

# CHAPTER 6

## SPAIN

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### Introduction

Spain and China have had a strategic partnership since 2005 (Zhongping & Jing, 2014). There has been an increase in the two countries' economic ties in recent years. What is more, the bilateral relations have been developed also on other levels. 11 out of 17 Spanish autonomous communities declare cooperation with partners from China. One objective of this chapter is to characterize the activities between Spanish communities and Chinese provinces and cities – their intensity, scope, advantages and obstacles that they face. The question relates to a broader perspective – the bilateral state government relations and the EU-China cooperation: is there any correlation between the relations at the state level and the regional level? Moreover, one of the ultimate goals of the whole project is to analyse the impact of the EU-China relations on paradiplomacy. Do the autonomous communities see any role of the EU in their activities with Chinese partners? Do they need any support from the European Union to have more intense or effective cooperation with this Asian partner?

In the first phase of the project an online survey was sent to all Spanish autonomous communities. 14 out of 17 regions sent completed questionnaires<sup>33</sup>. In the case of two more regions, partial information was received by e-mail. One region – Madrid – did not complete the questionnaire. Assumptions about partnership with China in that case are based on the information found on the region's website, which is why the information is not full and comparable to data gathered from the rest of the communities. Additionally, two autonomous communities were selected for a deeper analysis of the character of their cooperation with their Chinese partners. On the one hand, the cooperation between the selected communities and China is quite unusual and very intense<sup>34</sup>, but, on the other, the form and spheres of cooperation are very different in both regions. In the case of Castile and León, much emphasis is placed on educational cooperation, while in Valencia – economic.

The chapter is divided into two main parts. The first starts with some general information on the bilateral state relations, as well as those at the society level. There are also some basic characteristics of paradiplomacy regulations in Spain. The second part is dedicated to the research results. The chapter ends with some conclusions and policy recommendations.

## Central Level of Spain-China Relations

Spain and China established diplomatic relations in 1973, which is relatively late compared to some other Western European countries. As in the case of most Western European countries, opening relations with the PRC was supposed to strengthen the Spanish political position in Europe (Esteban, 2016). In 1985 – the year of the Spanish accession to the European Communities – President Felipe Gonzalez was the first Spanish president to visit the PRC. Spain began to offer tied loans to the PRC to facilitate the entrance of Spanish

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<sup>33</sup> Krystyna Czarnecka helped to gather the information about Spanish foreign activities in the first phase of the project.

<sup>34</sup> Catalonia is also particularly active in international cooperation (not only with China). However, the tools and objectives of Catalonia's paradiplomacy are widely described in the literature, often in combination with Scotland or Quebec (see e.g. Segura, 2017)

companies to China. Since that time **the Spanish policy towards China has remained the same for the last three decades, regardless of changes in the government**, focusing on economy. Spain is one of the EU member states which combines a soft power approach on political issues with a demanding position on economic matters (Esteban, 2016).

In November 1990, when China was isolated (after the Tiananmen Square massacre), the Spanish Foreign Minister, Francisco Fernandez Ordóñez, was the first representative of a Western authority to visit Beijing, which was appreciated by the Chinese leaders (Esteban, 2016). The first official action plan on the Asia-Pacific Region, released in 2000 (Higuera, 2015; *Plan Marco Asia Pacífico 2000–2002*, 2000), treated China as the most relevant country for Spain in Asia<sup>35</sup>.

The aforementioned close relations also have their institutional dimensions. The comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Spain was established on 14 November 2005. The year 2007 was the “Year of Spain” in China. At the same time, **China is the second-largest foreign holder of Spanish government bonds**, and the level of bilateral foreign direct investment has been increasing significantly since 2010 (Esteban, 2016). President Rodríguez Zapatero visited China four times during his terms in office (2004–2011). The former Chinese Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao, called Spain “the best friend of China in Europe” during his official visit in 2009 (Esteban, 2016).

The Spanish government has been engaged in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), announced by China in 2013. The government promotes the idea as a business opportunity for several sectors. Spain relatively quickly became **a founding member of the AIIB**, a bank perceived as a pillar of the BRI. The country can be viewed as **the last Eurasian leg of the BRI**, since Spain is the gateway to the Atlantic Ocean and the western Mediterranean Sea (Esteban & Otero-Iglesias, 2016). Spain hopes to be the regional hub for trade, to expand export markets for Spanish companies, and to offer opportunities to bid on construction projects (Pirner, 2018). The government expects that the Chinese project will bring opportunities especially in three sectors: construction and management of large infrastructure projects, cultural tourism from Asia, and

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<sup>35</sup> In the new strategy, no country is specifically mentioned (*A Strategic Vision for Spain in Asia 2018–2022*, 2018)

the export of agricultural products to China (Esteban & Otero-Iglesias, 2016). Prime Minister Mario attended the BRI forum in China in May 2017.

