better than before, for those with tertiary education this was 25.2 percent. Once again don't knows, which were 25.1 percent for illiterates and 7.2 percent for those with tertiary education, are important. Those Chinese with education have a more positive view of the degree of freedom of speech in the comparison with the past than those with less education. Similar patterns can be found by age and income. Chinese with a high level of income have a much more positive view on this question than those with lower income levels.

On the surface, the breakdown of data in China appears to differ from that in European countries. In Germany the younger groups have more positive views of human rights than the older, although the difference is quite small. In Germany there is also a higher percentage of positive views with increased educational attainment. There also appear to be more positive views of human rights with higher employment status. Similarly in Italy, the younger groups have a slightly more positive view of human rights than their elders. There is a higher positive rating with greater education and also with professional status. In Europe at least, higher levels of education and economic success appear to lead to more positive views of human rights. Despite this, in many European countries there are significant minorities who have negative views of human rights. In China this is not the case. Those with negative views are a small minority, and those with a strongly negative view are marginal, as they are in most European countries. China does not share the same level of negative views as often exist in Europe. Views in China are not as positive as some European countries, but this is the result of the large percentage of don't knows among Chinese.

	Total	Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
Much worse	0.4	0.1	0.9	0.5	-
Somewhat worse	2.3	2.4	2.1	2.5	1.3
Much the same	9.9	10.6	11.1	9.9	5.6
Somewhat better	56.9	48.9	57.4	60.9	58.2
Much better	15.6	11.5	15.6	15.9	25.2
Not applicable	0.8	0.1	0.6	0.9	2.6
Don't know	13.3	25.1	11.4	8.6	7.2
No answer	0.8	1.3	0.9	0.7	-
Total	3183	829	533	1512	306

Table 8. Comparison of People's Freedom to Say What They Think by Education (percent). Source: EAB

	Total	Lowest	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Much worse	0.4	0.2	0.4	-	0.8	0.5
Somewhat worse	2.3	2.8	2.8	4.4	1.9	1.7
Much the same	9.9	10.4	13.7	11.5	8.6	9.2
Somewhat better	56.9	46.4	53.0	56.3	60.7	59.1
Much better	15.6	9.5	12.0	12.6	14.9	18.8
Not applicable	0.8	0.9	-	0.5	0.7	1.0
Don't know	13.3	27.8	18.1	13.7	11.4	9.1
No answer	0.8	1.9	-	0.8	1.0	0.6
Total	3183	431	249	364	590	1549

Table 9. Comparison of People's Freedom to Say What They Think by Income. Source: EAB

5. Human Rights as a Priority

Human rights are not viewed in isolation. Even in Europe, where there is a tendency at least in principle to assert the primacy of civil and political rights, they are actually seen as part of a complex of priorities. In their official positions the EU and China emphasize different human rights issues even within the panoply of Western concepts of human rights. The EU focuses on civil and political rights, whereas China gives priority to

economic and social rights. Where do the Chinese people stand on the issue? Are these official positions replicated in public opinion, and do priorities vary between Europe and China?

In China, the survey data suggests that low priority is given to human rights, or at least to those that Europe focuses on. Respondents in the WVS were asked to give their first priority among the following: 1. Maintaining order in the nation, 2. Giving people more say, 3. Fighting rising prices, 4. Protecting freedom of speech.³² Among Chinese only 3.8 percent gave protecting freedom of speech as their first choice. This compared with 34.9 percent for maintaining order in the nation, and 26.0 percent for fighting rising prices. Once again there was a very high percentage, 23.8 percent, of don't knows. Compared to Europe, the priority given to protecting human rights, at least as Europeans tend to conceive them, appears very low.

	Total	Maintain order	Give people more say	Fighting rising prices	Protecting freedom of speech	Don't know
France	1001	28.5	20.4	29.6	21.2	0.1
UK	1041	31.3	30.3	10.1	26.0	1.7
Italy	1012	20.3	20.1	34.5	23.6	0.3
Sweden	1003	46.1	20.3	2.8	30.2	0.6
Poland	1000	31.3	29.8	30.4	4.4	4.0
China	2015	34.9	11.1	26.0	3.8	23.8
Taiwan	1227	57.2	10.4	29.2	3.2	0.1
Germany	2064	22.8	37.5	24.1	13.8	1.3
Total	10363	33.5	22.7	23.8	14.2	5.6

Table 10. Aims of Respondents by Country (first choice, percent). Source: WVS.

