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A EUROPEAN SPACE POLICY BRIDGE WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

Abstract

The paper first reviews existing Western theories about the Chinese space programme, then sets out a “Frame theory” which has been used to describe European space policy. It proposes two frames for understanding space policy between Europe and China.

To find new data, a “Citizen’s Action” project was initiated as part of World Space Week (WSW) 2018. It was awarded “Global Highlight” status by WSW that year and continues with delays in the postal system due to Covid-19.

In China, special illustrated envelopes are printed with State permission by individuals and societies and posted to commemorate the launch of rockets and other space events such as tracking by ground stations and ships. In the project, by the exchange of “space philately” envelopes, postcards and badges, relationships are building with space philately networks and individuals. The envelopes yield phrases to be used as search strings for context and when placed with other “grey material” are considered within “Frame theory”.

The first frame considers the Chinese space programme as a corporate whole, a single entity, and applies the language of corporate business. Consideration as a single entity is an innovation because China presents its programmes separately (crewed spacecraft, lunar exploration, etc). Characteristic strengths and products of the Chinese programme are identified here, and some formal European initiatives with China’s space agencies and programmes are described.

The second frame is called “ideology” and covers Chinese space “culture” (Wén) and “ideology” (sǐng). From examples in the Chinese press and on websites, some drivers of the Chinese space programme are identified. Finally, the paper considers what joint initiatives could proceed with easy support in Europe, and which might be hard if not impossible for Europe to support.