

## Internationalization and reforms in the higher education system in China

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### **Abstract:**

The objective of this paper is to provide a general overview of the aspects that define the strategic relationship between Europe and China, centered on the scientific cooperation and mobility promoted by the European Commission and the Chinese Ministry of Education in recent years. The shared vision of China and the United States in terms of scientific mobility and exchange programs is necessary, as migration flows of Chinese origin have always been primarily destined for United States soil. The objective of Sino-European cooperation is based on reforming the higher education system to do away with the “brain drain” that has had a dramatic impact on the Asian nation and member countries of the European Union.

**Keywords:** Higher education, education reform, brain drain, international mobility, scientific exchange programs

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## INTRODUCTION: SCIENTIFIC MOBILITY AND COOPERATION BETWEEN EUROPE AND CHINA<sup>2</sup>

The main objective of this paper is to present an overview of the gradual internationalization of the higher education system in China and the advent of global and international studies. The emergence of global studies in China is a recent turn of events, tied to current reforms designed to boost the internationalization of departments, schools, faculties, and research institutes.

Although this paper will present some general examples and statistics on foreign experts at Chinese institutions, which have never before published and were prepared specifically for this research, as well as some comparisons of scientific mobility programs in Europe and China, the core of this paper is focused on a theoretical, rather than empirical, analysis.

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As such, the essential question is: Is China really experiencing a large-scale reform when it comes to the internationalization of its higher education system? Accordingly, this paper will examine the origins of the internationalization of academic structures in China, dating back to when American sinologists began to work on new studies about the country. This analysis will elucidate the new context of International Relations through which, commencing in 1989, the international system has been reshaped as a multipolar world characterized by overlapping economic, political, and social structures in which the concepts of diversity and mobility are especially important (Geeraerts, 2011: 67-67).

Aiming to delve deeper into the meaning of the concept of multi-polarity, upon which current relations between China and Europe are based, it is important to mention China's new role derived from its impressive economic growth over the past few decades and its weight in global governance (Shen, 2009: 33-55). Beijing, one of the top world capitals, has become more active in setting up multilateral cooperative relationships with the rest of the world. The Chinese capital has in fact become the main headquarters of the new political system, which could easily be defined as global.

In this new framework, there is no longer a sole center of political and economic gravity, but rather a poly-centric global system in which China and Europe, among other territories, comprise a new structure in which the old quarrels inherited from the Cold War have been rendered obsolete. Europe has taken a more pragmatic stance towards China and its place in the new international order, thanks to China's unique cultural and social idiosyncrasies, as well as the recent migration of communities of Chinese origin to Europe. These are the main topics that researchers examining the strategic partnership between Europe and China have begun to address. In this sense, it is important to look at the new policies undertaken by the European Union (EU) and China over the past ten years in which the two political powers have mutually recognized one another as strategic partners.

This recognition crystallized in terms of academic and scientific cooperation with the opening of Euraxess-Links in Beijing in 2008. Starting in that year and to date, academic and scientific mobility from Europe and China took off exponentially. Euraxess-Links is currently an academic platform to provide information about European research policies, funding opportunities for research, international cooperation, and mobility for researchers living in regions where Euraxess has offices: Europe, Latin America, and Asia.

## **THE ROAD TO “INTERNATIONALIZATION”: THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF GLOBAL STUDIES IN CHINA**

Prior to the 1990s, all studies about China, especially those conducted by Western scholars, specifically, experts based at universities and research institutions in the United States, were strongly marked by the political context of the Cold War and the status quo of Sino-American relations (Shambaugh, 1993). It was then when the community of American academics began to show great interest in studies about China.

Renowned experts, like H.B. Morse (1910-1918), J.K. Fairbank (1950), and Orville Schell (1977), commenced studies of the language, culture, economy, and politics of the Asian nation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Fairbank was a student of Morse, and also

studied at Tsinghua University, under the mentorship of the prestigious historian Tsiang Tingfu, who introduced him to the Chinese world of academics. They became, of course, notable figures in studies about China, who paved the way for future generations and inspired a new and enthusiastic group of sinologists in the United States.

As a result, when this paper refers to Chinese studies, it is alluding to the interdisciplinary usage of the term itself. However, it must not be forgotten that studies about China in the West, as well as western and/or global studies in China, bear the mark of the ideologically polarized world of the twentieth century. Such figures as John Lindbeck have analyzed the status of contemporary studies in the United States and depicted the academic contributions and understanding of studies about China, which suffered a major impact in the Cold War and the period following the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 (Lindbeck, 1971).

The new age of Sino-American relations at the beginning of the 1970s, under President Richard Nixon's administration, followed by President James Carter's term, and Deng Xiaoping's new reforms, marked the moment in time when China began to open up to the world and, therefore, spurred a new generation of sinologists. Consequently, a notable group of American academics, not of Chinese origin, managed to develop good competency in Mandarin Chinese, and were able to publish in specialized Chinese journals, while simultaneously becoming familiar with the Chinese higher education system. Obviously, over the past century, it was American scholars who showed the first major interest in studying the Chinese culture and language and even in moving to the country.

The mobility of American sinologists and researchers looking to work in China and learn the language and culture finds its roots in the course of historical events that tie together China and the United States of America, principally in California, and their shared history since the mid-nineteenth century and up through to the beginning of the twentieth. For example, the provisions in the signing of the Treaty of Wanghia (1844) after the First Opium War, between China and the United States in regard to civil judgments, and especially related to the payment of trade debts between the two nations (Morse, 1921; Remer, 1928). Likewise, another good example to observe how the relations between the two nations began to consolidate historically is related to the arrival of the first immigrants (Hu-Dehart, 1998) from China to the United States. It is unsurprising that the first international community of academics to open research centers and implement new study programs about Asia and China was American.

However, in light of the historical events that took place throughout the twentieth century since the fall of the Qing dynasty, the founding of the PRC, and the subsequent constraints it faced in developing ties to the West, the number of academics who arrived to China was marginal. Gradually, at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, with the "Open Door Policy," championed by Deng Xiaoping, the number of Americans coming to study in China started to grow once again. The majority of researchers who came were supported by an American sponsor, in a scholarship program that covered both living and research expenses. The number of researchers who came without this economic support to live at a Chinese university as master's students, doctoral students, post-doctoral fellows, speaker, assistant professors, associate professors, or professors, working with a local Chinese contract, was practically non-existent.

