

CHINA POLICY SERIES

China and the European Union

Edited by
Lisheng Dong, Zhengxu Wang
and Henk Dekker



China and the European Union

The European Union is China's largest trading partner, and Chinese views of the EU are of crucial importance in shaping how the relationship will develop in the future, especially as the new Chinese leadership takes power. This book presents the findings of an extensive research project into the views of both elite groups (government officials, business leaders, academics, media practitioners and social activists) and the Chinese public towards Europe and the European Union. It considers attitudes on a wide range of subjects and reaches a number of interesting, encouraging conclusions. These include the fact that as Chinese people's knowledge of, and travel to, Europe become more extensive, Chinese attitudes towards Europe become more positive; and that Chinese people have a high regard for European culture and a high degree of trust in Europeans – though there are significant differences between different Chinese groups concerning controversial issues in the China–EU relationship. Overall, the book concludes that Chinese public opinion supports strong bilateral relations.

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Foreword

As China grows in global power and influence, it is critically important for the European Union to forge a close and cooperative relationship with it. Equally, China needs good relations with the EU, its largest single market. At times of financial crisis, both sides need each other even more. But the China–EU partnership is complex and often difficult. More effective mutual policies towards each other have to be based on a thorough understanding of the image of the EU in Chinese minds and China’s behaviour in its interaction with the EU. China and the EU are committed to what they call a ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’, but China–EU ties have not always been smooth. Too often, Chinese and Europeans misunderstand each other. A better understanding of the opportunities and challenges in China will enable the EU institutions and nation-states to develop an appropriate response to the rise of China as an economic and political giant. It will also enhance the ability of the EU and of European institutions in the economic, political, cultural and educational sectors to take the necessary steps towards developing more effective relations with China.

However, as some scholars have noted, there are practical obstacles. First, there is the issue of Europe’s identity and role. The absence of an EU consensus on the final goal of European integration between policy-makers and ordinary citizens has created a confused and perplexing image for those outside the borders of the EU27. This in turn has obscured the EU’s relationship with China.

Second, until recently there has been little scientific information about how the EU and China–EU relations are perceived in China. Further, given the conventional emphasis on the activities and importance of political elites, the perceptions of ordinary Chinese citizens has received even less attention, even though they constitute almost one-fifth of the world’s population.

Thus, there is indeed a strong need for new research projects that rely on public opinion polls, interviews and media analysis. Specifically, the scholarly and policy communities urgently need a research project with three qualities. First, it must go beyond the overall impression of the EU and enable us to understand how Chinese people perceive the EU in various issue areas, such as the trade relationship, energy security, human rights, governance and the rule of law. Second, it must look into the different sections of Chinese society, to enable us to understand how the general public as well as the government, intellectual and

business elites, and social activists (NGO leaders, for example) perceive the EU. And third, it must go directly to the Chinese people using face-to-face research methods, such as interviews, questionnaire surveys and focus groups.

This book presents the results of a three-year research project, 'Chinese Views of the EU', funded by the EU's Seventh Framework Programme, that has investigated in detail what China thinks of the EU and examined the implications. The project was conducted by a six-member consortium that was led by the China Policy Institute of the University of Nottingham and included the Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences as China coordinator, and also Renmin University of China, Leiden University in the Netherlands, Jacobs University in Bremen, Germany, and the Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House in London.

Each member of this unique and complementary team is embedded in broad professional and institutional networks from which resources and support are mobilized and through which the findings of the study are communicated and disseminated. The ambitious and innovative studies of this project required close collaboration among the project partners.

We hope readers will agree that the book achieves three major advances in our knowledge about how Chinese view the EU. First, it is informative concerning the perception of the EU by different sections of Chinese society, their perception and understanding of the EU in different issue areas, and these through a rich body of comprehensive data collected via multiple research methods. Second, the research findings as presented in the book significantly advance our understanding of the EU's image in China. Third, it is to be hoped that these findings can be translated into concrete policy recommendations that the current state of the art is missing.