In many European countries well over 20 percent of respondents rate protecting freedom of speech as their first priority. In the Netherlands, the figure is 43.1 percent, but at the other extreme in Poland it is only 4.4 percent. Europeans also give much higher priority to "giving people more say", which could be taken to mean having a more democratic or open government, than Chinese do. Another significant difference with China is

that in most European countries the percentage of ‘don’t knows’ is about 1 percent or less, whereas amongst Chinese it is 23.8 percent. As with their views on respect for human rights, the percentage of don’t knows varies across different groups, and is key to the possible development of views on the priority given to human rights by Chinese.

	15-29 years	30-49 years	50 and more years
Maintain order	47.5	33.6	31.7
Give people more say	15.9	12.8	7.1
Fighting rising prices	20.3	27.9	25.9
Protecting freedom of speech	4.7	4.2	2.9
Don't know	11.3	20.9	32.0
No answer	0.3	0.6	0.4
Total	301	929	785

Table 11. Aims of Respondents in China by Age (first choice, percent). Source: WVS

While in China there is a slightly greater proportion of respondents who give first priority to freedom of speech among young people, this is still far below the level that exists across all age groups in most European countries. The proportion of don’t knows is lower in the younger age groups. However, the shift to having a definite opinion amongst the young does not lead to a large increase in those who prioritize human rights. In the over-50 age group, 2.9 percent give first priority to protecting freedom of speech, while the figure for the 15-29 age group is 4.7 percent. In contrast to this 31.7 percent of the over-50 age group give first priority to maintaining order in the nation, while in the 15-29 age group close to half of respondents give this as their first priority. Young Chinese, it would seem, are far more concerned with order than they are with freedom of speech.

Among those with no formal education, just under half answered don’t know to this question, while among those with university degrees this was only 2.4 percent. Still, even among those with university education, only 6.3 percent ranked protecting freedom of speech as their first priority, compared to exactly half who gave maintaining order as first priority. Among those with no formal education, only 22.1 percent gave first priority

to maintaining order. Education in China it would appear does not instill a desire for freedom of speech.

	None	Elem	Second tech	Second adv	Higher
Maintain order	22.1	30.3	50.6	40.9	50.0
Give people more say	4.9	9.1	15.1	14.9	20.6
Fighting rising prices	20.9	32.2	23.9	26.9	19.0
Freedom of speech	2.5	3.7	4.4	4.0	6.3
Don't know	49.4	24.1	5.6	12.8	2.4
No answer	0.2	0.6	0.4	0.5	1.6
Total	526	515	251	572	126

Table 12. Aims of Respondents in China by Educational Level (percent). Source: WVS

	Total	Empl./ manager	Prof. worker	Manual skilled	Manual semi - skilled	Manual unskil.	Agr
Maintain order	34.9	45.1	55.8	35.9	41.1	24.7	30.4
Give people more say	11.1	14.3	15.8	10.3	15.6	12.3	9.4
Fighting rising prices	26.0	25.3	17.5	32.7	35.6	27.2	25.5
Freedom of speech	3.8	2.2	7.5	1.9	6.7	4.3	3.3
Don't know	23.8	13.2	3.3	19.2	1.1	30.9	31.0
No answer	0.5	-	-	-	-	0.6	0.4
Total	1015	91	120	156	90	162	1092

Table 13. Aims of Respondent in China by Employment (percent). Source: WVS

While Chinese give higher priority to protecting freedom of speech if they are more educated, the level remains far below that in Europe, where there is a similar relationship between education and prioritizing freedom of speech. For instance, in France 11.9 percent of people who have completed primary education give freedom of speech as their first priority, compared with 33.9 percent of those who have a university degree. In Italy, 10.7 percent of those who have completed primary education give protecting freedom of speech as their first priority, while 33.5 percent of

those with a university degree do so. In China, the education effect on prioritization of human rights currently appears to be weaker than in Europe. The same may be said for economic wellbeing. Only 3.3 percent of agricultural workers give protecting free speech as their first priority, while 7.5 percent of professional workers do. This compares with 30.4 percent of agricultural workers who rate maintaining order as their main priority, and 55.8 percent of professional workers who do so.