Now, the question to answer would be: has much changed since those days? Is the number of foreign professors currently working in either teaching or research and living in China

long term any different? As will be shown below, there has only been a minimal increase in the number of foreign experts<sup>3</sup> currently working at Chinese universities. This possibility did not even exist before, as foreign experts were previously only permitted to collaborate at research centers and universities as visiting professors or researchers for short stays. Thus, what should Chinese universities and academic institutions be doing to attract foreign experts, aiming to drive and foster an international environment and image for Chinese universities in the current global context?

Studies about contemporary China, especially those related to its twentieth century history, in the United States and, by extension, in Europe, have mainly dealt with the period from the end of the Cold War until the beginning of the 1990s. This research, then, is strongly influenced by the political context in which it takes place. Some of it even reflects errors of perception or “illusions” (Mackerras, 2000; Said, 1978) built or developed through the communication media and American political leaders by way of insertion in public opinion of the idea that scholars who worked on studies of China in the United States belonged to transgressive movements that were not politically correct or were somehow involved in a communist conspiracy against the Western bloc. This topic demonstrates how, on certain occasions, Chinese scholars have had to face speculative thinking and excessive political bias. Harry Harding (1993: 14-42) has called for better collaboration in research and cooperation among scientific disciplines, countries, and circles that develop and plan public policy, especially through think tanks.

Even so, there is still a big gap when it comes to research that encourages interdisciplinary participation. Undoubtedly, nowadays, it is easier to conduct research in China and about China than it was during the twentieth century, in light of the current state of political calm and the cooling of tensions between China and Western countries. The positive effect of this relative calm is manifest in the arrival of experts from Western countries to China. However, the debate has moved towards matters related to working conditions, especially in terms of the logistics, infrastructure, and funding for research needed to support the work of foreign experts who have come in the past ten years to provide services at top Chinese universities and research institutes.

More effort has certainly been made in the Technical Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, and Economics, but there is still a strong need to develop the fields of the Humanities and Social Sciences. Under the framework of the new arrival of foreign experts to China and attempts by the Ministry of Education to attract even more, the question looms large: what are the real efforts that Chinese universities and academic institutions are making to attract this group of scholars? Is there a real platform and cooperation program between Chinese universities and European academic institutions? For historical reasons, contemporary studies about China have sparked more interest among American scholars than in other countries. Examining the data (see Table 1) on the percentage of foreign professors at Chinese universities living and working there permanently at these institutions, it appears that there is still a long path ahead, because the figures are scandalously low.

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<sup>3</sup> Here, the Chinese government uses the term foreign experts to refer to foreign teaching and research staff who, starting in 2012 after the Ministry of Education reform, began to work at Chinese universities. It does not refer, as such, to the group of expatriates working in the diplomatic corps or multinational companies.

**Table 1.** Percentage of Foreign Academics with Permanent Appointments at the Main Chinese Universities

	<i>Total Professors in Faculties</i>	<i>Foreign Professors with Permanent Appointments (%)</i>
Peking University	2 900	0.50
Tsinghua University	2 941	1.60
Zhejiang University	2 850	0.28

**Source:** Created by the authors: [http://english.pku.edu.cn/Schools\\_Departments/](http://english.pku.edu.cn/Schools_Departments/);  
<http://www.tsinghua.edu.cn/publish/then/5976/index.html>;  
[http://www.zju.edu.cn/english/redir.php?catalog\\_id=211118](http://www.zju.edu.cn/english/redir.php?catalog_id=211118)

Looking at monthly salaries for teachers and researchers in China, it appears that pay cuts are a notable obstacle when it comes to attracting foreign researchers to Chinese universities and, therefore, promoting international mobility in the country (see Table 1 about the percentage of foreign professors working in China). The official national salary for a full-time professor in China, as currently set by the Ministry of Education, is around 4,000 RMB (renminbis), or approximately 500 euros a month. However, in recent years, the Chinese government has permitted university departments and faculties to supplement official wages with private funds that these centers raise through fees, consulting, and business affiliates.<sup>4</sup>

Even so, the main debate is not about bringing together academics and seeing who is in favor of or against the internationalization of higher education in China and who is willing to work there on a permanent basis in the country. It is a much more profound matter, because it is rooted in the rigid academic, administrative, and bureaucratic system of the research institutions and universities. Profound structural reform will be needed if Chinese academics truly want to implement a solid curriculum when it comes to global studies, which in turn would include essential aspects inherent to this type of research: mobility, internationalization, diversity, and the forging of academic networks. The concept of global studies implies a methodological and theoretical burden tied to the interdisciplinarity of diverse spheres of knowledge, and in recognition of the peculiarities and features of each geographic space. The problem resides in overcoming, something which occurs in the majority of cases, unscientific statements manifest in the form of national and patriotic sentiments, which are extremely present in the Chinese academic discourse. In this way, we see statements such as: "both globalization and global studies are Western theses, lacking neutrality..." (Wu Xiaoqun, 2005: 23), or others like: "...we cannot accept such a historiographical concept, as it contains the 'ideological trap' of globalization, in other words, the end of national sovereignty, deterritorialization, and the denationalization of nation-states, etc. These concepts are the product of Western neoliberalism" (Yu Pei, 2006: 23-24).

To think globally and free of patriotic and/or nationalist myopia could open novel paths to dialogue to foster new programs for global studies. Undoubtedly, the practice of such study plans in the fields of the Social Sciences and Humanities would entail a few methodological problems and ideological limitations. A new pedagogy must be implemented in order to

<sup>4</sup> Shanghaiist, 22/09/2006.

establish new courses about global studies and, of course, eradicate frequent obstacles, such as overcoming bureaucratic and administrative limitations to put into practice a global studies program, and, consequently, promote diversity and academic mobility among the faculty staff.

Aiming to shed light on this question, it is important to note the power of "manipulating" and "shaping" history, which has been quite present in nations such as China in modern times up until the present day. Civilizations, nations, cultures, and continents are all constructions of the so-called phase of modernity. This fact is extremely entrenched in the current Chinese academic system, despite the fact that some researchers have been seduced to some extent by the current fashion of undertaking global studies, principally those with ties to the American academic establishment, aiming to promote academic mobility from China to the United States. However, this is just one way that has permitted the ruling political class in China to reinforce the past and national history of the country.