The good relations were also underlined during the official visit of the PRC Chairman Xi Jinping to Madrid in November 2018<sup>36</sup>. It was the year of the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Spain and China. The meeting focused on the BRI and economic cooperation. The countries signed “**The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for a New Era**”, which is treated as a sign of the deepening of relations.

## Spain-China relations at the society level

Looking at the perception of China, there is a difference between the elite and wider society. In 2005, only 30% of Spanish people considered China as an opportunity for Spanish business, while 61% considered Chinese products as a threat (Esteban, 2018). However, the general perception of China was better. In 2006, China’s influence on the world was considered as positive by 45% of Spanish people. That support declined dramatically during the European crisis (data from 2013). While the government focused on the opportunities connected with the economic development of China, **the Spanish society blamed the Chinese for the decline in jobs in Spain** (Esteban, 2016).

Nowadays, the government, the public administration and media still perceive the increasing Chinese investments positively. This is in contrast to the Spanish public opinion which is more suspicious as regards the capital coming from China than from other geographic directions (Esteban & Otero-Iglesias, 2017). This could be caused by stereotypes and a generally poor knowledge about China, evidenced in some research. According to data from *Special Eurobarometer 2018 (Future of Europe. October-November 2018, 2018)*, more people have a “total ‘Negative’” view about China (50%) than “total ‘Positive’” (38%). However, it is interesting that this attitude has changed in the last three years. From 35% positive in 2016 (*Future of Europe. September-October 2016, 2016*), to 29% in 2017 (*Future of Europe. September-October 2017, 2017*), and finally to 38% in 2018 (*Future of Europe. October-November 2018, 2018*). This

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<sup>36</sup> It was the first time in 13 years that a Chinese head of state had come to Spain.

shows that, from one point of view, the opinion and attitude towards China is still quite negative but, on the other hand, it fluctuates, which may be caused by a lack of knowledge about the country among Spaniards.

The Chinese traditionally have a positive attitude to Spain. They associate Spain with a beautiful and picturesque country. However, they do not know much about modern Spain, for instance its position in the EU and Latin America.

To improve the mutual perception, both countries have conducted many public diplomatic initiatives (Esteban, 2016). Spain opened the Cervantes Institute in Beijing, and China – eight Confucius Institutes and nine Confucius Classrooms in Spain<sup>37</sup>. Apart from the development of trade and investment, tourism has also expanded (Pirner, 2018). The bilateral initiatives at the regional and local level are also an important tool to develop the economic, cultural and academic cooperation.

**The growing Chinese minority in Spain** is an important factor in bilateral relations. This community is the fourth-largest diaspora in Spain, with 207,593 registered citizens, according to the 2017 figures from the National Institute of Statistics (INE) (Rosati, 2018). The high increase in the number of Chinese in Spain has also been confirmed by Eurostat data. The number of long-term residents from China grew rapidly from 2010, when the number was 78,264 until the end of 2018, when the number was 129,510 (*Eurostat*, 2019). One of the factors was **the “golden visa” scheme** introduced in 2013. By 2016, more than 700 persons had benefited from this (Godement & Vasselier, 2017).

## Paradiplomacy regulations

Spain is a decentralized country: “the State is organized territorially into municipalities, provinces and the Self-governing Communities that may be constituted”<sup>38</sup>. There are 17 autonomous communities, and each has its own status. The Statute of Autonomy is hierarchically located under the Constitution of the country. The Spanish Constitution from 1978

<sup>37</sup> Hanban website, [http://english.hanban.org/node\\_10971.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_10971.htm)

<sup>38</sup> Spanish Constitution, <http://www.congreso.es>

underlines the unity of the Spanish nation, but at the same time guarantees the right to self-government: “All these bodies shall enjoy self-government for the management of their respective interests” (*Constitution*, 1978).

Autonomous communities have their own elected Parliament and local government to run the region. The regions have control over services, such as health care and education. Some have more autonomy. For instance, Catalonia and the Basque Country have their own police forces. The Basque Country and Navarra have independent fiscal systems. Communities also have great freedom in language policy.

International relations remain solely among the state government’s prerogatives; however, **the communities have the right to conduct foreign activities within their internal competences**. They cooperate with cities and regions from other countries. They sign cooperation agreements with foreign partners, participate in international projects, open representative offices abroad, and are active in international associations of local government.

Some Communities define their right to conduct international activities in their Statutes. They include special provisions on the foreign promotion of culture or vernacular languages, international contacts with overseas migrant communities and foreign aid (Tavares, 2016). Chapters or just articles referring to foreign actions can be found, for example, in the Statutes of Autonomy of communities such as Catalonia, Galicia, Andalusia, Aragon, Asturias, Castile and Leon. However, there are differences in the level of detail. **The case of Catalonia is particularly distinctive**. The region is very active in the field of international operations. Catalan paradiplomacy is analysed as activity towards the international promotion of the process of self-determination, also in a comparative study along with regions from other countries (Lohmar Sainz de Vicuña, 2015).

