Chapter 8
“From Brussels to Beijing”:
Comparing the Regionalization Strategies of
the EU and China
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Introduction

This chapter compares the regionalization strategies of the European Union (EU) and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The investigation queries what both actors hope to gain from their relations with other regions, and what respective policies do they use to further such long term strategic hopes? The contention is that the emergence of such regionalization strategies from both the EU and China is not surprising. Broadly speaking, the “new regionalism” has long been perceived as an emerging feature in international relations (see Chapter 1). At a specific level, the growing centrality of China and the EU in world affairs inevitably draws attention to the ways in which they engage other regions of the world.

This study argues that a parallel assessment of the external policies of Brussels and Beijing towards regions—in theory and in practice—reveals important similarities and differences of their regionalization strategies. On the one hand, both the EU and China stress economic cooperation, regional stability, and combating transnational terrorism as central features of their international relations. On the other hand, the EU’s emphasis on democratization and human rights goes against China’s prioritization of the inviolability of state-sovereignty. Whereas the EU talks of exporting democratization, Beijing stresses the greater need of a “democratization of international relation”—i.e., the requirement to acknowledge the legitimacy of non-Western practices.

This investigation details the similarities and differences of the EU’s and China’s regionalizing agency. A comparative analysis can thus be pursued either by looking at various themes (such as membership comparisons, economic development, political stability, sovereignty, democracy, and human rights) or by studying the respective involvement of the EU and China in other regions. Both lines of parallel assessment are followed in this chapter in order to outline the distinct regionalization strategies of Brussels and Beijing.
Comparing regionalization by themes

As suggested the parallel study of regionalization involves assessing the membership criteria postulated by different actors, the drivers of economic development and political stability, the notion and practices of sovereignty, and the relation to democracy and human rights. The following sections explain the comparative relevance of those criteria *vis-à-vis* the EU’s and China’s regionalization.

Membership comparisons

It is striking that both the EU and China have sought the assistance of some form of regional arrangements to further their external policies. In the case of China (as the chapters included in Part II indicate) it is a member of a variety of regional fora: the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization, the Asian Cooperation Dialogue, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), “ASEAN+3” (APT), East Asian Summit (EAS), etc. As the avatar of and vehicle for European regional integration, the EU has become a symbol of regionalism (Telò 2007). In this respect, it has established a range of contacts with other regional organizations. The EU has cooperation agreements with the Andean Community, MERCOSUR, Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Southern Africa Development Community, the East Asia Community, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), etc.

In this respect, there are a number of direct overlaps between the EU’s and China’s regional memberships. Both them are members of ASEM (and its offshoot the Asia–Europe Foundation), participants in the ARF, cooperation partners with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), dialogue partners with ASEAN and the South Pacific Forum, and have observer status with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Organization of American States. Meanwhile, the EU and China have their own bilateral links, nestling under the “Strategic Partnership” proclaimed in 2003.

Economic development and political stability drivers

Both the EU and China have a strong economic sense of other regions. It is in the EU’s and China’s own interests for other regions to be prosperous and trading with them. Thus, while issues of underdevelopment are a challenge for the EU and China in Africa and to a lesser extent Latin America, Asia presents noticeable economic opportunities for both. In this respect, Brussels’ view is that “the main thrust of the present and future [EU] policy in Asia is related to economic matters” (EU 1994). Indeed, such is the growing economic importance and strength of Asia, that the EU’s human rights clauses have less prominence when compared with EU’s involvement in weaker economies of Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific (Mayer 2008, 70).
Post-Tiananmen, China’s political stability depends on its ability to maintain its economic growth and “peaceful rise” to global prominence (Goldstein 2005). In this regard, economic imperatives—especially access to energy resources—have become a significant driver for China’s regionalization (Holslag 2006). Not unlike Beijing, Brussels’ regionalization is also underpinned by the EU’s “strategic raw materials diplomacy” (EU 2008d). However, the PRC’s and the EU’s energy needs are becoming increasingly competitive rather than cooperative.

Both actors seek to promote stability in their surrounding regions—the EU through the “European Neighborhood Policy” and China through the “Good Neighbor Policy.” In this regard, Brussels proclaims that “it is in the European interest that countries on our borders are well-governed. Neighbors who are engaged in violent conflict, weak states where organized crime flourishes, dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth on its borders all pose problems for Europe” (EU 2003b). Likewise, Beijing insists that “to accelerate its modernization drive… China needs a peaceful international environment of long-term stability, particularly a sound environment in its surrounding areas” (Wang 2004, 16).