Accordingly, global studies have become, in China, a new narrative used through the revival of a neo-Confucianist model (Elman *et al.*, 2002), whose aim is to shape Chinese national history (Holcombe, 2001: 10), leaving aside the authentic ends of the practice and the method of the global studies fields, which deals in analyzing the complexity of connections and international relationships between West and East. As Dirlik (2005: 391-410) put it well, the essential task must be to analyze the system and organization that articulates international relations worldwide around spatialities. Such analysis must replace the usage of global history as a way of imaging the past which, ultimately, serves to foster and breathe new life into the myth of archaic national histories (Anderson, 1983). The objective must rather be to deconstruct said national histories instead of building a new and "imagined" national time. This task should be a "moral responsibility" (Bentley, 2005: 51-82).

Departmental practices in the study of global history have been very focused on the construction of national histories and ancestral civilization in China. Concretely, practices such as those related to the "international" program based on the ancient silk road in China and the current policy and strategy of the government known as "The New Silk Road: One Belt, One Road," can be found in the Social Sciences and Humanities faculties at Chinese universities.

In this case, the practice of history, concretely, and of global studies, specifically, must entail a transnational approach through the search for interconnections and forms of communication between China and the West. Global history does not refer to abstract structural totalities, but rather to the analytical approach that seeks to deconstruct and historicize spaces that conventionally have been located in separate historical categories and disciplines, such as social, political, economic, religious history, etc. The conceptualization of the discipline of global history ranges from a "transnational" approach to a "translocal" approach. This discipline describes and analyzes, as such, movements created in these spaces to gain a complete understanding of the circulation of people (diasporas, migrations), consumer goods (through long-distance trade), and knowledge (received in different forms in new linguistic types through texts, books, manuscripts, calligraphy).

The challenges inherent to a complete overhaul of the higher education system in China, based on global studies to promote mobility, diversity, and the internationalization of education faculties, in the majority of cases, are related to strong socio-cultural and economic connotations exclusive to a well-designed policy agenda spearheaded by the

Ministry of Education and the government. A such, the question arises as to what it means to be Chinese and/or question the reality of China. The predominant historical paradigm has identified China with the limits of "continental China."

The policy of "China is one and Taiwan is part of it," which also encompasses Hong Kong and Macao, and the population in East and Southeast Asia of Chinese origin, such as Singapore and Myanmar, among others, is highlighted in the policy agenda. This can be identified as a new historical construction that legitimizes the Chinese space and expansion into a new species of modern "imperialism." All of this is related to the neo-Confucianist current that involves all aspects of the socio-economic, cultural, and political life, by articulating everything that can be identified as "Chinese," which is widely present in all regions and provinces, reactivating a process of nation-building (March, 1974).

China is seen not only as a singular nation, but also as a civilization with a longstanding tradition that differs in many aspects from the Western world (Dawson, 1967). We cannot ignore these questions when speaking of potential reforms to the higher education system in China. As such, the question to ask ourselves would be: how does this cog in the political gear fit in with the conception and parameters of a curriculum based on global studies that promotes academic diversity? One simple statement would be to affirm that department-based study plans are not well defined by political leaders, who undoubtedly possess the objective and mission of running counter to what is being proposed here. Finally, another challenge would be whether or not it is truly possible to escape such restrictions in order to put together a global studies program.

China, like other large nations, is composed of different realities that can be observed throughout its provinces. The pretense of building a "great nation," Chinese unity, and the Chinese dream, a concept clearly meant to emulate the "American dream," is deconstructed (Goodman *et al.*, 1994) through multiregional realities with a population of diverse linguistic, cultural, religious, ethnic, and social origins. A very important concept, accordingly, is that of the Chinese diaspora, which deconstructs the apparent social homogeneity in the most dynamic social groups that have emigrated over decades to the United States and Europe.

The foregoing contradicts and confronts the policy agenda with historical forces. To win this battle, the government recently established a national policy, whose purpose is to bring back the talent and intellectuals that have emigrated to the West, especially to the United States of America. The so-called internationalization of Chinese higher education and its entire territory is based on an adjustment to a new program, based on global studies with strong "Chinese characteristics," in other words, a new nationalization of the academic sector. The creation of said program is fundamentally grounded in this policy. Is it possible to imagine a global and/or international studies plan carried out by mere specialists and scholars in global studies? Are the global studies programs in China based on the concepts of diversity and scientific mobility that should be inherent to the academic system?

## **CHINA'S "BRAIN DRAIN" POLICY: KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AND SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION BETWEEN CHINA, THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AND THE EU**

As has been mentioned throughout this paper, in recent years, the process of globalization and market integration has sped up considerably, which obviously has a major impact on Chinese society and the economy. According to Stiglitz (2006: 4), many aspects of society are more intertwined and connected due to the transnational circulation of ideas, knowledge, technological development, migration, consumer goods, and new awareness of environmental issues. In this framework, knowledge transfer, human capital, and material mobility, as well as the consequent internationalization of institutions and social structures, are all crucial to sustainable economic growth and the modernization of society through the rapid development of science and technology.

Such growth and prosperity has been linked to developed countries (Lien *et al.*, 2005: 153), despite the fact that nowadays, it is possible to observe the mass migration of highly qualified researchers from Europe, especially from countries such as Germany, France, or the United Kingdom, a fact that is spurring the severe problem of the "brain drain." This issue is also ailing China, especially with the mass migration of students and academics to the United States.

The "brain drain," as such, can be defined as a global problem in which researchers have to emigrate from their countries of origin due to various reasons: limited access to the labor market, lack of infrastructure and logistics to open research centers, and cuts to spending on research. In the case of developing countries, like China, the problem resides in two factors: access to the labor market and lack of means and logistics to conduct research projects. In general, the "brain drain" in developed and developing countries leads to the consequence of the permanent loss of young talent and impedes the solidification and development of a solid higher education system based on high-impact academic standards.