The low priority given to civil and political rights or democratic values is also reflected in the EAB survey. Respondents were asked to give a comparison of how they ranked economic development and democracy. Only 20 percent of respondents said that democracy was more important than economic development, while 22 percent said economic development was definitely more important than democracy, and 25.3 percent said that economic development is somewhat more important than democracy. Once again, those who are better off, more educated and younger give greater priority to economic development over democracy.

	Total	Lowest	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Economic development is definitely more important	22.0	21.1	17.3	21.7	21.5	23.3
Economic development is somewhat more important	25.3	16.7	19.7	24.2	26.1	28.5
Democracy somewhat more important	13.3	10.9	14.1	12.6	13.9	13.7
Democracy is definitely more important	6.7	6.5	9.6	11.3	5.6	5.6
They are equally important	19.9	20.0	16.5	17.6	19.8	20.9
Don't know	11.6	22.0	22.1	12.4	12.0	6.7
No answer	1.3	2.8	0.8	0.3	1.0	1.2
Total	3183	431	249	364	590	1549

Table 14. China: Choice Between Democracy and Economic Development by Income Quintiles. Source: EAB

	18-29	30-49	50 +
Economic development is definitely more important	21.2	24.4	19.4
Economic development is somewhat more important	30.1	26.7	21.8
Democracy is somewhat more important	12.7	12.5	14.5
Democracy is definitely more important	5.5	6.8	6.6
They are both equally important	24.0	18.3	20.0
Don't know	5.9	9.9	16.0
No answer	0.6	1.3	1.6
Total	458	1267	994

Table 15. China: Choice Between Democracy and Economic Development by Age (percent). Source: EAB

	Total	Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
Economic development is definitely more important	22.0	17.2	23.1	23.9	23.9
Economic development is somewhat more important	25.3	18.6	21.6	27.8	37.6
Democracy somewhat more important	13.3	13.5	17.4	12.6	8.8
Democracy is definitely more important	6.7	7.8	7.9	6.4	2.9
They are equally important	19.9	14.4	18.9	22.5	23.5
Don't know	11.6	27.7	9.6	5.6	1.3
No answer	1.3	0.7	1.5	1.3	2.0
Total	3183	829	533	1512	306

Table 16. China: Choice Between Democracy and Development by Education (percent). Source: EAB

As already noted, in Europe it is common to connect economic development and human rights in the sense of civil and political rights. This is often seen in either one of two ways. Either greater human rights will benefit economic development, or economic development will lead to greater human rights. The high priority to given other policy choices and the low priority given to protecting freedom of speech, giving people more or even democracy say suggest that the public in China do not make the

same association. Unlike in Europe, human rights, at least in the sense of civil and political rights, remain a low priority compared to other issues.

7. The International Dimension of Human Rights

Human rights have become an issue of international importance. Europeans tend to insist on the universality of human rights and have little hesitation in criticizing what they see as abuses in other countries. On the other hand, China, with its strong view of national sovereignty and insistence on the principle of non-interference, argues that states themselves are the best judges of their progress on human rights. The two views of human rights in the international context tend to divide the EU and China. The public view of the issue reflects this fact. In the WVS, respondents were asked to give their preference for who should decide on human rights questions: national governments, regional organizations or the UN.³³ In European countries, for instance in Italy, Germany and especially Sweden, there was generally a strong preference for an international approach involving the UN, although there were exceptions to this such as Poland. The Chinese response to this produced a very large percentage, almost half, of don't knows, although 31.5 percent had a preference for national governments, and only 16.6 percent for the UN. If the don't knows are excluded, 60.9 percent of respondents in China preferred that human rights questions be decided by national government, a proportion similar to that in Taiwan.