Such commitment to regional stability is reflected in the peacekeeping contributions made by Brussels and Beijing. At the start of 2009, the EU operates thirteen EUFOR (EU Force) operations in the Balkans, the Caucasus (Georgia), Middle East (Palestine, Iraq), Asia (Afghanistan, Aceh), and Africa (Somalia, Guinea-Bissau, Chad, Central African Republic, and Congo-Kinshasa). On the other hand, some 11,063 military personnel from China have participated in 18 UN peacekeeping operations since 1990, including Chinese contributions to thirteen UN missions during 2008 involved in the Sudan, Ethiopia/Eritrea, Somalia, Western Sahara, Congo-Kinshasa, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Kosovo, Haiti, Lebanon, and East Timor. A regional emphasis in this Chinese involvement is perhaps indicated by over half the operations being in Africa. Whilst the EU presence in Africa is, like China’s, quite noticeable with five out of its thirteen operations being there; a EU regional emphasis on the Balkans, Caucasus and Mediterranean areas is also apparent, with five out of its thirteen EUFOR operations being there.

**Sovereignty**

The very nature of the EU-project rests on pooling the sovereignty of its member states. Resting on the experience of two world wars, the EU aims to transcend the divisions produced by the emphasis on national boundaries. It is in this context that, the EU’s experience “allows [it] to present regionalism as a model” (Reiterer 2005, 5). This background makes the EU predisposed to propagate similar regional arrangements elsewhere, such that “inter-regionalism has become a strong component of the EU’s relations with Latin America, Asia and Africa” (Söderbaum et al. 2005, 360). Instancing this predilection are the EU’s extensive **Regional Strategy Papers** on the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, Asia, Central Asia, Africa, Southern Africa, East Africa and the Indian Ocean, Latin America, Central
America and the Pacific. In such a context, it would appear that the EU “prefers inter-regional rather than inter-national relations in trading with other countries and regions” (Park 2005, 189).

China’s regionalization strategies are informed by very different values. Consequently, “the regional groups in which China holds membership have largely eschewed any movement towards supranationality. For its part, China has sought to promote, or at least reinforce, the norm of sovereignty” (Moore 2008, 43). This focus on maintaining sovereignty and non-interference forms part of China’s soft power (Kurlantzick 2007, 44). Such an emphasis on state-sovereignty reflects China’s historical experience and the narrative framing of the memories from the nineteenth—“century of humiliation.” Bearing this context in mind, Elmaco (2008, 8) argues that the EU’s regionalization-strategy reflects the dynamics of tighter “regionalism,” whereas China’s outlines a looser form of state to state “regional cooperation.” This difference of approach is why Zhao (1998) argues that in the Asia-Pacific, the EU can embrace “structured regionalism” from afar, whilst China instead prefers looser “soft regionalism” from nearby. Thus, unlike the ever closer union of the EU, China’s regionalization is firmly premised on the Westphalian national state model.

Beijing’s sensitivity to sovereignty is also connected to its aversion to the dynamics of regime change. China regionalization, thereby, emphasizes its regional policies reassert the sovereignty of states. Thus, in terms of comparing the EU’s and China’s relations with global regions, “Beijing’s affirmation of government centralization and sovereignty and the benefits of a party–controlled centralized command economy” seems to contradict Brussels’ “pride in interdependent politico-economic frameworks, flaunting the benefits of liberal democracy” (Kavalski 2007b, 841). In practice, therefore, while the EU has trumpeted the need for democratic change in Zimbabwe, the Sudan and Myanmar, China has instead emphasized the sovereign inviolability of those states.

**Democracy and human rights**

Democracy and human rights provide the clearest example of the distinct normative values of the EU’s and China’s regionalization-strategies. On the one hand, the PRC has emphasized socio-economic rather than political human rights, has sought to “redefine the international standard itself,” and “as such, China’s positions have received sympathetic hearings in the third world” (Deng 2008, 70–92).