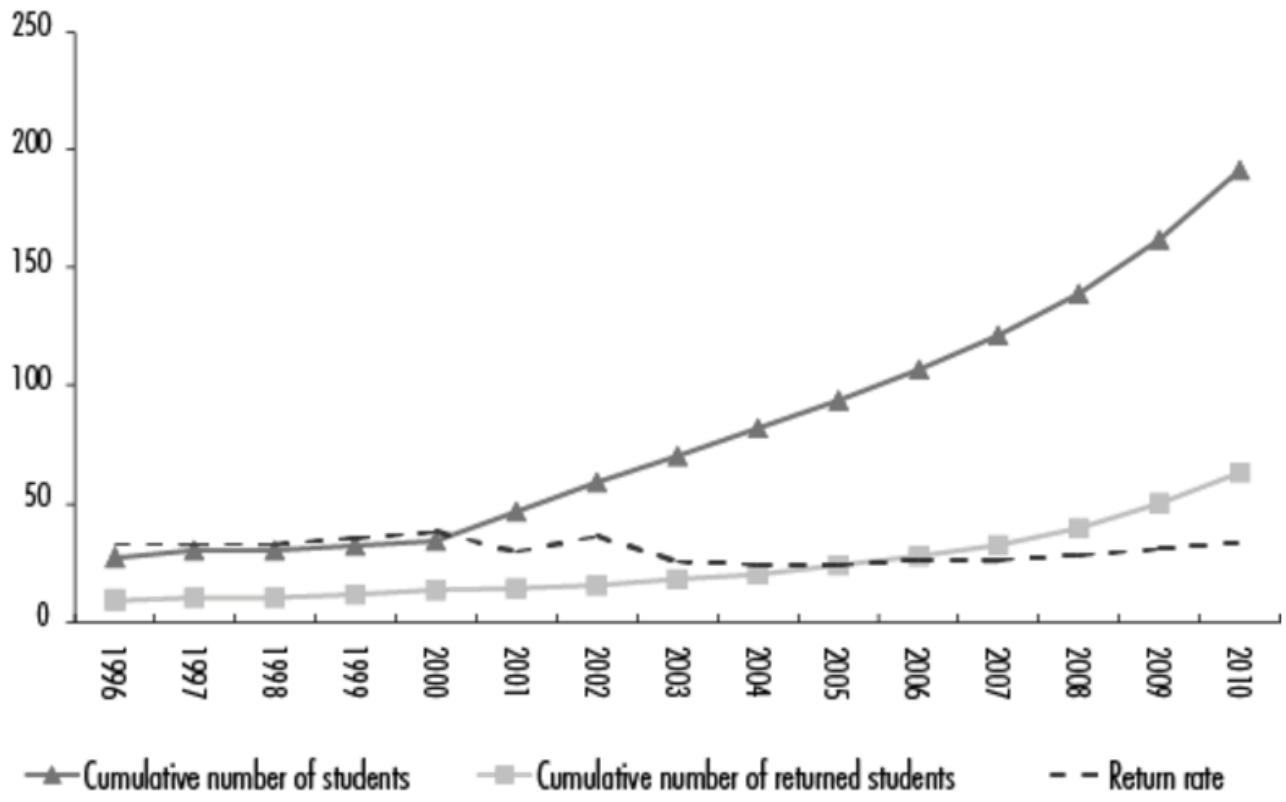
Over the past six years, China and Europe have dealt with this issue through a commitment to develop a strategic partnership, whose aim is to promote academic mobility where both the institutions of origin and those that receive scholars will both benefit from the mobility. China and Europe have encouraged their students and academics to go abroad in the hope that after a certain time period, after having acquired experience at international universities, they will return to their countries of origin to transfer the knowledge they have acquired.

Below is a brief overview of the historical trends and causes that explain why Chinese students and academics decided to emigrate to the United States of America over the past few decades. This trend can be observed in the Chinese Student Protection Act passed in 1992 by the United States congress, which stipulates that Chinese students and academics may stay to work and even become permanent residents (Cao, 2008: 333). Since then, the principal concern of the Ministry of Education has been the "brain drain reserve" and "building a country through science and education" (Nawab *et al.*, 2011: 73): as a result, the three most important programs developed by the Ministry of Education to obtain a "talent gain" are: 1) *The Hundred Scholar Program* (launched in 1994, for high-level scientists of diverse backgrounds to conduct research in China, 2) *National Outstanding Youth Fund* (set up in March 1994 to provide funding to young researchers under the age of 45 who conduct their work at research institutes and universities), and 3) *Changjian Scholar Project* (launched in August 1998 to attract, select, and create a group of global-level researchers whose purpose is to develop advanced research in all fields of higher education). In contrast with the Chinese Student Protection Act of 1992, we see that in Europe, a concrete policy was designed to retain and attract talent and researchers, whether

of European or Chinese origin, through the European Council Research programs, like the Marie Curie program, or the recently enacted Horizon 2020 program.

The aforementioned Chinese government programs have had little success in retaining experts in China. The number of Chinese researchers abroad under the program *The Hundred Scholar Program* rose from 72 in 1998 to 158 in 2005, with a decline from 190 in 2000 to 75 in 2003. From 2004 to date, the *Changjiang Scholar Project* has attracted 223 Chinese students from foreign countries to dedicate themselves to scientific research and teaching at Chinese schools and universities. But this figure has fallen thanks to the continued upward trend of Chinese students and researchers who pursue their careers abroad. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), data on Chinese students who leave and return from a foreign country (mainly to the United States), from 1978 to 2006, through the ratios of repatriated students, have tended to fall, from 50% in 1996 to a constant 25% in 2006 (Cao, 2008: 337) (see Figure 1). The data are evidence of the fact that for high-level Chinese talent, studying, living, and working abroad is more attractive than coming back to China.

**Source:** Created by the author. China Statistics Yearbook 1996-2010. 2008 data based on data published by the Ministry of Education.



