

Opportunities and Challenges: Sustainability of China-EU Relations in a Changing World

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Preparing for the Challenges: To Promote the Dialogue between the Youth of China and EU

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Abstract

This paper is based on the report from the results of the Jean Monnet Project “European Integration: Realities and Challenges-the Perspectives from Chinese Youth”, that we had implemented. The objective of the project is to understand the status of the Chinese college students’ knowledge about the EU and the European Integration. We hope that we could better understand how Chinese college students understand the EU, the European Integration and the China-EU relations through the survey of their basic knowledge about EU and European integration. Based on the first-hand information we had collected from the survey, this report, in one way or another, answers the following questions: How the Chinese college students know EU and the European Integration? Are they concerned about the EU and its development? What channels the Chinese students have in their learning and understanding about the EU and the European Integration? Are there ANY significant statistical differences among those Chinese college students from different

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cities or different types of the universities? We believe: if we are not clear even about these basic questions related to the youth at the root, and then we would only limit our discussion of the China-EU Strategic Partnerships between the governments and scholars, the discussion and the perspective of the developments of China-EU Relations would not be a full-sighted, especially concerning the future and further development. Data in this report are based on those from the 23 universities over China, total valid samples are 5446.

1. Introduction

From the List of the outcomes of the 19th China-EU Summit on June 2, 2017: The leaders of both sides applauded the positive achievements of the summit, and commended the fruitful progress of China-EU relations in politics, economy, culture, people-to-people dialogue and other fields. Following the principles of mutual respect, equality, mutual trust and mutual benefit, the two sides will continue to make a full use of the 70 or so China-EU dialogue and cooperation mechanisms, including the Summit, the High-Level Strategic Dialogue, the High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue and the High-Level People-to-People Dialogue, to enhance the partnerships for peace, growth, reform and civilization, and to further expand bilateral, regional and global cooperation.^①

For China and the EU, the political will and policy actions of both sides are the fundamental driving power for promoting cooperation and development. From the perspective of specific cooperative behaviors, however, both the economic & trade areas and the cultural exchanges all require the two sides to continuously explore and understand each other,

① http://english.gov.cn/premier/news/2017/06/04/content_281475676073214.htm (Accessed at February 26, 2018).

expand and deepen the cognition of the participants for each other. The so-called “high-level people-to-people exchange dialogue” requires not only the participating institutions such as the governments, the sectors of culture and education to establish mutual understanding and trust, but also requires the extensive public awareness, whether within the EU or in Chinese universities. For both sides, the logical extension of the official discourse of “equality and mutual trust” will inevitably involve the mutual cognition and understanding between the two peoples. Therefore, it is of great significance for both policy-makers and researchers to recognize the importance of the mutual understanding. This article will give some results from the data analysis of the survey of the EU’s cognitive questionnaire research project which we had done at 23 universities in 2016-2017 in China, these 23 universities are distributed over China, and we had totally collected 5446 college students’ valid data.

The Cognitive process is an individual cognitive activity, acquiring and processing information heavily influenced by the collective contexts and the information sources. No matter in China or in EU member states, college students’ communities tend to be one of the most important groups for researchers to examine so as to weigh public opinion. On the basis of what have been done already in 2014 in Europe^①—questionnaire surveys of European college students’ cognition of China in 5 universities in Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands, and the results show: Most European college students are willing to make friends with Chinese people, and they are optimistic about the development of China-EU relations. However, there are statistical significant differences in the cognition of China and China-EU relations between the students in each of these universities. In the insufficient information or maybe

① Jian Shi, Dan Yi, Zhuyu Li (2015) “The Differences of Recognition in China-EU Dialogue: A Survey and Analysis of the China-EU Relation Recognition among the Students from Four European Universities”, *Journal of Sichuan University*, 2015, No. 6: 77-85. (Chinese with English abstract)

some errors there under the background of information transmission, media reports tend to be unable to avoid a biased idea, for the European students cognition of China and China-EU relations could be obviously blocked. We should also have a good understanding of the situation of the Chinese college students' cognition of the EU, especially how they perceive the EU. In order to enhance the communication and dialogue between the two sides.