On the other hand, whilst the EU has its own battery of socio-economic rights, it has explicit and prominent standards set for liberal democracy values. In this regard, “the development and consolidation of democracy and the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms together form a major objective of the external policy of the EU” (EU 1994). Indeed this rhetoric underpinned the formation of the EU enlargement has involved support for democratization towards Greece, Spain and Portugal in the 1980s and towards Eastern Europe in the 1990s—all showing “the transformative potential underwriting the dynamics
of accession conditionality” (Kavalski 2007b, 842). Such emphasis on democracy and human rights have been absent in China’s external relations. Conditionality is generally something that Beijing neither practices nor preaches—indeed, it is the lack of such conditionality that distinguishes the global politics of the PRC’s regionalization from that of the EU’s.

China’s argument is that the insistence on the international universality of human rights standards is a feign disguise for the external (Western) interference in the domestic affairs of states. To a significant degree, such an attitude reflect Beijing’s preoccupation with controlling (if not curbing) the promotion of democracy within China as well as with the fixation on the regime-survival of CCP. In this respect both the PRC and the EU have different understanding of the notion and practices of “good governance.”

As evidenced by China’s regionalization practices good governance involves patterns of economic stability and efficiency. For the EU, good governance involves the promotion of political stability based on transparent and accountable government practices, which “strengthen democracy and political pluralism by the expansion of participation in political life and continues to promote the embracing of all human rights and freedoms” (EU 2008b). The EU’s regionalization, thereby, is premised on conditionality and the assessment of the progress made by regional partners in the area of governance. Such conditionality, assessment, and indicators criteria are not something that China pushes in its own regionalizing-outreach, not least because of the unwillingness to attract attention to its own domestic practices.

Of course, just because the EU has normative transformative levers and policy-discourses does not mean they have been utilized to their fullest extent (Barbe and Johansson-Nogues 2008, 91–93). Yet, it is the very existence of such democratization-human rights levers that distinguished the EU’s regionalization strategies from China’s experience of region-building. The following section expands on the external relations of both Brussels and Beijing with different global regions.

Comparing regionalization by context

As suggested the parallel study of regionalization involves not only the assessment of its underlying themes, but also of the concrete regional effects and policies of agents. Comparative regionalization, thereby, involves the study of the distinct contexts to which region-building is applied. To that effect, this section undertakes a parallel assessment of the EU’s and China’s regionalization in Southeast and East Asia, in Africa, in Latin America, and in Central Asia.
Southeast and East Asia

Southeast Asia has attracted formal attention by both the EU and China in recent years. Both actors are “dialogue partners” with ASEAN. The EU-ASEAN encounters involve EU Foreign Ministers, the Secretary-General of the Council, and the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and the European Commissioner for External Relations and the European Neighborhood Policy. The EU-ASEAN Summit involves similar high level EU agencies.

Both the EU and China have engaged in modest peace consolidation operations in the region. Chinese military police were involved in the stabilization of East Timor as part of the multinational UNTAET mission from 1999–2002, and the EU contributed police training and monitoring units to Aceh in 2005–2006, under the EU Commission’s €15.85 million Aceh Peace Process Support program.

The region is an attractive economic area for both Brussels and Beijing. China’s diplomacy has targeted Southeast Asia in a sustained fashion (Kuik 2005). Beijing’s regionalization in this regard can be read as an attempt to allay the fears of Southeast Asian actors, due to China’s sovereignty claims over (virtually the whole of) the South China Sea (see Chapter 10). Such suspicion, however, has a historical background as well.

Initially, China (under Mao) interpreted the establishment of ASEAN in 1967 as a form of a neocolonial project. In this context, the post-Mao cultivation of Beijing’s relations with ASEAN is particularly noticeable. An indication of the improvement of relations has been the “Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea” drawn up between China and ASEAN. The encompassing ASEAN’s “Treaty of Amity and Cooperation” was signed by China in 2003—a signature required by all countries willing to participate in the East Asia Summit. It is significant that the “Joint Declaration” between China and ASEAN highlights the shared aim of “support[ing] each other’s endeavor for economic growth and development” (PRC–ASEAN 2003), with no mention of democratization or human rights issues. In contrast, it took the EU much longer to sign ASEAN’s “Treaty of Amity and Cooperation,” scheduled for the 2009 EU–ASEAN ministerial meeting at Phnom Penh. Whereas China negotiated a FTA Framework Agreement in November 2002 with ASEAN, the EU was still engaged in negotiating a similar FTA in 2009.