**Figure 1.** Chinese Student Mobility (1996-2010)

Attracted by high standards for education and better living conditions, China tops the list, among other countries like South Korea, Mexico, Poland, and a few Eastern European countries, of the total proportion of foreign students in the United States as of 2009/2010 (around 127,628 students, 18.4%) and 2010/11 (around 157,558 students, 21.8%). Chinese researchers also exceed those of other countries in the total share of international scholars

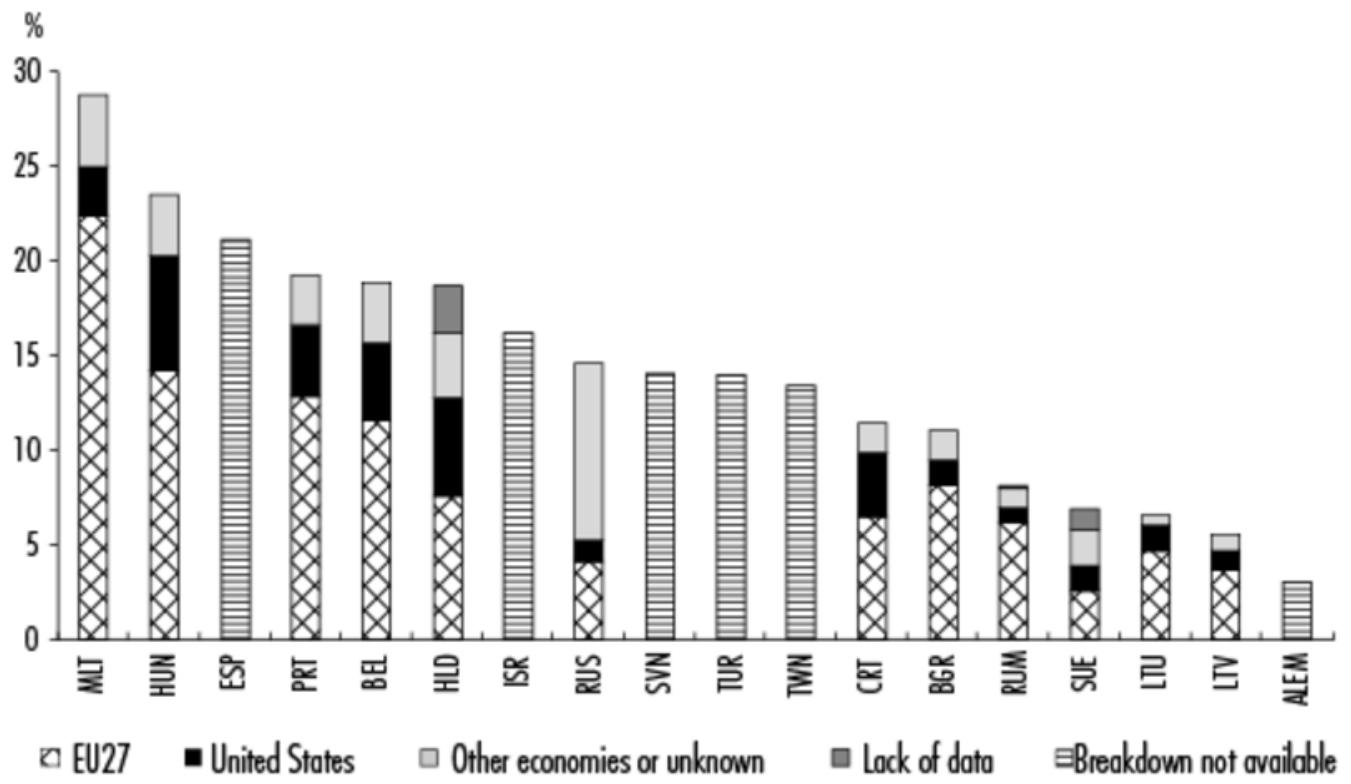
in the United States from 2000 to 2011, with a total average share of 20%.<sup>5</sup> However, such a longstanding and constant flow of Chinese students and scholars to the United States implies an important obstacle for the good development of strategic cooperation in technological and academic matters between Chinese and European research institutes and universities. While the preference for outgoing Chinese researchers and students is to go to American universities, for Europeans, the trend in mobility is to go to other universities somewhere within Europe (see Figure 2).

Notes: MLT (Malta); HUN (Hungary); ESP (Spain); PRT (Portugal); BEL (Belgium); HLD (Holland); ISR (Israel); RUS (Russian Federation); SVN (Slovenia); TUR (Turkey); TWN (Taiwan); CRT (Croatia); BGR (Bulgaria); RUM (Romania); SUE (Sweden); LTU (Lithuania); LTV (Latvia); ALEM (Germany). "Other economies" refers to those located in Africa, America, Asia, Europe, and Oceania; For Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain, the data refer only to graduates starting in 1990 and onwards. For Germany, the data are relative to a short stay abroad, which could be around six months, as compared to three months in the other economies. For the Netherlands, Portugal, and Romania, the gap in the number of reports is caused by rounding in the figures. For the Russian Federation, the data refer only to doctoral degree holders who work as researchers or teachers. For Spain, the sample has limited coverage of PhDs in the years 2007 to 2009. For Sweden, the information gap is because the data have not been shown relative to national citizens at the level of each country, and those surveyed who have not been assigned to countries or classified as unknown.

**Source:** OECD Science, Technology, and Industry Scoreboard 2011. OECD, based on OECD/UNESCO Institute for Statistics/Eurostat data collection on careers of doctorate holders 2010, June 2011.

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<sup>5</sup> Statistics from various years available at the website of the Institute of International Education (IIE) <<http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Date/International-Students/Leading-Places-of-Origin>>



**Figure 2.** Percentage of EU Nationals with a PhD Who Have Lived/Remained Abroad Over the Past Ten Years

As can be seen, there is a small trend for PhDs from the EU to leave the borders of the European Union. The inclination towards Asian countries, like China, has been marginal, while the participation of the United States is not much higher in this regard.

European countries have, in recent years, attracted Chinese students and academics to come study and research at various institutions. However, Europe continues to be a destination low down on the list as compared to the United States when it comes to Chinese studies. The United Kingdom, Germany, and France are the principal destinations for academics and students of Chinese origin. According to research sponsored by the European Commission in 2006, the most frequent nationality of foreign students in the EURO-DATA region is Chinese, exceeding 6%. In the years 2003/2004, Chinese students accounted for 12% of all foreign students in the United Kingdom, 8.4% in Germany (number two after Turks), and 4.8% in France (number 3 after Moroccans and Algerians).<sup>6</sup> These numbers are marginal when compared to the proportions of Chinese students and academics who choose to go to the United States.

Such a gap in the percentage of Chinese students and academics who go to Europe as compared to Europeans who go to China is one of the priorities for the European Commission to overcome, a fact reflected in the opening of Euraxess-Links in Beijing in 2008, the result of initiatives undertaken by the European Commission. Accordingly, the general scenario facing the higher education system in China, as mentioned earlier, should

<sup>6</sup> EURODATA uses 32 European and non-European countries, including Turkey as an origin of institutions for higher education (Kelo *et al.*, 2006).

be borne in mind when European partners attempt to approach Chinese scientific institutions.