In the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia from 2006, the whole chapter refers to the “Foreign action of the Generalitat” and another one to the “Relations of the Generalitat with the European Union” (*Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia*, 2006). It defines, among other activities, the right to establish offices abroad and to participate in international bodies:

“The Generalitat and the State shall undertake the necessary measures to obtain official status for Catalan within the European Union and its presence

and use in international organisation and in international treaties of culture or linguistic content. (Art 6(3)) (...) In order to promote the interests of Catalonia, the Generalitat may sign collaboration agreements in areas falling within its powers (from Art 195)”

However, in the general provision it states that “The Generalitat shall foster the external projection of Catalonia and promote its interests in this area, while respecting the powers of the State in foreign affairs” (*Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia*, 2006).

## Spain-China Paradiplomacy

There are some factors influencing the significant dynamics of paradiplomatic cooperation with Chinese partners in recent years. These include processes such as globalization, the increasing role of territorial units, the decentralization of international affairs, domestic situations, and the foreign policies of the two countries. The growing international position of China is also an important factor. It relates to the economic expansion and to the Chinese model of promotion (Szcudlik, 2018). The best examples of effective Chinese soft power tools are the BRI and the Confucius Institutes. The first Institute was established at the University of Madrid in 2005, the next five between 2006 and 2011, and two latest ones were opened in 2017<sup>39</sup>.

Cities and communities show an interest in being involved in the BRI. **Madrid was the second city to organize the Silk Road Forum** (the first one was held in Istanbul) in 2015. Topics covered during the meeting included infrastructure connectivity, international cooperation in production capacity, the Silk Road construction, and sustainable development.

The most developed project connected with the BRI in Spain is **the train connection between Madrid and Yiwu. This is the world’s longest rail link**. The first trip was undertaken in December 2014 (Esteban & Otero-Iglesias, 2016). However, the biggest problem remains the lack of demand for filling the trains from Madrid back to Yiwu.

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<sup>39</sup> Hanban website, <http://english.hanban.org/>

Internal factors from the Spanish side include the interest of the communities in cooperation as a tool for regional development, as well as creating investment opportunities for regional companies and regional promotion. The growing Chinese diaspora in Spain is also an important factor (Rosati, 2018).

Another essential aspect is the Spanish engagement in **child adoption from China**, especially some years ago. The China Center of Adoption Affairs reported that Spain, after the U.S., is the country that adopts the highest number of children from China. According to Spanish government data, Spanish families adopted 2,700 children from China in 2005, while there were 5,400 adoptions from abroad in total (Bernstein-Wax, 2007). The high number of adoptions from abroad results in a new obligation for communities. Regions are obliged to provide Chinese lessons in schools and universities to protect the adoptive children's rights to maintain close relations with the Chinese language and culture.

All those facts translate into the Spaniards' interest in the Chinese language, culture and tourism. New regional contacts may be the pretext for, or the outcome of, business contact, the establishment of new Confucius Institutes or academic cooperation. The cultural and educational projects are important tools to bring the two societies closer and get to know the culture and the language better.

## Survey results

According to data collected in 2017, 11 out of 17 Spanish autonomous communities declare active cooperation with Chinese partners (Table 23). Further three communities – Aragon, Cantabria, Chartered Community of Navarre – used to have some contacts, but their partnerships are not active now. Among these, the communities of Cantabria and Chartered Community of Navarre would like to have some kind of partnership, but there were no details provided in 2017. The last three regions – Balearic Islands, Castilla-La Mancha and Canary Islands – have not had any partnerships with Chinese partners. However, Castilla-La Mancha declared an intention for future cooperation.

Among the 11 communities which confirmed their active cooperation, there are 32 declared partnerships. However, only 18 are characterized as active



(any common initiative during the last two years), 13 are not active and the status of one is unknown. **There is no correlation between the degree of activeness and the formal status of cooperation.** There are some not active relations even though an agreement was signed. On the other hand, there are active partnerships without any formal arrangement. The factor connected with the initiator of cooperation is neither correlated with the activity status nor with the starting year. In the case of 8 relations, the initiator was the Chinese side and half of them are not active now. Similar numbers come up in the case of relations initiated by the Spanish partner or by a business partner.