	Total	National government.	Regional org.	UN	Don't know
Italy	1012	26.8	14.7	50.8	6.1
Sweden	1003	16.7	9.2	72.0	2.1
Poland	1000	48.5	7.3	41.1	2.8
China	2015	31.5	3.6	16.6	47.7
Taiwan	1227	56.3	10.0	30.7	2.8
Germany	2064	20.4	19.4	55.2	4.2
Total	10363	25.8	8.8	33.7	11.5

Table 17. Preference for Who Should Decide: Human Rights. Source: WVS

The breakdown of the data in China shows that this preference for human rights questions to be decided by national governments is only likely to increase. As with other questions on human rights, there is a higher proportion of don't knows among respondents aged 50 or more, 57.7 percent in this case, than among the younger age groups. Among those aged 15-29 the don't knows are 25.6 percent. While there is a higher proportion among the 15-29 cohort who believe human rights questions should be decided by the UN compared to those aged 50 or more, they are far outnumbered by those who prefer that they be decided by national governments. Among the 50 and over cohort, 13.4 percent believe that the UN should decide human rights questions, compared to 23.9 percent of those aged 15-29, but 43.5 percent of the later group prefer that national governments decide these issues. While about one quarter of young Chinese are apparently multilateralists on this question, many more of their fellows adopt a position that supports the Chinese state's assertion of its primacy in this area.

	Total	15-29	30-49	50 +
National governments	31.5	43.5	31.9	26.5
Regional organizations	3.6	6.6	4.0	2.0
United Nations	16.6	23.9	16.9	13.4
Don't know	47.7	25.6	46.4	57.7
No answer	0.6	0.3	0.9	0.4
Total	2015	301	929	785

Table 18. Who Should Decide, Human Rights in China by Age. Source: WVS

Education produces a similar effect. Among the less educated groups there is a very high percentage of don't knows. This is much lower among educated Chinese, but while there is a higher percentage of educated Chinese who believe that the UN should decide human rights questions, the preference for national governments to decide these issues is much stronger. Among those with a university-level education it reaches 57.1 percent. Educated Chinese have a very strong view of national sovereignty on human rights issues.

	Total	None	Elem.	Second. technical	Second. advanced	Higher
National governments	31.5	15.0	28.3	46.6	37.2	57.1
Regional org.	3.6	1.9	3.7	4.8	4.9	2.4
United Nations	16.6	7.8	12.8	24.7	21.7	31.0
Don't know	47.7	74.7	54.8	22.7	35.7	8.7
No answer	0.6	0.6	0.4	1.2	0.5	0.8
Total	2015	526	515	251	572	126

Table 19: Who Should Decide, Human Rights in China by Education (percent). Source: WVS

The preference among Chinese with an opinion on the question for their own government to decide human rights issues flies in the face of the beliefs held by many Europeans. The fact that this preference is stronger among younger, and more educated Chinese indicates that there will be a continued divergence of opinions on this issue, and the gap may even increase. In China, the government's position is reinforced by, or reinforces, public opinion.

8. Bridging the Gulf

Contrary to expectations in Europe, the evidence to suggest that there will be an increasingly strong constituency for human rights demands in China is weak at best.³⁴ While the evidence suggests that some young, educated and comparatively well off Chinese may have a somewhat more critical view of human rights in China than their older, less well educated and poorer compatriots, many more of them have positive views. Those with negative views remain a small minority, even among the young, educated and well off. The evidence also suggests that in general human rights as conceived in Europe rank quite low in the policy priorities of most Chinese. There is no strong evidence to support the expectation that there will be growing demands for human rights in China, or that Chinese see human rights as essential to their economic development.