China and Europe, in their strategic cooperation and scientific mobility partnership, have designed a new model to overcome the nightmare of the "brain drain." This model is based on the well-known win-win solution, whose purpose is to transform the "brain drain" into the "talent gain," through student and academic exchanges abroad as part of the Marie Curie program and the recently launched Horizon 2020 program led by the European Commission, as well as the new programs spearheaded by the *Chinese Scholarship Council* in cooperation with Unesco and the Hanban Program of the Confucius Institute organized by the Ministry of Education.

Within this model, China and Europe, through diverse actions, invite foreign academics and students to go to China and Europe to obtain benefits through their knowledge. The Ministry of Education in China has in recent years engaged in dialogue with the European Commission in the fields of education, training, and cultural multilingualism. For example, since 2004, over 2,008 Chinese students and 320 academics have been chosen to participate in joint programs, doctorates, and courses through the Erasmus Mundus program. Another program, called the *Science and technology Fellowship*, has supported exchanges between European and Chinese students and academics.<sup>7</sup> In terms of mobility from the EU to China, as of 2009, more than 22,600 EU students, mainly from the United Kingdom, Germany, and France, had gone to China. The ratio of outgoing and incoming (the number of Chinese students entering Europe for every European student leaving to China) is 1:5 for the EU as a whole. This means that for each European student who goes to China, China exports five Chinese students to Europe. The joint study report conducted by the European Commission and the Ministry of Education of China also revealed an alarming piece of data about the growing number of Chinese students who do not come back to their country of origin after graduation.

The joint effort made by Europe and China in recent years has allowed Chinese universities to gradually undertake a certain process of internationalization to hire EU researchers. This entails a major opportunity for foreign experts to conduct pioneering studies working at the top research institutions and, at the same time, to get to know the academic system of Chinese universities firsthand. This constitutes the most outstanding added value beyond the mere fact of working in the Chinese higher education system. The number of foreign experts working full time as teachers and researchers in departments and faculties at Chinese universities is low. As such, from the Western perspective, this may help explain why there are still so many mistaken perceptions about how the academic system works in China.

This is a truly unexplored topic, given that the majority of Western experts who work in and on China remain for just a short period of time with the status of visiting professor or speaker, or conduct their individual research sponsored by a European or American institution. This is a fact that certainly tarnishes and obscures the academic perception in the West about how the Chinese academic system functions and operates in reality.

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<sup>7</sup> EU-China Student and Academic Staff Mobility: Present Situation and Future Development, April 2011. Joint study between the European Commission and the Ministry of Education of China. Available at: <[http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relationprogrammes/doc/china/mobility\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relationprogrammes/doc/china/mobility_en.pdf)>

However, those who remain for a long period of time under Chinese contractual conditions as teachers and researchers have a better idea of how the Chinese university system works day to day. In this case, working at a Chinese university constitutes a real challenge for European researchers, who must face language barriers and the obstacles of a highly bureaucratized system, or what would be defined as an academic system with "Chinese characteristics." In the majority of cases, the language is not even the biggest problem, but rather mutual understanding, which must be based on cultural comprehension and international experience with how institutions that promote high-quality academic research operate, setting aside political and ideological overtones.

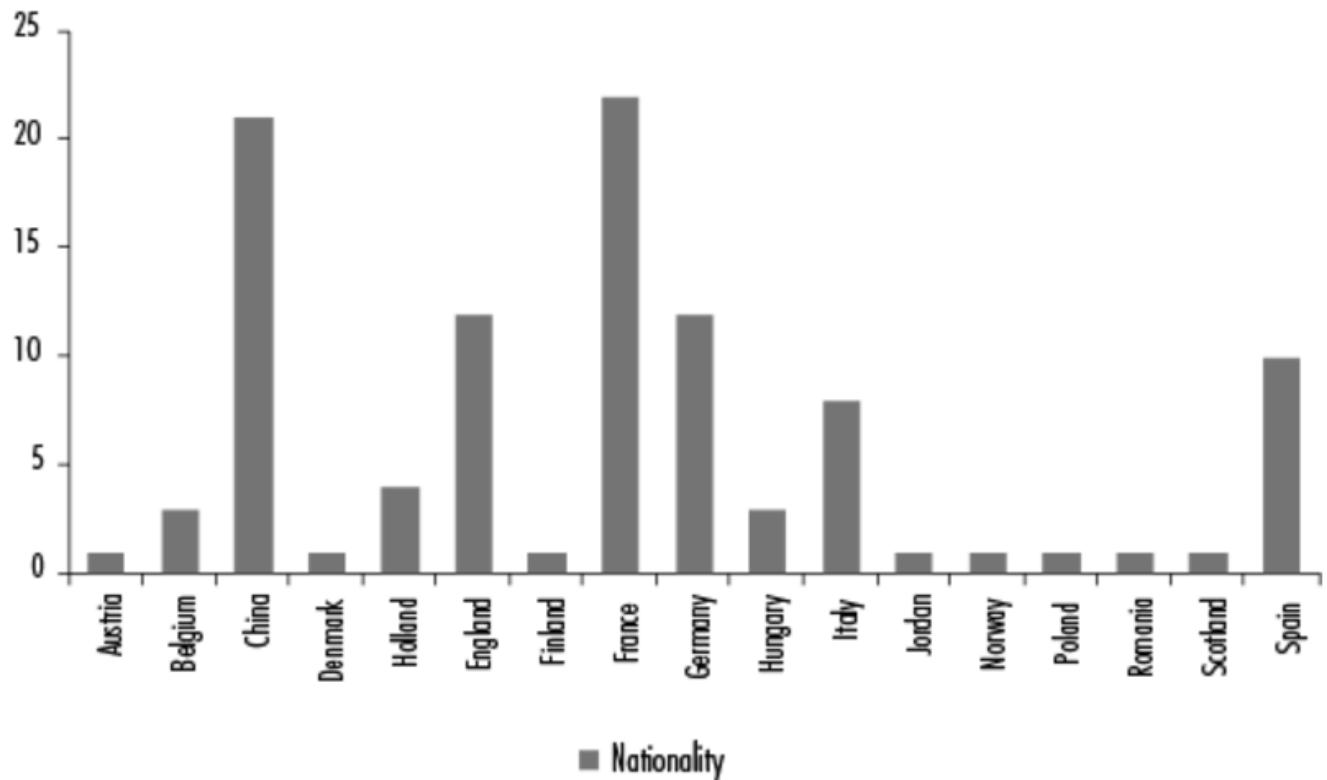
Another of the challenges involves confronting an extremely bureaucratic system, as well as resolving the issue of funding to develop research projects through the various national programs available. These are some of the main difficulties facing teaching and research staff working at Chinese universities on permanent appointments, but they are at the same time the most fascinating part of working there. Better understanding of such limitations, and efforts to resolve them, could ease understanding of the Chinese higher education system.