Looking at the years of launching the contacts, some synergy between state governmental relations and paradiplomacy can be seen. After the initiation of the China “opening” policy, it was the city partnerships that started first. A cooperation agreement between Madrid and Beijing was signed in 1985. Next, town twinnings have been launched since the mid-1990s, about one new contact a year. **The year 2005 was exceptional since it was the year of the strategic partnership signed between the countries – five new partnerships between cities were established.**

The international activity at the provincial level started later. Most regional contacts between Spain and China started at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Region of Valencia partnership with Sichuan, which dates back to 1994, and with Shanghai (1997) are two exceptions. The contacts from the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be related to the state strategy towards Asia (2000), where China is mentioned as one of the main partners for Spain (Higuera, 2015). The partnerships from this period are still active. The next important year was 2006. It was a year of the growing interest of China after signing the strategic partnership between the two countries. Three new partnerships were signed in 2006, and one more just a year later. All the three new contacts from 2006 were launched by the Rioja region and are not active now (Table 23).

The absence of an active cooperation within regional contacts launched in 2006-2007 and the lack of new partnerships between local governments in 2008 can be connected with the financial crisis in Europe. Revival in cooperation took place in the next decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It can be linked to the official visit of the Chinese Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao, to Spain during his European tour in January 2009. In the period of 2009-2010 three relationships were launched – by Catalonia, The Basque Country, and The Region of Valencia and Asturias.

**Table 23.** Spanish regional cooperation with Chinese partners (2017)

No.	Region	Cooperation declared	Cooperation in the past	Cooperation in the future	Active cooperation	Non-active cooperation	Sum of partnerships
1	Andalusia	Yes			1		1
2	Aragon	No	Yes	No			
3	Balearic Islands	No	No	No			
4	The Basque Country	Yes			1		1
5	Cantabria	No	Yes	Yes			
6	Castilla-La Mancha	No	No	Yes			
7	Castile and León	Yes			5		5
8	Catalonia	Yes			5		5
9	Galicia	Yes			1	1	2
10	Canary Islands	No	No data	No data			
11	La Rioja	Yes			0	3	3
12	Chartered Community of Navarre	No	Yes	Yes			
13	Principality of Asturias	Yes			1		1
14	The Region of Murcia	Yes			1		1
15	Extremadura	Yes			1		1
16	The Region of Valencia	Yes			2	9	10
17	Madrid*	Yes			No data	No data	1
	<b>Sum</b>				<b>18</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>32</b>

\*In the case of Madrid the status is not known.

Source: *own elaboration*

**Table 24.** Chinese Partners of the Spanish Autonomous Communities

No.	Autonomous Community	Province/city	Status of Chinese Partner	Start of Cooperation	Active/ not active
1	Andalusia	Shanghai	a city with provincial status	2002	active
2	Basque Country	Jiangsu	a province	2010	active
3	Castile and León	Xiangtan	a city in the Hunan province	2015	active
4		Chongqing	a city with provincial status	2015	active
5		Jinan	a city, the capital of the Shandong province	2016	active
6		Changchun	a city, the capital of the Jilin province	2016	active
7		Nanjing	a city, the capital of the Jiangsu province	2016	active
8	Catalonia	Guangdong	a province	2003	active
9		Hong Kong	a province	2009	active
10		Jiangsu	a province	2015	active
11		Zhejiang	a province	2015	active
12		Chongqing	a city with provincial status	2016	active
13	Galicia	Mongolia interior	a province	2011	not active
14		Hunan	Hunan	2016	active
15	La Rioja	Shandong	a province	2006	not active
16		Liaocheng	a city in the Shandong province	2006	not active
17		Heze	a city in the Shandong province	2006	not active

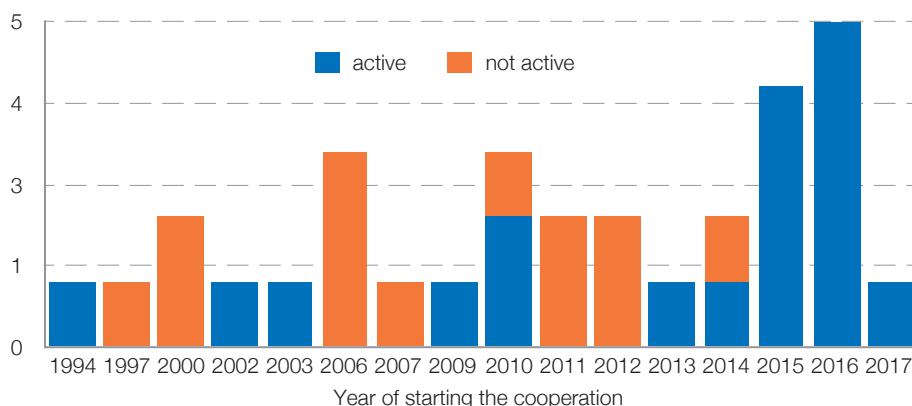
**Table 24.** cont.