Unsurprisingly, regional dynamics in East Asia show a significant role for the PRC in the region (see Chapter 9). Admittedly, both the EU and China participate in the ARF and the ASEM. However, the EU has played a more prominent role in maintaining ASEM—with the EU Commission acting as a “permanent” coordinator (Zhang 2008). Yet, the EU’s absence from the “Six-Party Talks” on North Korea is indicative of Brussels’ limitations. Whereas China is involved with “ASEAN+3” and EAS; the EU is not. For the moment, given the lack of any clear regional-institutional framework for East Asia, the EU’s interaction has been mainly at the national level, in its bilateral relationships with South Korea, Japan,
and above all with the PRC. Economic issues, especially trade (imbalances), figure heavily on Brussels’ agenda.

Africa

Africa is increasingly emerging as an extended neighborhood for both Brussels and Beijing, with geopolitical, economic, and energy concerns becoming the focus of policy attention. Political stability, in particular, has become a common concern to both. On the one hand, the EU has authorized forces to Somalia, Guinea-Bissau, Chad, Central African Republic, and Congo-Kinshasa. On the other hand, China (through its contributions to UN-peacekeeping) has been operating in the Sudan, Ethiopia/Eritrea, Somalia, Western Sahara, Congo-Kinshasa, Liberia, and the Ivory Coast (see Chapter 13). Both the EU and China have links with African regional and sub-regional organizations; yet, clear normative divides are evident in the regionalization strategies of both actors over the issues of sovereignty and democracy/human rights.

China has embraced Africa (i) in part for gaining diplomatic recognition for its “One China” policy; (ii) in part for geopolitical leverage vis-à-vis the United States; and (iii) in part because of Africa’s growing importance for providing mineral and energy resources, especially oil (Taylor 2006). The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), set up in 2000 offers a continent-wide regionalizing framework that can be compared to the 2007 EU–Africa Summit, which brought together 52 African states (alongside the African Union) and the 27 member-states of the EU (alongside the European Commission).

Amidst talk of common goals for development in a multipolar world and of diplomatic support for the PRC’s claims over Taiwan, the White Paper on “China’s African Policy” articulates Beijing’s regionalization of the continent as an instance of “promoting more democratic international relationship and rule of law in international affairs and safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of developing countries” (PRC 2006). On the other hand, the EU’s vision is explicitly premised on the dynamics of institutional regionalism. Thus, an Africa-wide process of regional integration is not only recognized but encouraged by the EU. Brussels emphasizes that “at the continental level, the EU should support the continental institutions and strategies of the African Union [which] will require boosting the capacity of these supranational institutions to make them stronger” (EU 2005, 20).

The “Strategy for Africa” also brought in the normative preferences of Brussels that “the EU should also continue to promote the human rights” because “the EU and Africa share basic values and objectives, such as a more multilateral world order, fairer global development and the promotion of diversity, they must be strategic partners in the international community” (EU 2005, 4–19). Such normative political assertions are at the very forefront of Brussels’ assertion that “Africa and Europe are bound together by history, culture, geography, a common future, as well as by a community of values: the respect for human rights, freedom, equality,
solidarity, justice, the rule of law and democracy” (EU 2007b, 1). In contrast, Beijing’s regionalization of Africa has prioritized economic development. The point, therefore, is not whether these democratic values are being implemented in Africa; but whether the PRC’s “no-strings” framework for the regionalization of the continent is more relevant to the African context (Ramo 2004).

It would appear that for the time being the EU is better attuned to the different regional arrangements in Africa, with program established with the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community, the Indian Ocean Commission, and ECOWAS. The PRC may well be establishing some regional-level links in Africa, but Beijing’s focus is still predominantly on bilateral program. Africa, however, is becoming the scene for competition between the EU and China. As one observer put it “China’s business-first approach is undermining EU efforts to boost sustainability and governance standards” (Berger 2007).

Latin America

History and language give the EU a substantial presence in Latin America. The EU has had a deliberately regional approach (Santander and Lombaerde 2007). There have been ongoing EU-strategy documents drawn up by the Commission for Latin America as a whole, most recently with the 2007–2013 “Regional Strategy Paper” (which followed the 2002–2006 one), which explicitly focuses on ways in which “the two regions must work together” (EU 2007d, 7). Political dialogue is maintained at this general level each year, either through the biannual EU–Latin America Summit of Heads of State or the ministerial EU–Rio Group. Their 2008 “Lima Declaration” included development and climate issues.