The solution that stands out from the start, although it would require a great deal of work and sacrifice, would be to create an international scientific network, composed of Western and Eastern academic experts, to promote quality research in which pioneering works can be conducted. Such actions would fill the gap in knowledge of the Social Sciences and Humanities in the Chinese and European academic worlds. Accordingly, one good example is the creation of the Global History Network (GHN) (<http://www.globalhistorynetwork.com>) in China, which the author of this paper founded and directed since 2011 while working with Tsinghua University, together with Asian, European, and American colleagues.

An academic platform of this magnitude was launched to maintain permanent scientific cooperation agreements between Europe, America, and China, the dynamic transfer of knowledge, and the development of scientific methods, techniques, and sources of European, American, and Chinese knowledge. Moreover, it will help create a database to foster mutual understanding of diverse academic systems so that in the long term, it is possible to reach common recognition of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees.

To achieve these objectives, in recent years, a Sino-European scientific network has been launched. It was created by the European Commission, and is called Euraxess-Links. Its purpose is to contribute to boosting knowledge at academic institutions and establishing research projects that give results and can be applied to develop and foster national economies (see Figures 3, 4, and 5, where it is possible to note progressively how the number of European experts in different areas of research and occupation levels who work in China).

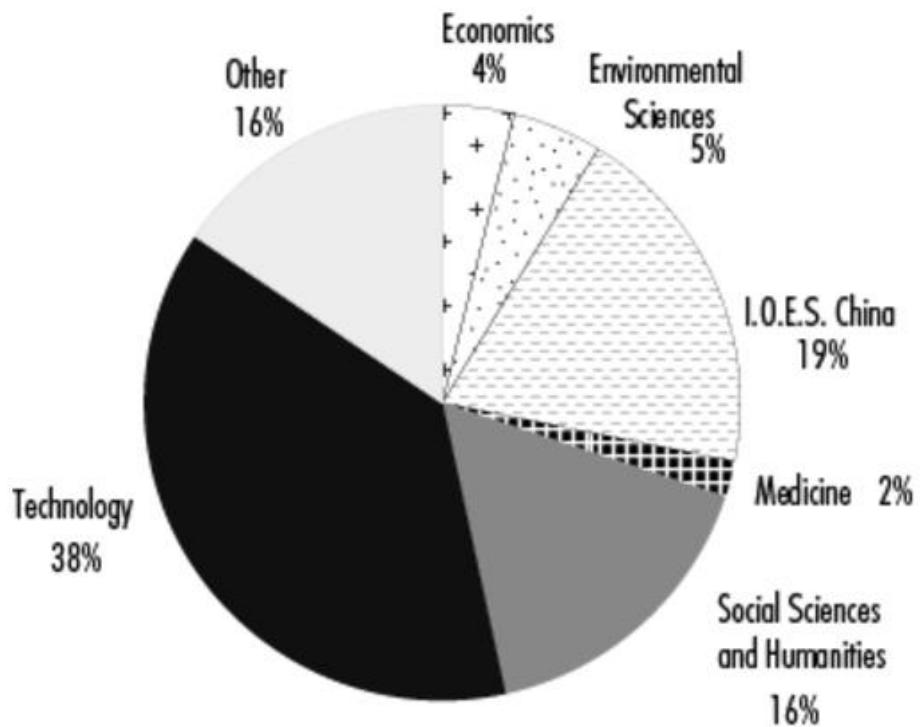
**Source:** Created by the author. Euraxess in China. China Links Meeting - Mobility of European Researchers to China - Beijing - 7 - December, 2011: Registration List.



**Figure 3.** Nationality of Researchers Recorded at the Annual Meeting of the European Delegation in China (2011)

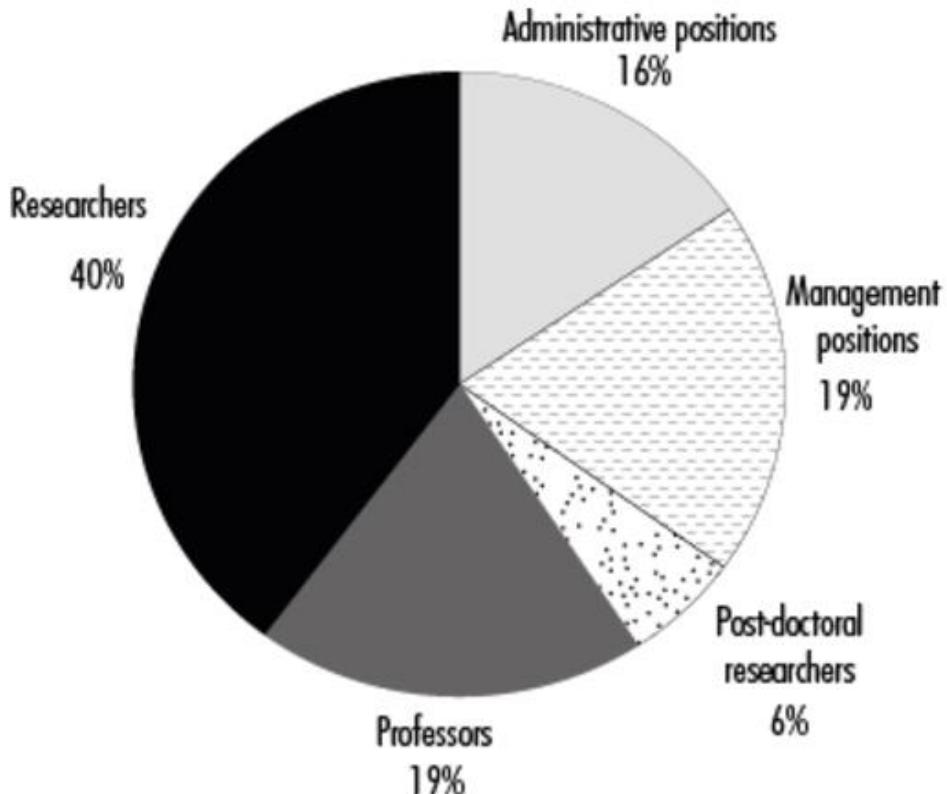
Where I.O.E.S. stands for the International Organization for Education and Science in China.