No.	Autonomous Community	Province/city	Status of Chinese Partner	Start of Cooperation	Active/ not active
18	Asturias	Shanghai	a city with provincial status	2010	active
19	Murcia	Yangzhou	a city in the Jiangsu province	2014	active
20	Extremadura	Shaanxi	a province	2013	active
21	Valencia	Sichuan	a province	1994	active
22		Shanghai	a city with provincial status	1997	not active
23		Liaoning	a province	2000	not active
24		Beijing	a city with provincial status	2000	not active
25		Guizhou	a province	2007	not active
26		Guangzhou	the capital city of the Guangdong province	2010	not active
27		Ningxia	the Hui autonomous region	2011	not active
28		Jilin	a province	2012	not active
29		Wenzhou	a city in the Zhejiang province	2012	not active
30		Fujian	a province	2014	not active
31		Tianjin	a city with provincial status	2017	active
32	Madrid	Beijing	a city with provincial status	no data	no data

Source: own elaboration

Most partnerships are relatively new, especially in comparison to other West-European countries such as Germany and France. **A high increase in new contacts has been observed again since 2013: the year of announcing the**

**Belt and Road Initiative.** Most new partnerships launched in this period are still active. However, the engagement of the sides is not always connected with the priorities of the BRI project (infrastructure, economy). Castile and León constitutes a good example. The representatives of this region declared five partnerships with Chinese partners, all of which initiated after 2013. However, they concentrate on soft activities – promotion of language and culture.



**Figure 16.** Activeness of Spanish partnerships with Chinese partners

Source: own elaboration

Most surveyed regions have one active partnership with a Chinese partner. Catalonia, and Castile and León, declaring 5 partners, and Valencia with 11 partners, are the exceptions. The cases of the last two autonomous communities will be analysed in detail later in this chapter.

Similarly to the results in most of the surveyed countries, **general economy and then education/research remain the most often indicated areas of cooperation** (Table 25). However, the specific character of the multi-area type of relation can be seen. Besides the categories mentioned above, there are activities in the spheres connected with agriculture and rural development, environment, sport and tourism, administration, health and public policy<sup>40</sup>. The category “other” includes, among others, cultural cooperation.

<sup>40</sup> Due to the low number of surveyed cases, the order of cooperation areas is only approximate.

**Table 25.** The areas of cooperation between Spanish and Chinese regions

Areas of cooperation	No. of responses
General economy	9
Higher education and research	6
General education	5
Agriculture and rural development	5
Other	5
Sport and tourism	4
Environment	4
Administration and region management	3
Health and public policy	2
Municipal economy	1
<i>Number of regions answering the question</i>	<i>10</i>

Source: own elaboration

Universities, business partners and representatives of educational institutions are also **the main local partners** engaged in contacts with China. The forms of cooperation also confirm the great importance of activities connected with economy. Besides the official visits, business missions and participation in fairs and economic forums are the most often reported kinds of activities. In some cases, the representative office in China plays an important role in cooperation. Two autonomous communities declared having established this type of office in their partner's province.

Looking at **the benefits**, the multifaceted cooperation is reflected. The activities connected with general economy are also among the most often declared benefits of paradiplomacy with China in Spain (as well as in other surveyed countries). Most regions point to the better position for business, trade development and Chinese investments as the most important profits (Table 27). Promotion is also an important advantage. Regions underline **cultural and tourism promotion** as an important aspect of partnerships. Additionally, six out of 10 regions indicate a general exchange of experience as an important benefit.

**Table 26.** The forms of cooperation between Spanish and Chinese regions

<b>Forms of cooperation</b>	<b>No. of responses</b>
Official visits	9
Participation in fairs and economic forums	7
Business missions	6
Permanent office in China	2
Other	2
Work within official central government delegations	1
Permanent Chinese office in your region	1
<i>Number of regions answering the question</i>	<b>9</b>

Source: own elaboration

**Table 27.** The main benefits of the cooperation with China indicated by Spanish regions

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>No. of responses</b>
Cultural promotion	9
Better position for business	9
Trade development	8
Tourism promotion	8
Attracting Chinese investment	7
Exchange of experience	6
<i>Number of regions answering the question</i>	<b>10</b>

Distance and the related cost are the main declared obstacles to a regional cooperation with Chinese partners. At the same time, they are one of the reasons why some partnerships are finished or no longer active. The second category of problems reported by the communities is connected with language barriers and cultural differences. That, and the lack of knowledge about China, have already been mentioned in terms of the general public's attitudes.

**Table 28.** The main obstacles in the cooperation with China indicated by Spanish regions

Distance	9
Cost	7
Language barriers	6
Cultural differences	6
Other	1
<i>Number of regions answering the question</i>	<i>10</i>

Source: own elaboration

## Case studies

### Castile and León

Castile and León is an autonomous community in north-western Spain. It is the largest Spanish region, with no access to the sea. It was constituted in 1983. The capital city is Valladolid, among the biggest cities are Burgos, Salamanca and León. The community neighbours eight historical Spanish regions (it is situated next to Madrid, Castilla-La Mancha, Extremadura, Murcia, Cantabria, La Rioja, and Aragon). Over 60% of all of Spain's heritage sites lie in Castile and León. Towns like Avila, Salamanca and Segovia are among the World Heritage Cities. Moreover, this is the region where the Spanish language was born. These prerogatives are also important in the community's paradiplomacy. The cooperation with China focuses on activities connected with education, language, culture and the local and central government partner's engagement.