The understanding and judgment of the major international issues between China and Europe Union should start from the basis of mutual cognition of the peoples of both sides. Full and in-depth field research can enhance this mutual understanding and help strengthen the dialogue between China and the EU, so as to avoid miscalculation and arbitrary decision-making.

This paper has particularly carried out cognitive surveys of the Chinese college students' understanding of and their attitude towards EU and China-EU relations. Via questionnaire surveys and interviews, we are able to collect the first-hand research material to conduct empirical investigation, research and comparative analysis. The results we achieve could be used to summarize and analyze the Chinese youth's understanding/recognition of European Union, and these results could be crucial to the decision makers both in China and EU in various promotion and concerned work. From the previous survey we have done in Europe, there are a few questions we need to make clearer in the Chinese youth:

1/. First, how the Chinese college students know EU and the European Integration? Are they concerning about and caring for the EU and its development?

2/. Second, through what channels the Chinese students get to know and understand the EU and the European Integration?

3/. Third, are there significant statistical differences among those Chinese college students from different cities or different types of the universities?

2. Description of the Survey

Based on the survey by CASS 2007, H. Zhou^① published the paper, “The Chinese Perception of the EU-A Preliminary Analysis of the Survey on the Chinese Perception of the EU and the Sino-EU Relations”, and in Chapter 5 “How Chinese college students view the EU and China-EU relations?”, they gave such results of the Chinese college students in 2007: most students come from Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan, Guangzhou and Xi’an, valid samples are 1302 (including some students coming from European Studies Major^②), compare the other target groups (government officials, business men, scholars and citizens), the college students have the lowest cognition of the EU, only 33.5%, even lower than the common citizens’ awareness of the EU 34.1%, the government officials 52.5%, the scholars 69.1%.^③ This finding might mean that the group of the college students are not concerned about the EU, since they have 67.3% cognition of USA. Such cognitive outcomes are clearly incompatible with the development of China-EU relations. In recent years, China-EU relations have been developing rapidly, and both sides are committed to enhancing mutual cooperation. So is there any change in the status quo of the Chinese college students’ perception of the EU?

This research paper is based on what we have done from 23 universities in China in 2016-2017, from the south to the north, from the bigger cities to the relatively small ones, and from some Chinese top universities to some local ones. The outcomes would hopefully answer the 3 questions mentioned

① Hong Zhou etc (2008) “The Chinese Perception of the EU-A Preliminary Analysis of the Survey on the Chinese Perception of the EU and the Sino-EU Relations”, <Chinese Journal of European Studies>, Vol. 2:1-49, 2008. (Chinese with English abstract)

② Our survey in 2017 are randomly, not specially including the students on European Studies.

③ Hong Zhou etc (2008) “The Chinese Perception of the EU-A Preliminary Analysis of the Survey on the Chinese Perception of the EU and the Sino-EU Relations”, <Chinese Journal of European Studies>, Vol. 2: 37, Table 5-1-1.

above. The most important objective of this project for us is to promote the understanding of European Union or European Integration among the Chinese people, especially the Chinese Youth, since they are the future of the world and the future of the China-EU relation development.

The basic hypotheses in the paper are:

I. In the EU Jean Monnet Programme covered area, the Chinese college students know EU and European Integration better.

II. There are differences among the Chinese college students from different cities and different levels of their school in their understanding about the EU and European Integration.

Methodology of our research would have the debates of the questionnaire design, information campaigns after the survey, data collection and analysis, some interviews combined with questionnaire survey. The information campaigns would be an opportunity for us to communicate with the involved Chinese youth personally, and discuss with them in different social, educational, cultural and geographical contexts. Our survey in different universities had been done with all the participants making anonymous answer and joining the survey freely, same as that we did in Europe.

To compare and answer the 3rd question we mentioned in the first section, there are three tiers of cities in the chosen target group: the biggest, the medium and the small; there are also three tiers of institutions: the top national ones, the middle provincial institutions and the small regional ones. The regional distributions of our survey are different with 2007, the survey in 2016-2017 involves those universities/colleges located in the small and medium-sized cities, as well as different types of universities. This new way can better observe cognitive situation of the Chinese college students.