Human rights, as they are conceived in Europe, will not take Beijing. Of course, as the data used here shows, there is no single, unified European view of human rights. There are many differences between European countries, but these differences tend to be smaller than those with China. More important than the broad differences across whole populations are the apparent shifts across different groups in China and Europe. Those who are in the middle class, or who perhaps will be, certainly do not have strongly negative views of China's human rights. The young, well-off and the educated, who might be most likely to articulate future demands for human rights, show little sign of strong attachment to conceptions of human rights as they are espoused in Europe. Nor do they view human rights in China in the same way as Europeans may. In fact their views of human rights in China are more positive than those held by Europeans of their rights. The evidence indicates that views of Chinese about their own human rights situation are actually likely to become more positive rather than otherwise. At the extreme we are faced with two possibilities to account for the difference in assessment of the human rights situation in China, either Chinese and Europeans have two totally different conceptions of human rights, resulting in completely divergent assessments of the same reality of their implementation in China, or they share the same concepts, but still have totally different perceptions of how they are put into practice in China. The data from these surveys does not provide an answer to this question. The answer is likely to lie between the two. The rights that Chinese believe are respected may not be exactly the same ones as those that Europeans concentrate on, and they may also have a more nuanced view of how they are put into practice in their own society than the perceptions as seen from Europe. The modernization theory that explicitly or implicitly underlies beliefs that views of human rights in China will approach those of Europe and that demands for human rights will increase appears optimistic in the short term and probably misplaced in the longer term. There is little sign that those groups in society that would be expected to be the bearers of post-modern or self-expression values have any strong commitment to human rights as they are conceived of in Europe, especially when placed against other priorities such as stability or economic development. Chinese

do not appear to see any necessary connection between civil and political rights and economic development. The deterministic view that economic development brings demands for human rights is likely to be falsified. Even the less deterministic position adopted by writers such as Inglehart, which argues that economic development and values are linked or that the relationship is probabilistic, may not fully take account of the process occurring in China, where history, culture, and, perhaps more vitally, the policies adopted by the government, may bring about very different results compared to other parts of the world. The large percentage of don't knows in China and changes in their proportion across difference age, economic and educational groups suggests that unlike in European countries like France, Germany and Sweden, where views on human rights have been absorbed into popular thinking and are almost universally held, the Chinese public's view of human rights is still a work in progress, but the indications are that the finished article, if there ever is one, is not likely to be a simple reproduction of the European or Western view.

Not all Chinese are completely happy and contented with their lot, many may be very discontented, and there are human rights problems in China however they may be defined. But Europeans should be cautious in interpreting the contents and discontents of Chinese. To put this in a policy perspective, when European leaders speak to an audience in Chinese universities, as they often do, and argue that China must improve its human rights, roughly 65 percent of their listeners are likely to think they are talking nonsense, since they believe that their human rights are respected, about 25 percent may be to some degree in agreement and the rest are perhaps open to persuasion. When European politicians denounce what they believe to be the terrible human rights record of China, their views will find agreement from about 3 percent of all Chinese, since this is the percentage that believes there is no respect at all for human rights. This disjuncture has important consequences, not just for human rights policy itself. If the EU chooses to place human rights at the centre of its policy

toward China, the mismatch in the views expressed in Europe and those held in China affects the credibility of EU policy more widely. The EU and Europeans in general will have to consider their policy or at the very least the presentation of it. A policy will have no credibility with those it claims to benefit and is unlikely to be successful if it relies on a description of the world they do not recognize.

The importance of the human rights issue waxes and wanes in the EU-China relationship, but forms a background of distrust, especially in public opinion in Europe. It is unlikely that this will change. European belief in their values appears strong, as does Chinese belief in theirs. This will not change. Even though China can point to improvements in what it believes to be human rights, the narrative in European media and public opinion remains the same, and is unlikely to change. China will not be able easily to persuade the European public or media to change their perceptions. Nor will Europe persuade Chinese to abandon their positions soon. Rather than converging, as many Europeans expect, views on human rights may actually be diverging. The dialogue which is supposed to occur is not necessarily producing greater understanding on either side. Both Europe and China may have to reconsider how they approach the question, if there is to be an effective exchange that benefits both sides.

Notes and references

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¹⁰ J. Dickson Bruce, *Wealth into Power: The Communist Party's Embrace of China's Private Sector* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 4.

¹¹ Ronald Inglehart, Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, How Development Leads to Democracy: What We Know About Modernization, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2009.

¹² Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E Baker, Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values, *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 65, No 1, 2000, p 20.

¹³ *Ibid*, p 21.