### Education – especially language

The representatives of the region declare active and formalized cooperation with five Chinese cities. Four of them are the capitals of provinces and Chongqing is one of China's four municipalities under the direct administration



of the central government. Agreements with the cities of Xiangtan (Hunan) and Chongqing were signed in 2015, while those with Jinan, Changchun and Nanjing were signed in 2016. Although there are some activities connected with economic cooperation or local development experience sharing, **collaboration in the sphere of education, then research, culture, sport and tourism are the most prominent**. Institutions connected with education played the role of the cooperation initiators in four out of five partnerships. Regional Spanish Universities initiated activities in three cases, and the Ministry of Education – with one city. In the last case it was the City authorities.

In reference to the emphasis put on education, especially language learning, an important role in the cooperation is played by the Spanish Ministry of Education, and Chinese institutions – Hanban (the Confucius Institute Headquarters) and the Confucius Institute, situated at the University of León. A few years ago, the Ministry invited autonomous communities to participate in activities aiming to get to know Chinese culture and provinces. The Ministry of Education also played an important role as an initiator and organizer of cooperation with Hanban. **Chinese language courses in schools were among the flagship initiatives in 2018**.

In Spain, apart from obligatory courses in schools in the whole country, each community can choose optional subjects which become the part of the official curriculum. Castile and León is **the only community in Spain where there is a possibility to choose the Chinese language as an optional school subject**. Moreover, in two schools in Valladolid the Confucius Classes in high schools are going to be arranged.

“All communities are interested [in Chinese learning] but each one has got its own pace. For example, Andalusia has greatly developed Chinese learning in initial teaching, but as an extra-curricular activity, just as in secondary schools. We started with extracurricular activities and quickly included it in the curriculum.” (*Interview with Officials from the Government of Castile León, personal communication, 2018*).

The increase in the interest in the Chinese language and culture can be also connected with the already mentioned Chinese child adoptions which took place at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in some parts of Spain, including

Castile and León. These children should have contact with their native culture and language.

**The region promotes the Spanish language in partner cities and provinces.** Castile and León wants to establish partnerships with Chinese schools where Spanish courses are offered for pupils and encourage them to participate in summer schools in Spain.

“We advertise exchange opportunities every summer. Hanban sends us a list of centers where students can make summer stays and more, we publish these offers through our social media.” (*Interview with Officials from the Government of Castile León*, personal communication, 2018).

Apart from the signed partnerships there are also some irregular initiatives connected with the region’s promotion and tourism. The authority of Castile and León, referring to the historical and linguistic heritage, tries to encourage Chinese people to visit the community. The Regional Council for Tourism and Culture organizes the Language Tourism Day in cooperation with the Spanish Tourist Office from Hong Kong to promote the region among Chinese people.

## **Perspectives and obstacles**

Thanks to the cooperation of the Ministry of Education and the University of León, the region is planning to start a programme of student exchanges. The community wants to further develop educational programmes. The new cooperation agreements should have a wider scope. This will not be an agreement with individual/concrete regions, but a framework agreement which will cover all Chinese provinces. Among the plans for the future is to “Deepen and make new relations with China. Allow teachers and students to stay here and ours there. Then, extend the teaching of Chinese as an optional subject to a larger number of secondary schools and introduce it to primary education. These are our plans in the medium and long term.” (*Interview with Officials from the Government of Castile León*, personal communication, 2018).

China is a quite new geographic direction for cooperation in the case of Castile and León. The encounter with the Chinese language and culture is

a challenge for people from the region. The common activities are appraised as valuable and the regional government wants to develop them, however **the problem is the financing of the cooperation**. Most activities are financed from their organizers' own resources. The Confucius Institutes are financed by the Chinese side, but the regional government is responsible for the technical and organisation part.

“In Castile and León learning a foreign language and a possibility to get to know other cultures is something we are very much interested in. This is the strategic goal of our council. In this context, an opening to the East region is enriching our activities. The activities whose mission is to make our students and society open to global world.” (*Interview with Officials from the Government of Castile León*, personal communication, 2018).

**The representatives of the community do not see any role for the BRI initiative** in their case. They regard this initiative as a possibility for Spanish regions, but only those from the Mediterranean area, such as Valencia, Aragón and Catalonia.

