

PARADOXAL CHINA: WESTERN PERCEPTIONS, EASTERN REALITIES?

A conference of the
Academic China Meeting (ACO)

www.aco-nl.org

Groningen, Friday 28 November 2008

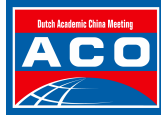
Background

The world has placed a magnifying glass on China. We debate its development, analyze its economy and politics, and try to grasp a glimpse of its social and cultural complexities. China has hit the international headlines because of contaminated baby milk and SUVs that fail crashtests. These problems might point to the end of China's low cost strategy. On closer inspection, however, China seems to have substantially fewer problems with product quality than other emerging economies, and even Western economies for certain products. Similarly contradictory is China's impact on developing countries. Critics fear a negative influence on Africa of China's economic rise. Indeed, China's rise has stiffened competition for the textile industry in Lesotho and South Africa, leading to job losses. Simultaneously, the Chinese globalization has also created a new impulse for poor cotton farmers in West-Africa, and overall increased purchasing power for the ordinary African citizen.

What is true about the reports on China that we read in the newspapers and internet? How close do our perceptions of a vast and multi-faceted "*Paradoxal China*" come to its *actual* development? The community of Dutch scholars who are active in China, united in the Dutch Academic China Meeting or ACO, wishes to present the many, at times blatantly, contrasting faces of Chinese development, and to foster the debate about these with others. Against this backdrop, we would like to cordially invite you to attend the meeting, discuss and rethink our own perceptions as compared with the complexities of Chinese reality.

Program, panels and speakers

The coming ACO conference is organized around several sessions. Each session focuses on the discrepancy between Western perceptions and the actual complexities of Chinese development. There will be ample room for debate and reflection in each session. The various aspects of Chinese



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development that will appear in the panels are (preliminary line-up and titles):

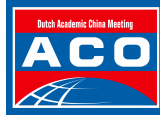
1. China's Science and Education: Collaborator or Competitor? (van Hees)
2. Chinese Globalization and the South: A Contradictory Expansion in Africa (van Dijk)
3. Human Rights and Good Governance: Universal versus Chinese Values (Ho)
4. Chinese Product Quality: End to low-cost strategies or new opportunities? (Krabbendam)
5. Chinese traditional medicine versus Western knowledge (van Dijk)
6. Organising your business, the Chinese and the Western points of view (Krabbendam)
7. The Environment according to the West and the East (Ho)
8. Deconstructing Perceptions of Chinese Culture and Media (Krabbendam)
9. Views on Chinese History: From Mao to the Cultural Revolution (Ho)
10. China in international relations: How negative perceptions influence international policies (van Dijk)

The conference will bring together key speakers on China's economy, politics, science and technology, culture and society. Moreover, the various panels of the ACO conference will be chaired by some of the key decision-makers in the Dutch academia. At present, we have confirmed attendance from Mr. Dirk Jan van den Berg (former Dutch ambassador to China and chairman of Delft University), prof. Sibrand Poppema (chairman of the University of Groningen), and prof. Frans Zwarts (rector magnificus of the University of Groningen).

In the attached registration form you can propose a panel, or sign up for one of the preliminary panels listed above. Please note that the working language for the conference will be English.

About ACO

The Dutch Academic China Meeting (or ACO) was launched in Groningen in the fall of 2004 in the presence of the President of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences, the Dutch ambassador to China, and the Vice Chancellor of the University of Groningen. It can be expected that in the foreseeable future China will be one of the world's largest centres for academic research and education. On the other hand, in many disciplines Dutch universities are at the forefront of international research. Several Dutch universities are among the World Top 100 ranking of universities. It is therefore no wonder that an active and dynamic scholarly process of cross-fertilization has emerged between The Netherlands and China.



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Over the years, a wide variety of exchange programs and cooperative projects have been established between The Netherlands and China. The ACO has been established in response to these exciting developments. Dutch researchers from several research institutes and departments of the universities of Amsterdam, Delft, Groningen, Leiden, Twente, Utrecht and Wageningen – have joined forces to shape the ACO (see www.aco-nl.org).

Mission

The ACO neither intends to merge the respective institutes nor to coordinate research and education efforts, but to step up the momentum and interaction that has been growing between Dutch universities and to provide a framework within which enlarged China co-operation can take place. The ACO has the following objectives:

- To keep track of, and provide information about Sino-Dutch academic cooperative projects as a service to ACO members and other interested parties;
- To provide a forum for exchange and strengthened communication on China between scholars of Dutch universities and Dutch government officials (such as from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs; Development Cooperation; Education, Culture and Science, and so forth);
- Where possible to cater for multi-disciplinary exchange and cooperative projects between ACO members and Chinese universities.

Conference publication

The ACO will work towards a book publication of the conference. For this purpose, each panel will be attended by one journalist or scientist, who will write a chapter for the book.

Registration

For registration and information, please fill in the attached registration form, and send this to Mr. Arthur de Boer, Centre for Development Studies, University of Groningen, arthur.de.boer@rug.nl.

ACO 2008 is sponsored by:
the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU)
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