



## CGS Abroad: The 2019 Shanghai Conferences

**Shanghai & Bonn** – As the global distribution of power has significantly changed over the last decade, the Center for Global Studies (CGS) of the University of Bonn traveled to Shanghai in order to discuss the state and future of global power relations at two international conferences at Tongji University.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Euro-Sino Forum was held this year under the headline “China, Europe and the United States in the Changing International Landscape” on September 28, 2019. Organized by the German Studies Center of the Tongji University, the Shanghai Institute for European Studies, and the CGS, an international group of scientists discussed opportunities and challenges in the relations between these three global players. After Professor Dr. Mingqi Xu (President of the Shanghai Institute for European Studies), Professor Dr. Chunrong Zheng (Director of the German Studies Center at Tongji University),



and Professor Dr. Xuewu Gu (Director CGS) opened the conference, Professor Gu presented insights on “A More Independent Europe and Its Challenges for China and the US”. He pointed to Europe’s opportunity for to become a peer competitor on the world stage with the ability to defend itself at home and push its own preferences abroad. This scenario would be particularly uncomfortable for the US. For China, too, the EU could become tremendously challenging, if Brussels teamed up with Washington to contain China’s rise.

Following this, Dr. Hendrik W. Ohnesorge (CGS) explored the impact of political leaders and their respective personality traits on the trilateral relationship. After providing a conceptual introduction to the individual-related approach in historiography and political science, Dr. Ohnesorge focused on the influence of Donald J. Trump in particular. In the course of his talk, he illustrated that key personality traits of the incumbent United States President have indeed already wielded considerable ramifications with respect to US global standing and foreign affairs. Among these repercussions, Dr. Ohnesorge notably attested an increasing strategic uncertainty both towards long-standing partners and emerging challengers.

In this panel on case studies of trilateral interactions, Christiane Heidbrink (CGS) presented trilateral perspectives on the security dimensions of China’s Belt and Road Initiative. The relations are shaped by different understandings and prioritizations of security, thus impeding cooperation. Nevertheless, there are windows of collaboration as Europe, the US, and China are confronted with similar questions

of practical security in the field. These include for instance the quest of finding reliable partners or of building a durable, cost-efficient, and climate-adaptive infrastructure. In response to the audience, Mrs. Heidbrink clarified that there is a perception gap vis-à-vis the coherence of the BRI and the concept of security which calls for an intensified trilateral dialogue on these issues in order to tackle the current ambiguity.



In the afternoon, Philip Nock (CGS) expressed concerns about Sino-US rivalry, European responses, and Thucydides’ Trap in particular. Coined by Harvard Professor Graham Allison, the phenomenon describes the structural stress that affects a ruling and a rising power during a power shift which he attributes towards the US and China. Mr. Nock identified conceptual problems and common criticisms such as the trap’s intellectual proximity to determinism and Power Transition theory or the case selection. Furthermore, he discussed Chinese, European, and US responses, the concept of a rivalry partnership, and its feasibility. Although Mr. Nock warned that Thucydides’ Trap entails the danger of a self-fulfilling prophecy, it also might advance the field by including both structural and emotional considerations.

Afterwards, Dr. Ying Huang (CGS) highlighted the influence of the US-China Trade War on the EU. She presented her main argument that the EU economy could indeed benefit from the US-China trade diversion in the short run by analyzing the economic structures of the US, China, and the EU as well as by a comparison of their trade amounts in 2017 and 2018. However, the trade dispute between the two largest economies has already raised concerns in Europe. Because of global supply chains distorted by the trade conflict and the negative effects of growing uncertainty for investors, it will be difficult for the EU to evade the ongoing and escalating trade diversion between Washington and Beijing in the long term. This, in turn, could trigger global economic turbulence and recession. Additionally, the trade war is challenging WTO rules and effectiveness that serves as the trade principle for the EU countries. Above all, the economic and political stability of the EU and its further integration are mainly based on the healthy and stable global economic order and the stable US-China relations. Although trade conflicts can be at a certain time resolved through consultation, the EU must face the long-term strategic confrontation between US and China. In summary, Mrs. Huang made some recommendations for both the EU and China to respond to trade protectionism and illustrated the state of the trilateral relations in the context of trade war. During the discussion, she was asked the Reason why Donald Trump does not side with the EU together against China in the Trade War. While the USA might have good chances to win the Trade War with the support of the EU, it cannot be neglected that America’s trade deficit with EU countries is also very high. Trump’s trade policy always follows his “America First” that despises the role of the EU in the America national strategy.



A closer look at the internal estrangement of the EU was presented by Dr. Andrej Pustovitovskij under the headline “17+1 between Brussels, Beijing and Washington – Who’s Structural Power?” he raised the question on whether China, the eastern and middle European members of the group or even Washington may gain power vis-a-vis Brussels. With two members of the group, Poland and Hungary he showcased a quite mixed picture, where Hungary on the one hand aligned closer to Beijing and tried to leverage Brussels with this connection and Poland on the other hand is disappointed with China

and moving closer to Washington. Overall, the 17+1 format's problematic seems to be rather one of the sources, but the symptom of inner-European divides.



The second conference, the 7<sup>th</sup> German-Chinese Forum, on September 29, 2019, likewise took place at Tongji University, whose *Deutschlandforschungszentrum* (DFZ) was also the head organizer. The conference was organized in cooperation with the *Zentrum für Chinesisch-Deutschen Gesellschaftlich kulturellen Austausch* of Tongji University, the German-Speaking Countries Branch of the Shanghai Overseas Returned Scholars Association, the Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) and the CGS. The conference was held in German and Chinese with opening remarks of Prof. Dr. Chunrong Zheng.



On the first panel of the day, Dr. Pustovitovskij gave a brief introduction to Germany's recent domestic policy developments, putting a strong emphasis on the polarization and fragmentation of the political landscape, both in terms of party and voting behavior and ideological cleavages inside German society. Here especially the cleavage between so called cosmopolitan and communitarian is of significance. Also, the new importance of climate change considering the "Fridays for Future" movement and the rise of the green party was a topic, as it makes the voters age and its role in restructuring the party-landscape in Germany visible.

On the same panel, Professor Dr. Xuewu Gu spoke on future prospects of German foreign policy. In this context, he presented and discussed three conceivable scenarios for Berlin decision-makers: an increased solo effort, an equidistance between Washington and Beijing, and finally the upholding of strategic multilateralism.

In the last presentation of the day, Dr. Ohnesorge explored the significance of the so-called "Panda Diplomacy" for China's foreign affairs in general and its soft power towards European countries in particular. Initially providing a taxonomy of soft power and integrating respective Chinese efforts into this schematic, Dr. Ohnesorge illustrated that past and current practices of sending pandas abroad can indeed be regarded a strategic instrument of Chinese soft power projection. In this context, he demonstrated that different cycles regarding destination countries of these animal ambassadors can be detected, corresponding to major Chinese foreign policy objectives and (re-)alignments. Second, a distinct correlation between destination countries and crucial Chinese trading partners has been highlighted, underlining once more the strategic element in sending pandas to zoological gardens around the world.



All members of the Center for Global Studies want to once more express their thanks to our hosts at Tongji University for rendering these conferences possible as well as our hope that debates like the once were shared in Shanghai, both cordial and critical, will continue in future years.

