The human rights dilemma: an east-west encounter: Germany and China in 1996

Abstract
Conflicts over human rights in relations between East Asia and the West have increased since the end of the Cold War. Western governments express concern about human rights standards in East Asian countries. In the East, these expressions have been perceived as interference in internal affairs. Due to dramatic economic development, East Asian nations recently have gained in pride and self-confidence as global actors. Such development is observed with suspicion in the West. Concerned about the decline of global U.S. influence, some American scholars have re-invented the notion of "culture" to point at an alleged East Asian threat. Also East Asian statesmen use the cultural argument by claiming the existence of so-called 'Asian values', which they allege are the key to Eastern economic success. This thesis argues that issues of human rights in East-West relations are not only a consequence of well-intended concern by Western governments regarding the human rights and welfare of the citizens of East Asian nations, but are in fact dominated by and used as a pawn in interplay with more complicated questions of global power and economic relations between East and West. The thesis reviews the relevance of culture in East-West relations. In the West, particularly Samuel P. Huntington with his prediction of the Clash of Civilizations stands out. Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew has been very vocal on the Eastern side. Whereas the West tries to cope with its decrease of global influence, after hundreds of years under Western hegemonism, the East believes in an Asian way of development without interference form the West. Most of this dispute revolves around the issue of human rights. The West claims the universality of rights which in fact emphasizes political and civil rights. Western countries criticize poor human rights standards in East Asia. The East, in return, accuses the West of hypocritical policies that seek global dominance. East Asian governments assert that due to a different stage of development they have to stress first their rights to development in order to assure stability. In particular, China argues this way. The country's leadership, however, shows concern about human rights and has already improved its human rights record over the past years. This thesis analyses the dispute over human rights in a case study on Germany and China. Both countries have a mutual interest in trade relations which has conflicted with Germany's criticism of China's problematic human rights record. In 1996, the two countries clashed after the German parliament passed a resolution condemning China's treatment of Tibet. This caused a lot of damage to the Chinese-German relationship which in the course of the year went back to normality. In the light of these frictions a German human rights policy that focuses on unspectacular grass-roots support of China, for example in strengthening China's legal system, would be preferable. Such co-operation must be based on mutual respect.