Currently, all the activities with Chinese partners are financed from communities' funds. The representatives of the region do not see any opportunity to use the European Union programmes to finance this kind of activity. However, having good experience with Erasmus, reaching to such geographic areas as South America, they see a chance of including also China in the Erasmus idea, which would support the exchange of professors and students. The community has also proposed the idea of a study visits programme to their Chinese partners. It would enable best practice exchange in the education system between regions.

“I proposed to Hanban and the representatives of the Chinese government to set up a study visit program to study how regions with good academic performance are pursuing education. Castile and Leon is also a good example. We have high scores in the PISA study, we have good practice, just like Shanghai has good practice. Therefore, we proposed that scientists come from here to look at Castile and León, and our scientists could go there, analyse education in Shanghai” (*Interview with Officials from the Government of Castile León*, personal communication, 2018).

## The Region of Valencia

The Region of Valencia (Valencia) is a coastal province on the east side of the Iberian Peninsula. It is the fourth most populous autonomous community with more than 4.9 million inhabitants. The regional government is called *The Generalitat Valenciana*<sup>41</sup>. Many Valencian people speak Valencian. An important asset of the region is **the largest port in Spain and in the Mediterranean Sea basin, located in Valencia**, the capital city of the community. There are also important ports in Sagunto and Castellón. Apart from the capital, the biggest cities of the region are Alicante, Elche, Gandia and Castellon. The geographical location and the ports are essential in the regional development and in foreign contacts.

**Valencia is the most experienced Spanish region in terms of cooperation with China.** The cooperation was initiated by the representative of the Valencian Institute responsible for developing exports. The first partnership was signed in 1994 with Sichuan province, followed by the cooperation between the regional capital cities Chengdu-Valencia. One year later, the first office was opened in Hong Kong, launching the trade cooperation. During the next ten years, new representative offices were opened: in Shanghai (1997), Beijing (2000), and Guangzhou (2004). Independently of these activities, the region has developed contacts with other provinces and cities. The representatives of Valencia have declared 11 partnerships of this kind, however, only two of them were deemed still active in 2017, one with Sichuan, and one with Tianjin. Most of the not active partnerships have never had any formal basis for cooperation.

## Economy, tourism, ports

Economy was the major focus of cooperation. Offices were opened to promote the region and to facilitate business relations. However, all of them have been closed as regional offices in recent years due to the fact that regional authorities decided to change the model. A consulting company is now responsible

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<sup>41</sup> Generalitat is the name of the systems of government of two of the present Spanish autonomous communities: Catalonia and the Valencian Country.

for these offices, which work as subcontractors. This change resulted from the economic crisis in Spain and the region; the community had to limit its expenses. Despite closing the representative office, cooperation with Sichuan continues, **focusing on business relations**. The most frequently reported benefits include a better position for regional companies, Chinese investments and trade development. Additionally, in the last years more stress has been put on **tourism promotion**.

Due to the geographical location of the Autonomous Community of Valencia, the new partnership with Tianjin was very important. As the largest coastal city and the largest port in North China, it is one of four municipalities under the direct administration of the Chinese central government. Ports in Valencia, Sagunto and Castellón, which are primarily commercial, as well as industrial **ports were highly interested in the development of this partnership**.

Besides these spheres of cooperation, the representatives of the Valencia community underline the importance of institutional dialogue which is a necessary part of the relationship. The official visits are an opportunity to present investment opportunities, and to explain the potential of investments in ports, industrial parks, commercial cooperation and tourism. This is also the opportunity for the exchange of experience in urban management.

“Community that supports its local companies, presenting itself as a stable and reliable partner. (...) Institutional relations are also important, especially in the case of China, where the support and confirmation of political contacts are always an added value for them.” (*Interview with Officials from the Government of Valencia*, personal communication, 2018).

## Local partners

There are also some cultural and educational events. The Confucius Institute at Valencia University organizes language courses, promotes the Chinese culture, and prepares the visit of the Chinese Ambassador to Valencia. The Institute creates a good atmosphere for a bilateral relation. However, there is no formalized or regular cooperation between the Institute and the regional government.

The cooperation with the Sichuan province is also a good example of a parallel partnership between regions and capital cities. Following the cooperation of regions, the partnership of Valencia and Chengdu (the capital city of Sichuan) was started. Moreover, in May 2017, a proposal for a new alliance was approved (*Valencia and Chengdú are twin cities*, 2018). The cities want to cooperate in the cultural, educational and commercial fields. The idea is also to engage local universities and cultural institutions to work together.

Cooperation with local companies is a natural consequence of the stress on economy and trade by the community. Business is mentioned as one of the main local partners engaged in the activities with China. Its representatives take part in official visits of the community, in fairs and economic forums. The Generalitat provides organisational, institutional and political support for business activities. The costs of these missions are covered by businesses themselves.