Collected data come from the following universities in the different areas of China:

Southwest(10): Sichuan University (SCU, Chengdu); Guizhou University (GZU, Guiyang); Sichuan International Studies University

(SCISU^①, Chongqing); Southwest Jiaotong University (SWJTU, Chengdu); Southwest University of Finance and Economics (SUFU, Chengdu); Southwest University for Nationalities (SWUN, Chengdu); Southwest Medical University (SWMU, Luzhoucity, Sichuan); Sichuan University of Science and Engineering (SUSE, Zigong, Sichuan); Sichuan University of Arts and Science (SUAS, Dazhou, Sichuan); Chengdu University of Technology(CUT, Chengdu)

Central& North (8): Renmin University (RUC, Beijing); China University of Politic Sciences and Law (CUPL, Beijing); Capital University of Economics and Business (CUEB, Beijing); Nankai University (NKU, Tianjin); Hebei University (HBU, Baoding); Shanxi University (SXU, Taiyuan); Hunan University (HU, Changsha); Hunan Normal University (HNU, Changsha);

East (5): Nanjing University(NJU, Nanjing); Shanghai International Studies University (SISU, Shanghai); Shanghai Jiaotong University (SHJU, Shanghai); Fudan University (FUDAN, Shanghai); East China Normal University (ECNU, Shanghai)

The types of the universities include the Ministry of Education, the province and the local, covering the comprehensive, the engineering, the medical and also the specialized universities, such as political science &law, economic and trade.

Periods of Survey:

March 1-June 1, 2016 (before UK voted for its exiting the EU); and the September 1-March 1,

2017. Although we considered to divide the two periods of thequestionnaires, that is before June 23,

2016 and after, to explore if there is any significant difference for samples coming after the referendum/Brexit. But after we analyzed the data

① SCISU original is SISU, the same as Shanghai International Studies University (SISU) in the East, so we use SCISU in the paper to show the difference of the location.

of the two universities from Beijing (CUPL, CUEB), those came in the end of October, 2016, we have found that there is no difference at all, and also due to the balance, we decide not to divide these data in two parts.

As we mentioned above, the survey done in the 23 universities had all the participants make anonymous answer and join the survey freely. The members of the project run the most of the 23 universities to collect the questionnaires, meanwhile also give lectures after the data collections. EXCEL and SPSS are used for the data input and data analysis by the research group members of the project.

3. Results for the Chinese College Students' knowing EU

Due to the large number of the research questionnaires, we will mainly focus on the three questions related to the EU and China-EU relations in the first section to give our relevant research results. First we should figure out whether or not the students are willing to make friends with the Europeans. The answer for the special question: **“I am willing to make friends with Europeans”**(single choice) to show the positive answer (Very strong +strong) is 92.5%, negative (not and strongly not) is only 0.6%, uncertain rate is 6.9%. This shows that the most Chinese youth would like to make friends with the Europeans. In 2013 and 2014, the similar question **“I am willing to make friends with Chinese”** from our surveys in European college students in 5 universities in 5 different cities in Europe was averagely 80%, quite lower than that of the Chinese students.

3.1. To answer the first question: how the Chinese college students get to know the EU and European Integration? Are they concerned about the EU and its development?

In case to understand the basic knowledge about the EU, we list the following 5 questions related to the EU, each one only allows a single choice, the Three-item scale are [Yes, No, Uncertain]

Table 1. the Answer Rate of the Basic knowledge of the EU (single choice, % of participants)

		Yes	No	Uncertain
1	The European Union (EU) is the largest organization of regional integration in the world and has 28 member states in total	49.1	11.0	39.9
2	The EU's top three institutions are: European Parliament, Council of the European Union and European Commission	50.2	10.4	39.4
3	The European Community is the predecessor of the European Union, and its founding countries are France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg	52.1	13.8	34.1
4	The EU's Motto is Unity in Diversity	58.1	9.6	32.3
5	In 2015 the EU is the largest trading partner of China and China is the second largest trading partner of the EU	31.5	26.8	41.8

We have seen that there is not so cheerful for the answers, only around half of the participants (N=5446) know some basic information about the EU. Then, if we further ask, "Are you concerned about the EU's development?" The following Table 2 gives the results.