Initial results of dissemination activities of the project are encouraging. The consortium organized two academic conferences, in London in February 2011 and in Beijing in October 2011. In addition, a total of seven dissemination events were held in six EU countries to communicate the results of the project to academics, policy-makers, the media and other interested parties.

For example, participants from the EU Commission expressed keen interest in the project's conclusions on the need for stronger cultural and education ties. A questioner pointed out the essential asymmetry of Chinese people knowing much more about Europe than Europeans know about China, and the related issue of there being far fewer Europeans studying Chinese and learning about China than there are Chinese people studying Europe or travelling to Europe to study. It was felt that the project produced very useful snapshots of views of the EU at particular points in time, but that it would be useful to study how perceptions were changing. It would therefore be necessary to repeat the survey after a certain interval, say five years, to be able to analyse how perceptions have changed over a period, in order to better understand the dynamics of the EU-China relationship.

Our two institutions are interested in looking for opportunities to continue this kind of important academic and policy study undertakings, and hope other

members of the consortium and, more generally, other Chinese and European institutions will join us. The experience of effective and fruitful cooperation for this project gives us confidence in the feasibility of cross-country joint efforts at improving the mutual understanding between China and the EU.

On behalf of the Board of the Consortium, we appreciate the good teamwork of the Editorial Committee led by Professor Lisheng Dong in producing the manuscript of the book. Excellent assistance provided by Mr Lüjun Zhou, PhD candidate at Peking University, is acknowledged. We would like also to thank Professor Yongnian Zheng, who supported Professor Dong's initiative to apply for this project in late 2008 and agreed to include this book in the China Series published by the Routledge under his editorship.

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Part I

Introduction

1 Introduction

Henk Dekker and Zhengxu Wang

This book gives the reader insight into how Chinese citizens and officials think about the European Union. The insights that we present in this book are the results of a research project that we – a group of researchers from six academic institutions in China and Europe – have conducted in China.¹ This chapter informs about the why, how and what of our research: the main motivations for our study, the applied methods of data collection, and the main research questions. At the end we give a short overview of the various chapters in this book.

Motivations

The starting point for our research project was great curiosity. We asked ourselves: what do Chinese citizens know, think and feel about the EU and how much do they differ in their knowledge, perceptions and attitudes towards the EU? Besides this factual curiosity, we were interested in more theoretical issues: How can we explain differences in knowledge, perceptions and attitudes regarding the EU among Chinese, and which theories previously developed by Western scholars to explain orientations towards foreign countries and international organizations have empirical evidence in China and which explanations are nearer ‘the truth’ than others? Theoretically, we distinguish three processes by which individuals learn, and develop their own cognitive and affective orientations: processing their own experiences, processing factual information and emotional messages from mass media and relevant others, and their own thinking. The direct contact theory represents the first process. Socialization theory is the representative of the second process. The third process is inference represented by theories that focus on cognitive explanations such as knowledge, image, and conflict perception theories, and theories focusing on affective explanations, such as social identity theory.

Besides this scientific relevance, we expected that studying Chinese views on the EU could also have an important societal relevance, especially for EU policy-makers. China is the world’s second largest economy after the United States, and Europe’s biggest trade partner after the United States. As China grows in global power and influence, it might be critically important for the EU to forge a close and cooperative relationship with China. Policy papers say that

China and the EU are committed to a comprehensive strategic partnership, but reading newspapers is enough to know that EU–China ties have not always been smooth; Brussels and Beijing have often disagreed over, for example, China’s human rights record. The relationship seems also very complex in practice. There are signs that Europeans often find China hard to understand. We thought that it could be important for Europeans to get to know more about how Chinese officials and people regard the EU. A better understanding of the opportunities and challenges in China may enable the EU institutions and nation-states to develop an appropriate response to the rise of China as an economic and political giant. A better understanding could also enhance the ability of the EU and European institutions in the various economic, political, cultural and educational sectors to take the necessary steps towards developing more effective relations with China. The European Commission found this study important enough to include it in its Seventh Framework Programme under the title ‘Disaggregating Chinese Perceptions of the EU and the Implications for the EU’s China Policy’, and to support the study financially.