¹⁴ More fully, the hypothesis argued by Inglehart and Welzel is as follows: "[a]lthough many observers have been alarmed by the economic resurgence of China, this growth has positive implications for the long term. Beneath China's seemingly monolithic political structure, the social infrastructure of democratization is emerging, and it has progressed further than most observers realize. China is now approaching the level of mass emphasis on self-expression values at which Chile, Poland, South Korea, and Taiwan made their transitions to democracy. And, surprising as it may seem to observers who focus only on elite-level politics, Iran is also near this threshold. As long as the Chinese Communist Party and Iran's theocratic leaders control their countries' military and security forces, democratic institutions will not emerge at the national level. But growing mass pressures for liberalization are beginning to appear, and repressing them

will bring growing costs in terms of economic inefficiency and low public morale. On the whole, increasing prosperity for China and Iran is in the United States' national interest." Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, How Development Leads to Democracy: What We Know About Modernization, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2009.

¹⁵ Data available at <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>.

¹⁶ V164.- How much respect is there for individual human rights nowadays (in our country)?

Do you feel there is: 1. There is a lot of respect for individual human rights 2. There is some respect 3. There is not much respect 4. There is no respect at all?

¹⁷ Selected countries/samples: China [2007], France [2006], Germany [2006], Great Britain [2006], Italy [2005], Netherlands [2006], Poland [2005], Sweden [2006], Taiwan [2006]. The totals in some tables presented here may not add up to 100% as a result of the exclusion of responses such as No Answer, Not Applicable, etc.

¹⁸ V98.- Now I'd like you to look at this card. I'm going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I'd like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it. Attending lawful demonstrations

V100.- Have you or have you not done any of these activities in the last five years? ((Read out and code one answer for each) action): Signing a petition.

V101.- Have you or have you not done any of these activities in the last five years? ((Read out and code one answer for each) action): Joining in boycotts. Possible answers: 1. Have done 2. Might do 3. Would never do.

¹⁹ No formal education.

²⁰ Completed elementary education.

²¹ Complete secondary school: technical/vocational type/Secondary, intermediate vocational qualification.

²² Complete secondary: university-preparatory type/Full secondary, maturity level certificate.

²³ University with degree/Higher education - upper-level tertiary certificate.

²⁴ Employer/manager of establishment with 10 or more employed.

²⁵ Professional worker.

²⁶ Skilled manual worker.

²⁷ Semi-skilled manual worker.

²⁸ Unskilled manual worker.

²⁹ Agricultural worker.

³⁰ Data available at <http://www.asianbarometer.org/>. Data used is for 2002, as there is no more recent survey available.

³¹ The question asked was: We would like you to compare the system of government we have today in China with the one we had before “reform and opening” in 1978. Everyone is free to say what they think?

³² V71.- If you had to choose, which one of the things on this card would you say is most important? And which would be the next most important? First choice.

Possible answers: 1. Maintaining order in the nation 2. Give people more say 3. Fighting rising prices 4. Protecting freedom of speech.

³³ V183.- Some people believe that certain kinds of problems could be better handled by the United Nations than by the various national governments. Others think that these problems should be left entirely to the respective national governments; while others think they would be handled best by the national governments working together with co-ordination by the United Nations. I’m going to mention some problems. For each one, would you tell me whether you think that policies in this area should be decided by the national governments, by the United Nations, or by the national governments with UN co-ordination? Human Rights

Possible answers: 1. National governments 2. Regional organizations 3. United Nations 4. National governments, with UN coordination 5. Non profit / Non governmental org 6. Commercial enterprise.

³⁴ Historical comparisons over the longer term are difficult to make using the WVS data. The question on human rights was asked in the 2001 survey in China, but not on previous occasions. The 2001 survey gives higher levels of positive views on human rights, which could be taken as an indication that Chinese are becoming more critical of the human rights situation in China. Unfortunately, such a conclusion is difficult to sustain because of very different sampling in the two surveys. There was a significant increase in the sample size in 2007 which was to a large extent accounted for by adding greater numbers of respondents with a lower educational background economic status.³⁴ The social balance of the 2007 survey may have been improved to reflect better the make of Chinese society, but it makes historical comparison difficult. Broadly speaking the patterns of the 2007 survey are found in that of 2001.