Table 2. Are you concerned about the EU's development? (single choice, % of participants)

Positive Very concerned +Concerned	Uncertain	Negative Unconcerned +Totally unconcerned
39.9	16.0	44.1

We can see only less than 40% concerned about the EU's development, this is lower than the negative opinion rate over 4%. We would like to ask if our students over 92% would like to make friends with the Europeans, how they would think about the EU, and why such lower percentage to concern about the EU, for sure the EU is not Europe^①.

To try to understand how the Chinese college students pick up China- EU relationship, the results from Table 3 may give us some hints.

① The whole survey including more questions focus on the Europe and the EU.

Table 3. Related the China-EU relationship (single, choice, % of participants)

NO	Items	Positive	Uncertain	Negative
1	There are no big conflicts of strategic interests between the EU and China, and this is the premise of friendly cooperation.	83.7	12.2	4.1
2	The EU and China should become a real substantially comprehensive strategic partnership.	67.8	25.7	6.5
3	The EU and China could strengthen unity and mutually support each other on addressing big international issues.	90.5	8.0	1.5
4	China and the EU should strengthen cooperation in the field of international politics so as to counterbalance the US.	67.6	22.9	9.5
5	China and the EU should enhance communication and improve mutual understanding, especially the People-to-People Dialogue.	92.8	5.9	1.3

* Originally there is a 5-item Scale: 1. Strongly agree; 2. Agree; 3. Not necessarily; 4. Disagree; 5. Strongly disagree. We put the 1+2 as POSTIVE, 4+5 as NEGATIVE.

Clearly, the Chinese college students make very positive answers to look at the cooperation of China and the EU, even only less 40% students concern about the development of the EU. The Chinese college students also have high expressions for strengthening dialogue and communication between China and the EU and their working closely on the international issues.

3.2. To try to answer the second question, what channels the Chinese students have to know and understand about the EU, the European Integration?

No matter what information those students get, and what their impressions about the EU or Europe, first we would like to make sure that most information they get not from their own experiences, because there is less than 5% of the students have the direct personal experiences in Europe. So their information about the EU and Europe only can go through the ways indirectly.

In 2007, through the survey by CASS (headed by Hong Zhou^①), from 976

① H. Zhou, etc (2008) "The Results of Survey on Chinese public perceptions of the EU and China-EU relations and a preliminary analysis", <Chinese Journal of European Studies>, Vol. (2008) 2: pp. 1-52, p.7, Figure 2-1-1 .

Chinese city residents in 5 big cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan, Guangzhou, Xi'an), they mainly get the information about the EU through: "Television (83.2%); Newspaper (52.3%); Internet (50.2%)".^① This means Chinese city residents' generally understanding/cognition of the EU has been mainly guided by the mass media, specially from TV news channel. The situation now somehow is quite different from the European college students in our survey of 2014, the main channels for the European students to know China are "Internet (61.9%); Newspaper (60.4%); Television (54.2%)".^② So, we will see what the main channels for the Chinese college students to know the EU and European Integration. The following Table gives the results from our survey in 2016-2017.

Table 4. Through which channels you knew EU (multiple choices)

	Means	% of participants
1	TV and Broadcast	72.1
2	Internet	44.9
3	Social networking platforms (Micro-blogging, WeChat, etc)	39.1
4	Newspapers and magazines	37.9
5	Books	35.2
6	Movies	34.9
7	Class learning	32.7
8	TV, special programmes	23.1
9	Talk with the Chinese friends	9.5
10	Talk with the European friends	4.4
11	Visit to and travelling in Europe	3.8
12	Other	1.7

① 2007 Survey in 5 cities from Chinese city residents, N=976.

② J. SHI, D. YI & ZY LI(2015), "To adjust the strength and tactics of the China Internet External publicity", <European Studies Forum>, No. 18: 117119.