Methodology

In order to generate insight into how different groups of Chinese elites and citizens view the EU and how their perceptions of and attitudes towards the EU are formed, we employed a mixed range of research methods, including focus group discussions, surveys, interviews and content analyses.

We ran six focus group discussions to identify critical issues and important questions in Chinese perceptions of the EU. A focus group discussion was conducted in each of the six Chinese cities selected for surveying the general public’s perception of the EU. We involved a total of about 60 Chinese citizens in these discussions. Each focus group discussion lasted about an hour to an hour and a half. A ‘Protocol for Focus Group Discussions’ was first developed, which gave detailed guidance to team members on how to run a focus group discussion.

The public survey questionnaire was designed collectively by the research team. All English-language items used in our study were translated into Chinese by a local bilingual translator, and a native English speaker with good Chinese proficiency was then asked to back-translate these items. Back-translation was compared with the original English version, and some minor modifications were made to produce the final Chinese version. A pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted in early 2010. After the pilot test, we made a few amendments to the questionnaire before it was finalized for the survey proper. The final questionnaire included close to 130 questions. They covered the respondent’s attitude towards the EU, knowledge about the EU, perceptions of the EU, interest and trust in the EU, and attitude towards EU policies and European ideas and practices, as well as the respondent’s attitude towards his or her own country and people (China and the Chinese), media use (from what sources the respondent receive information about the EU, for example), social and cultural values, and

the respondent's personal background. The purpose of including questions about the respondent him- or herself was that they could help us to explain how perceptions and attitudes towards the EU vary among different groups of Chinese.

The survey was conducted between June and August in 2010, and sampled more than 3,000 respondents among the registered residents of six Chinese cities: Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Xi'an, Chengdu and Nanning. The choice of cities was intended to include cities of different sizes (from megacities to small provincial capitals), different geographical locations (coastal and inland, northern and southern) and different levels of economic development (from the highly developed to the relatively underdeveloped). We sampled 500 respondents in each city using a multi-stage probability proportional to size sampling procedure. Respondents were required to be between 18 and 70 years old and to have lived in the city for at least half a year. In each of the six cities, we first employed a stratified procedure or simple random procedure to select three or four Districts (*qu*). Within all the 21 selected city districts, four or three 'streets' (*jiedao*, an administrative unit in the Chinese governing system) were randomly selected in each district, resulting in 72 'streets'. In each of the selected 'streets', we randomly selected two 'communities', or neighbourhood committees (*juweihui*, the lowest level in the Chinese governing system). Hence, a total of 144 neighbourhood committees were randomly selected. At the community level, we obtained a list of all the households, then used a systematic sampling procedure to select the households for our study. After each household had been identified, we interviewed the person in the household whose birthday was closest to 1 June. Taking Beijing as an example, a total of 24 neighbourhood committees were selected from eight districts, resulting in 504 valid questionnaires. At each stage (district, street, neighbourhood) of the sampling process, the random procedure was executed according to the population sizes of the units in the sampling frame.

The fieldwork team in each sampled city was led by either one or two researchers from either the People's University of China or the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, who had received a two-day training session on fieldwork techniques in advance. They were supported by 10–15 locally recruited research assistants, usually students of a local university, who received a one-day training briefing before they started to interview the respondents. As a measure of quality control, an observer was randomly selected among the assistants and was independently hired by University of Nottingham to join one interview team every day. In addition, the leading researchers of each city reviewed the completed questionnaires and interview records, which were collected and further reviewed by the researchers from both institutes in Beijing.

The total sample size is 3,019, whereby each separately drawn city sample included about 500 respondents. On average, the response rate was 81 per cent (Beijing 76 per cent, Shanghai 78 per cent, Guangzhou 81 per cent, Xi'an 84 per cent, Chengdu 85 per cent and Nanning 84 per cent).