### **Synergy with the Spanish government**

Despite the large autonomy of the community, the Generalitat works in agreement with the Spanish government. The state institutions and diplomatic corps support the regional activities. **The representatives of the community underline that the region benefits from good Spain-China relations.** The Community works within the framework of the China-Spain Strategic Partnership and the EU regulations, especially on trade.

“It is worth emphasizing that we are working in harmony and in agreement with the Spanish government, not on its margins. National institutions, such as the Instituto de Comercio Exterior, the embassies, trade and tourist advisers, our diplomatic corps, give us full support. For our autonomous community, external policy is not a point of confrontation, but an essential element of economic development.” (*Interview with Officials from the Government of Valencia*, personal communication, 2018).

The representatives also underline the specific perception of paradiplomacy in China. The provincial delegations must be authorized by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The local authorities require a permit from the

central government. **The strategic partnership framework and political support is very important for both sides.**

## Perspectives and the EU role

The representatives of Valencia underline the need for specialization in paradiplomacy. Even in the case of cooperation, which is based on several spheres, each partnership should have one main, most developed one: “In each region, you need to strengthen your position in a specific sector”. (Interview with Officials from the Government of Valencia, personal communication, 2018)

The development of tourism and trade seems to be among the most beneficial spheres of cooperation with China for the autonomous community of Valencia. **Spain is a very popular tourist destination for the Chinese, however, fewer than 1% of them visit the Valencia region** when they come to Spain. Additional stress put on the economic relation is the result of the last visit of the representatives of the region to China. The Chinese partners are now more interested in importing Valencian products, not just exporting goods there. A crucial role is played here by Valenciaport. The Far East represents 48% of the traffic managed by the port. Around 50% of foreign trade between Spain and China passes through Valencia. **At the end of 2017, China constituted the main commercial partner of Valenciaport by the volume of imports** (6.97 million tonnes channelled, 2.95% more than the previous year). In November 2018, the Port Authority of Valencia attended the China International Import Expo to promote its central role in the Mediterranean as a key port for cargo transit with the Far East (Ullyett, 2018).

Half a year later (July 2019), the director of the Port of Valencia attended the fifth edition of the International Cooperation Forum of the ports of the new Silk Road in Ningbo, China, and presented the Valenciaport PCS platform, a management model for optimization and operational data management (Ullyett, 2019).

**The representatives of Valencia underline the important role of the European Union in trade policy**, in setting the main direction of development of this relation. However, in the case of China they do not see any need for any special programmes or financial support.

“Our entrepreneurs are open to the world. The framework set by the European Union is our framework (...) the use of funds or specific programs of the European Union was not our priority, because there was no need” (*Interview with Officials from the Government of Valencia*, personal communication, 2018).

Better protection of the EU market is the real necessity. For example, companies from the Valencia Community had a problem with price dumping: “One of the objections our entrepreneurs have against China and the European Union concerns the dumping of ceramic tile prices. It is the EU that should ensure that products that enter the European market are introduced under fair conditions” (*Interview with Officials from the Government of Valencia*, personal communication, 2018).

## Conclusions

In comparison to other Western European countries, Spanish autonomous communities are characterized by short-lasting partnerships with China. This is due to their greater interest in cooperation with China, but also to the intensification of Spanish-Chinese relations at the level of central authorities, including Chinese investments, which are to support Spain during the financial crisis.

The cooperation between Spain and China seems to be quite intense and reliable. It concentrates on business and academic cooperation, and other spheres of interest include culture, tourism and regional development. The communities' new initiatives are linked to government activities. Moreover, local partners are also eager to participate in common projects.

Looking at the cases, Castile and León, and Valencia differ in the forms and areas of paradiplomacy with China, however, some common points can be found. The characteristic features of partnerships are the result of communities' specificity, history and geographical localization. Despite the large autonomy of Spanish communities, there is cooperation with the state government in both presented cases. The regions underline the subordination to the national interest and the activities within its prerogatives. The lack of



cooperation or exchange of information between Spanish communities is a significant feature. However, each surveyed region has a clear idea of its goals and the benefits of the cooperation with Chinese partners and they just implement its vision.

The perception of the EU's role in paradiplomacy with China is also common for all the regions. The Spanish representatives notice the positive role of the EU and its projects focusing on the initiation or strengthening of the cooperation aimed at another geographical direction. However, they have not benefited from any European project to develop their cooperation with China. In both communities, the expenses are covered mainly from their own resources. In the opinion of the representatives of Castile and León, the EU could create a financial instrument which would promote projects focused on the exchange of best practices not only with the EU regions, but also involving partners from other countries.

Although the representatives of the researched regions do not currently see themselves as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, both regions seem to have the potential to engage in some initiatives if they take place. In the case of Castile and León, it could be based on historical heritage and educational cooperation, whereas in the case of Valencia it could be an infrastructure project with the use of Valencian seaports.