From Table 4, we can see the main channels for the Chinese college students nowadays are TV, Internet and the Social networking platform and the newspapers. It is not a surprise the Social Networking platforms coming to the third if we know that according to the data launched by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) on August 3, 2017^①, till June, 2017, “China’s Internet population reached 751 million, with a penetration rate of 54.3%. The number of mobile Internet users is 724 million, with 96.3% of mobile Internet users”. “Chinese netizens are still dominated by the people at the age-group of 10-39-years-old, accounting for 72.1% of the overall population: among them, the proportion of netizens aged 20 to 29 years old is the highest, reaching 29.7%.” 99% of the college students who participated in our survey were under 28-years-old, and they are in the group that occupies quite a large percentage of mobile Internet users in China. From the further analysis, we also found that the cognitive channels of social networking platforms are changing as the research progresses from the spring of 2016 to the spring of 2017. Here’s an intuitive picture to show this:

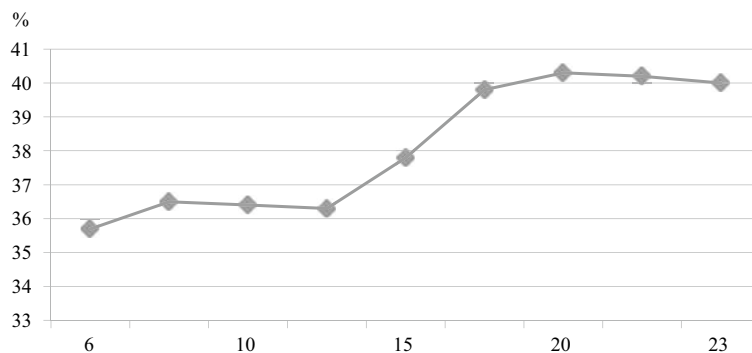


Figure 1. “Social networking platforms” (The vertical axis)% to “The number of the universities participating in the survey” (The horizontal axis)

From Figure 1, with increasing the number of the universities participating, the percentage of “Social networking platforms” is constantly changing. From

^① <http://www.cnnic.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwzxbg/hlwtjbg/201708/P020170803598956435591.pdf>.

less than 36% the first six universities increasing to 20 universities, the rate increases to more than 40%. At the end of all the 23 universities involved, the rate of “Social networking” fell to nearly 40%. Obviously, the various universities participating in the survey differed in the EU’s cognitive channels, so that we could further see whether there were statistically significant differences in cognition in different universities. This is what we need to answer the third question we mentioned in the first section.

3.3. The third, are there significant statistical differences among those Chinese college students from different cities or different types of universities?

Before discussing this question, we need to say: due to the consistency of mass media in China, we removed the “consistency of external sources of information and information dissemination” that was taken into account in different parts of Europe for Chinese cognitive differences. At the time, it means the possible differences between different member states and languages. In the paper, we only consider “university differences/urban location differences”. By statistical difference chi-square test, we know all the 23 universities participating the survey on the five basic questions of the EU have the significant statistical differences, because all those 5 questions in Table 1 have test values α less than 0.01.

Let’s have a closer look at the universities in different major cities, such as Nanjing University (Nanjing, valid samples are 295) and Nankai University (Tianjin, valid samples are 289) in Table 5:

Table 5. Nanjing University compared with Nankai University (K^2 -Test)

	Basic knowledge of the EU	α -value
1	The European Union (EU) is the largest organization of regional integration in the world and has 28 member states in total.	0.11
2	The EU’s top three institutions are: European Parliament, Council of the European Union and European Commission.	0.006**
3	The European Community is the predecessor of the European Union, and its founding countries are France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg.	0.21

Continued Table

	Basic knowledge of the EU	α -value
4	The EU's Motto is Unity in Diversity	0.002 **
5	In 2015 the EU is the largest trading partner of China and China is the second largest trading partner of the EU.	0.35

Note: Level of the significant statistical differences: * $\alpha < 0.05$, ** $\alpha < 0.01$; *** $\alpha < 0.001$

We have found that there are statistically significant differences in the answers to Question 2 and Question 4. We know Nanjing University and Nankai University are in big cities, students from Nanjing University come from the School of Social Science, and the students from Nankai University come from the School of Mathematics, both disciplines are not directly related to the European studies.

