

The China Platform

Dear Rector, Vice-rector, directors, Chinese guests, ...

For the next ten minutes or so, I will introduce to you the China Platform at Ghent University, which was established last year as a part of the International Relations Office, but has now been transformed into a cooperation project with the Provincial Government of East-Flanders, the City Authorities of Ghent, and the Flanders-China Chamber of Commerce as its strategic partners. But, more on this later, let me start by telling you a little bit about the history of cooperation between Ghent University and China, and that of the China Platform within the university.

As an internationally oriented university, our institution has been active in China for over twenty years. Lately, we have seen that more and more of our academic staff have become interested in exploring possibilities for cooperation with Chinese institutions, for both educational and research activities. In the field of education, Ghent University at this moment has 10 Cooperation Agreements with Chinese universities, as well as 5 important Memorandums of Understanding. In June this year, Ghent University was the only Belgian university to participate in the Trade Mission to China, lead by the Crown Prince of Belgium, Filip.

With the establishment of the China Platform, we have provided an answer to all the questions that arose with the increasing interest in China. We support Faculties, professors, research groups...in their China-activities, both here in Ghent as in China. We offer them an

overview of what is possible in the field of cooperation within the framework of European educational programmes, like AsiaLink and Asia Pro Eco in the past, and we guide them through the admission procedures of these programmes. At the end of this year, we expect a new European Programme to be launched. The Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window will this time focus on Asia, making cooperation in the field of education between EU-institutions and for instance Chinese institutions easier. At this moment, we have started to whether and how we can submit one or more applications for this programme.

Another means of supporting the Faculties is by acting as a single point of contact for all relevant China information. We keep close contact with the Chinese Government, namely the Embassy of China in Brussels, as well as with the Government of Flanders/Belgium. To give an example, starting from January 2007, our Government decided that all Chinese students wishing to study in Belgium have to obtain an APS-certificate, if not, they wouldn't be granted a visa. The China Platform follows the implementation of this new rule closely in direct contact with the responsible government bodies, and in doing so is able to provide accurate and updated information to both our Student Administration and our Chinese partner institutions.

However, the China Platform does more than supporting Faculties. From its start, it became clear that Ghent University as an institution would benefit most if it were to realise its China-goals in cooperation with a couple of strategic partners outside of the academic world. That's why in April this year, Ghent University signed a Cooperation Protocol with the Provincial Government of East-Flanders, with the City of Ghent, and with the Flanders-China Chamber of Commerce. By joining forces between the academic world, the political world and the economic world, we can explore new ways of financing activities, we can have a more

profound impact on the societal debate, we can reach out to more people, ... Besides this, as a University we can take the chance to participate in activities and projects that are not strictly academic. To give an example: in 2010 Shanghai will host the World Expo – an excellent opportunity to promote the China Platform. Another example, one that you all have experienced yesterday, is the welcome you've enjoyed at the Provincial House, and the guided tour in Ghent.

The cooperation with the economic world is also a very important aspect: this creates new possibilities, obviously in the field of research, but also on an educational level. For instance, we are currently planning to see how our students can do an internship in companies that are active in China, or the other way around, how our Chinese students can benefit from an internship in companies in Flanders. Also, another possibility has to be explored as well: how can we as a university cater to the needs of the economic world? Can we develop courses in cooperation with companies? Can we host training sessions for employees?

As you can see, there are still a tremendous amount of possibilities to be explored. The institutionalisation of the China Platform is a first step into an overall China strategy. Without doubt the activities of the China Platform and of Ghent University in general, in China will only increase. So, let me conclude this speech by wishing you all an interesting and fruitful session here in “the Pand” this morning, and later today in Brussels. I will now give the floor to.....