**Source:** Created by the author. Euraxess in China. China Links Meeting - Mobility of European Researchers to China - Beijing - 7 - December, 2011: Registration List.



**Figure 4.** Research Study Fields Technology

**Source:** Created by the author. Euraxess in China. China Links Meeting - Mobility of European Researchers to China - Beijing - 7 - December, 2011: Registration List.



**Figure 5.** Occupations

Such a strategic plan will usher in new working methods and modes of dialogue to foster cooperation between the two territories. The scientific and logistics platform proposed by the top Chinese universities, like Tsinghua University, Peking University, Renmin University, Fudan University, and Zhejiang University, among others, go in this direction, although there is still a lot of ground to cover.

Recent cooperation agreements signed by Chinese and European academic institutions should help to permanently consolidate this scientific network. This cooperation must be based on an understanding of the current university system that is moving towards a global space based on mobility, diversity, and the internationalization of academic structures. Recognition of these types of concepts encompassed by today's academic world, could promote more fluid transfer of scientific knowledge, as well as the development of the higher education system. This recognition could also help improve the system of both European and Chinese universities on the broader global scale to make these research institutions and universities more competitive.

The immediate impact of scientific and academic projects that promote academic mobility, the internationalization of the staff working at research institutions and universities, and the renewal of outdated curricula, is reflected in the achievement of a formula based on innovation, quality in research, and scientific development. A true and authentic "talent gain" could be attained by implementing this model. Such an equation would be able to contribute to sustainable economic development through which all societal structures could obtain benefits in the short and medium term. Consequently, problems related to the environment, demographic growth, wealth distribution, job creation, and urban development, among other global concerns, can be solved more effectively.

Pilot research projects implemented between China and Europe are based on the resolution of such matters. Figure 4 shows that the proportion of European researchers working in China is higher in the realm of the Technical Sciences, due to concern with solving matters related to sustainability in urban and rural zones. The main objectives of Chinese and European universities could be divided into the following aspects:

1. Create active platforms for the exchange of visiting professors between European and Chinese universities, fostering the development of academic activities and improving teaching and research activities in disciplines of mutual interest. In other words, jointly organize and implement series of conferences, workshops, and seminars that have an impact on society in solving the problems we face today.
2. Exchange scientific, academic, and technical information, as well as other types of mutually interesting information, helping universities maintain intellectual property rights and avoiding the issues of plagiarism and falsification of data.
3. Cooperation and partnerships between institutions, with joint research projects in which researchers, both at the individual level and in research teams can jointly take part to develop ambitious research projects with an international scope.

Within this framework of collaboration and mutual cooperation, Chinese and European institutions benefit from the excellence and competitiveness driven by academic exchanges at the global and international scale. Permanent communication between institutions can

facilitate the transfer of high-value information, helping teams achieve their established research objectives, as well as improve the exchange programs for students and professors. One of the principal gaps at some European institutions, especially in the Mediterranean countries of the EU, is the low level of internationalization and knowledge about how other international research groups work.

When it comes to objectives related to dissemination activities, the fundamental principle must be to create profound awareness and social comprehension of the importance of a new global model of academic mobility and higher education. Pursuant to these parameters, it is important to disseminate to and raise awareness among society of the importance and application of research activities, something that must be made comprehensible and tangible for non-experts in these matters.

Accordingly, it is time to improve and develop what could be defined as "public awareness" of cutting-edge science and research. Academics need to be in more direct contact with the general public to help researchers fully understand public needs and promote interest in science and technology, while also undertaking outreach activities to help society gain "awareness" of the work done by researchers and academics.

In this way, through concrete pedagogy and an understandable mode of scientific knowledge and research dissemination, it would be easier to develop public learning to lead to this "scientific awareness." These outreach activities should aim to disseminate to society the importance of the Social Sciences, as well as how interdisciplinary research can aid in understanding the dynamics and interconnections of a globalized world, which in our case encompasses such disparate, but equally interconnected, fields as International Relations, History, Economics, or Sociology.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is important for the Chinese higher education system to develop a certain degree of internationalization in the academic and scientific structures of the various universities and research institutes.

There is still a lot of ground to cover, as there are many obstacles that impede fluid cooperation between Chinese and Western universities and research centers, due to the institutional limitations that stand in the way of implementing a global model based on diversity, mobility, and the internationalization of academic institutions. Likewise, it must be noted that there are low levels of knowledge in Europe about the Chinese higher education system, explained primarily by the marginal number of European (and American) researchers and professors working in China on a permanent or long-term basis. Scientific agreements, to date, especially the proliferation of memorandums of understanding, are few and limited in scope, not to mention insufficient to establish a general and concrete framework for cooperation at the institutional level. These agreements would be more operational if they were grounded in the departmental or individual level, from researcher to researcher, which is when true mutual scientific interests and synergies are sought out.

In this way, with prior knowledge of the conditions and obstacles inherent to the system itself, it would be more comprehensible and realistic to attack the problem through the implementation of solid scientific networks that would serve as ongoing platforms for common understanding on the basis of mutual trust and transparency. These are the

ingredients to achieve the much-vaunted win-win scenario between partners and scientific groups. In this framework, it would be possible to truly reform the curricula and global studies-based scientific programs through the promotion of diversity, mobility, and internationalization. In this sense, the aforementioned difficulties, inherent to different higher education models operating in Europe and China, which characterize a highly bureaucratic system lacking meritocracy, would be progressively eradicated. Accordingly, it is time to find synergies between research institutions to locate common interests in cooperation and invest all of our efforts in more concrete research projects to compare and understand the divergent or convergent socioeconomic processes in China, America, Europe, and even Africa, rather than perpetuating the longstanding confrontation of the hegemonic powers of the West and the East.

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