Why there is the difference? One factor to consider might be: Nanjing University has no any EU Jean Monnet project that is specially for promoting European Integration, while Nankai University has several Jean Monnet projects, that will bring at least some relevant courses or related activities at the campus. Similarly, we can do a comparative study of multiple latitudes. For different types of universities, such as normal universities and engineering universities, we chose Shanghai Jiaotong University (engineering, Shanghai) to compare with East China Normal University (normal, Shanghai). The same as the above, we use the statistical Chi-square Test to compare the two universities with the answers of the five questions in Table 5 on the Basic knowledge of the EU. The results show: there is only a statistical significant difference in the answer to the Third item, it then means, there is the statistical significant difference on the answer about the six founding members of the EU. It is very interesting to know that the Chinese students from the different types of universities have such a difference, it shows that the beginning of the European Integration is not well known to the Chinese students. The same test will be used to compare the Shanghai International Studies University with Hunan Normal University at Changsha, Hunan province, we get the following table:

Table 6. Shanghai International University Compared with Hunan Normal University (K^2 -Test)

	Basic knowledge about the EU	α -value
1	The European Union (EU) is the largest organization of regional integration in the world and has 28 member states in total.	0.032*
2	The EU's top three institutions are: European Parliament, Council of the European Union and European Commission.	0.089
3	The European Community is the predecessor of the European Union, and its founding countries are France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg.	0.002**
4	The EU's Motto is Unity in Diversity	0.088
5	In 2015 the EU is the largest trading partner of China and China is the second largest trading partner of the EU.	0.057

Note: Level of the significant statistical differences: * $\alpha < 0.05$, ** $\alpha < 0.01$; *** $\alpha < 0.001$

Now, through the survey we can understand the Third item, there are significant statistical differences among those Chinese college students from different cities or different types of the universities. Through further analysis we can see that universities with Jean Monnet Programme know the EU and the European Integration better, or even those universities which have carried on the EU/European Studies Centre Programme (ESCP) in 2005-2007 know the EU and the European Integration better than those with none of them (Jean Monnet Programme, ESCP). That is to say, with the promotion or without the promotion of the EU and the European Integration among the youth is different. We may say this is the difference in dialogues, or at least the promotion events can play certain role in the cognition of the college students in China about the EU and the European Integration.

4. Conclusion

Based on the collected data (through the sampling survey of the questionnaire and interview interaction), we will be able to summarize and

achieve a better picture of the Chinese college students' understanding of the EU and the European Integration. Comparing studies have been based on the sampling from different types of universities and different cities in China. This will further help us to understand the status of the Chinese youth's cognition of the European Union, and the results can be taken into account in the policy-making for the decision makers, also for reference in the work of the strategic people-to-people dialogue between China and the EU.

The implementation of the China-EU diplomatic strategy and the realization of mutually beneficial cooperation depend on mutual understanding between the two sides in addition to their political will. If there is no real and deep mutual understanding between the two peoples, the four partnerships of 'peace, growth, reform and civilization' in China and the EU will not be able to build a solid foundation for the public support. The people to people dialogue, one of the 3 pillars of China-EU diplomatic support, must also be built on the platform of mutual understanding and mutual trust. Further, for the young people, in China and in Europe, especially the students from universities are the future and centre of the politics, economy, trade and cultural exchange between both sides. How they know each other and have cognition of each other will decide the future of China-EU relations.

From our survey we can understand that the internet and the social networking platform play an increasingly important information dissemination and penetration functions both in Chinese and the European college students, these can affect their perception of the world anytime and anywhere, they also affect their mutual understanding and judgment. In the use of traditional mass media for macro information transmission (at the same time), how to make use of the Internet, especially the real-time interactive social networking platform, to form the effective communication of the college students from China and Europe, to provide real and attractive information on both sides and to promote mutual understanding are the questions and tasks in front of us that we can not ignore, and even it is a very urgent issue for us now.

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