Below this broad regional framework, the EU engages Latin America at the sub-regional level as well. In this regard, some have pointed out that “inter-regionalism is particularly strong in the EU’s external policies towards Latin America, where the EU has interregional partnerships with most relevant sub-regions” (Söderbaum et al. 2005, 366). Thus, the EU has entered into a “Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement” with the Andean Community, a “Framework Cooperation Agreement” with MERCOSUR—it has actually been termed “one of the most developed cases of inter-regionalism that exists anywhere in the world” (Söderbaum et al. 2005, 366). Negotiations for a deeper “Association Agreement” began in 2000, subsequently concluded on political and cooperation areas, but remained stuck on setting up a FTA. Sub-regional linkages with Central America have also been sought by the EU (Argueta 2008). The EU’s relations with the Caribbean have emerged from its close colonial ties of member states like the UK, France, and the Netherlands. In this respect, Brussels has acknowledged that “the EU stands behind the Caribbean objective to build regional unity in the Caribbean, with CARICOM being the axis of integration and CARIFORUM of cooperation” (EU 2006a, 3).
China does not have the same historical legacy in Latin America like European states, but Beijing has tried to turn this to its advantage (see Chapter 14). The PRC has thus instituted the four-yearly China–Caribbean Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum, the biannual Dialogue Conferences with MERCOSUR (since 1998), and the biannual “Political Consultation and Cooperation Mechanism” of the Sino–Andean Community (since 2002). In the negotiations of the WTO Doha Round in Hong Kong in December 2005, MERCOSUR (in particular Brazil) and China worked together against EU agricultural subsidies as a trade distorting advantage for Europe. Latin American tours by the Chinese leadership have become a feature of recent years, much to the discomfort of the USA. The interest for China in Latin America remains more at the bilateral state level; with Brazil as the regional giant and multipolar partner, Venezuela for its energy resources, and Panama for access to the Panama Canal.

Central Asia

Central Asia is an important region for China. Parts of it used to be under Chinese imperial control in earlier centuries (see Chapter 2); whilst China’s current grip on its own Central Asian provinces of Xinjiang and Tibet are directly affected by events elsewhere in the ex-Soviet Central Asian states. Whilst Central Asia is part of China’s immediate neighborhood, the region is not construed as the immediate vicinity of the EU—i.e., it is part of the so-called “the ‘Neighbors of EU Neighborhood’” (EU 2007a, 7). Nevertheless, both the EU and China are concerned about the regional stability of Central Asia, especially by the threats posed by the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the prospect of destabilization spreading from Central Asia eastwards towards China and westwards towards the Caucasus, the Middle East, and, ultimately, Europe.

Both the EU and China have common interests in strengthening transport infrastructure through the region, exemplified in the Euro-Asian Transport Corridor Network. The EU quickly started up the TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe–Caucasus–Asia) Project in 1993, funded under their TACIS program, and subsequently settling down at intergovernmental level in 1998. China’s attitudes towards TRACECA are unclear. On the one hand, Beijing has indicated its willingness to develop alternative routes of its own; whilst, on the other hand, China has also shown an interest in joining the TRACECA project. A final link-up to China’s transport system would complete the network, and reflect China’s growing readiness to extend transport links westwards (Garver 2006).

Indeed, geopolitical undertones can be seen in the EU’s attempt to anchor, if not reorient Central Asia westwards, though overlapping regions. The EU’s Black Sea regional outreach is being extended eastwards (Yannis 2008). The Black Sea-Caspian “Baku Initiative” links the EU and Central Asia together in a ministerial and working parties framework, complete with yet another cross regional linkage in the shape of the EU “Black Sea and Caspian Sea Basin and its Neighboring
Countries Energy Cooperation Secretariat.” Energy security underpins the “Baku Initiative” (Baran 2008).

Both the EU and China have clear energy interests in Central Asia—a tendency which appears to make concerns about democratization and human rights issues are rather irrelevant. The sense for the EU Commissioner for External Relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner (2008, 2), at the EU-Central Asia Security Forum on Security Issues was that “strengthening our energy partnership with Central Asia is a top political priority for the European Union. The region is central to our strategy of diversification of energy supplies and supply routes.” Similar energy diversification imperatives operate for China in Central Asia (Peyrrouxe 2007, 46–69; Clarke 2009), and with it a degree of energy competition emerging between the EU and China in Central Asia. On the one hand stands the eastern corridor Kazakhstan–China pipeline; on the other hand stands the southern corridor Caspian–Baku–Turkey pipeline.

Human rights and democracy issues continue to be an area of divergence in the EU’s and the PRC’s policies towards Central Asia (see Chapter 11). The EU contends that “the development and consolidation of stable, just and open societies, adhering to international norms, is essential to bring the partnership between the European Union and Central Asian states to full fruition.” Talk of international norms is a code word for political values, “good governance, the rule of law, human rights, democratization, education and training are key areas where the EU is willing to share experience and expertise” (EU 2007c, 5). It is significant how the EU lists its aims in Central Asia, “the Strategy defines EU priorities for its cooperation with the region as a whole, including in the fields of human rights, rule of law, good governance and democracy, education, economic development, trade and investment, energy and transport, environmental policies, common threats and inter-cultural dialogue” (EU 2008c, 1); with the human rights/democratization values put at the forefront.

One further avenue for the EU’s regionalization of Central Asia has been the setting up in 2008 of the EU-Central Asia Forum on Security Issues (which involves Brussels with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan). It had a clear enough rhetoric on how participants are “driven by a shared commitment to developing and organizing our long-term partnership on the basis of common objectives and undertakings to strengthen peace and stability in Central Asia, respect for human rights and the development of the rule of law and democracy” (EU 2008c).

Of course in the case of countries like Turkmenistan one can wonder about the genuineness of such democracy/human rights rhetoric, but that misses the point; such rhetoric does not appear when it is a question of China-Central Asia matters. However this creates tensions for the EU within its regionalization approach that China does not face. In contrast, China can, and does, just simply focus on issues of security and energy, in Central Asia. Whereas China is a founding member of the SCO, the EU has little links with its regional counterpart. Instead the EU has so far channeled its regional strategy with just the local five states of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan together, at various
ministerial meetings involving the EU-Central Asia Ministerial Troika from the Council of Ministers, attended by the EU Commission as well. There seems some reluctance on the part of the EU to complicate its Central Asian strategy further by initiating relations with the SCO. In part this is ideological, as the SCO has labored under Washington’s disapproval as something of a “club of dictators.” In part it is organizational as the SCO has few supranational aspects for the EU to engage with (Bailes 2007, 18). China’s membership of the SCO does not bring any particular erosion of Beijing’s sovereignty; the SCO very deliberately is set up as a non-supranational non-EU style regional body.

Conclusions

This chapter has evidenced that the EU regionalization approaches are underpinned by a strong normative emphasis on democratization and human rights, whereas China’s does not. The implementation of such a democracy-human rights agenda is not always consistently applied, Brussels’ rhetoric is clear enough—“the EU strives in particular to promote prosperity, solidarity, human rights and democracy, decent work, security and sustainable development worldwide” (EU 2007, 4). Whereas the EU trumpets internal democratization preferences, and proclaims the merits of liberal democratic values stemming from the European evolution; China instead proclaims a de-Westernizing “democratization of international relations.” Such regionalization strategy is laden with the emphasis on state-sovereignty and multipolarity.

Indeed, this emphasis on state sovereignty by China points to a further difference in regionalization strategies. Inter-regionalism (between regions) can be distinguished from regional cooperation (state to state). The EU was founded on a regionalism superseding the narrower frameworks of the nation state. The argument then is that being created as a regional entity, the EU consequently has a disposition—a pre-existent sympathy—towards inter-regionalism (Aggarwal and Fogarty 2004) in its external relations. Conversely, China, as a nation-state actor uses regional openings as an avenue to pursue its own national interests, but has no particular pre-existent sympathy towards inter-regionalism as a concept or a policy-framework.

Nevertheless it seems that China’s involvement with other regions is already generating distinct socialization dynamics in world affairs. Beijing’s regionalization, therefore, indicates a nascent tendency towards establishing distinct communities of practice. The counterpoint to this convergence is reemphasis on divergence, Inayatullah and Blaney’s (2004, 44) sense of “international society in which the problem of difference is pervasive.” Certainly, at present China has policies and involvement vis-à-vis other regions, whilst the EU, per se, represents a classical form of a Western mode of regionalism. Whether this is, or is not, a better thing is of course a matter of interpretation. Yet, the observation of the regionalization practices initiated by both Brussels and Beijing indicate the need to deepen (not only broaden) the study of comparative regionalism.
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