Surveys of members of five elite groups were conducted in order to measure more specific views on the EU and EU policies by the Chinese people. Using

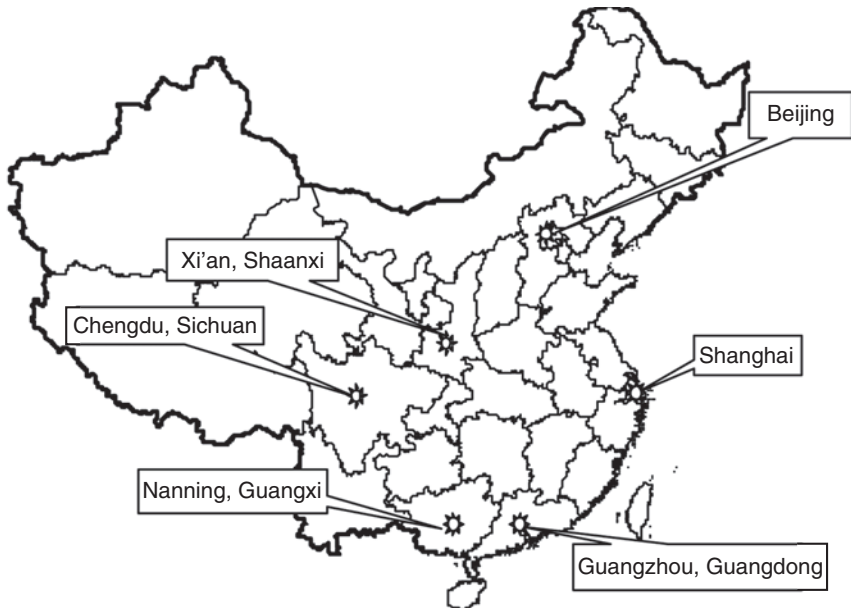


Figure 1.1 Map of China.

snowballing and purposive sampling strategies, we successfully surveyed more than 200 government officials, 200 business leaders, 100 scholars and researchers, 100 reporting and editorial staff in the mass media, and 100 leaders and activists in NGOs. The questionnaires of these elite surveys consisted of three main parts. The first part included a number of questions that were also asked in the public survey. The second part included a set of questions that were common among all the surveys of the elite groups. The third included a set of questions that were specific to the elite group that was being surveyed. In this way, we were able to compare responses to a number of identical questions (those in the first part) between the elite respondents with the general public. We were also able to compare responses to a number of identical questions (those in the second part) between all elite groups. We were also able to understand respondents to a number of questions specially related to their profession (those in the third part).

To better understand elite attitudes, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 20 government officials, 20 business leaders, and ten scholars and researchers. In total, 50 in-depth interviews were conducted. We were able to interview officials working in government ministries as well as provincial and municipal governments, scholars and researchers at institutes and centres of European Studies in China's academies, universities and other academic/research institutions, and company directors and managers who have business relations with European partners.

Our project also included an analysis of school textbooks in China to understand how the EU and Europe are taught to Chinese youth. Two scholars in the team collected school textbooks for World History classes and examined how the EU and Europe are presented to Chinese schoolchildren.

Key questions

What do Chinese people know about the EU, what are their perceptions of the EU and Europe, what are their attitudes towards the EU in comparison with other major powers in the world such as the United States, Russia and Japan, what are their perceptions of the EU's role in the world, and how do the Chinese feel about current and future EU–China relations? Li Zhang and Ying Yu present in [Chapter 2](#) an overview of the findings and provide a comprehensive picture of the views of Chinese citizens on the EU. The chapter also examines the specific perceptions of the five elite groups and explores how the nature of their status influences their views of the EU.

How can we explain difference in attitudes towards the EU among Chinese citizens? That is the key question posed in [Chapter 3](#). Henk Dekker and Jolanda van der Noll test a predictive model that is based on intergroup contact, social identity, integrated threat and socialization theories.

Do Chinese with more knowledge of the EU have a more positive attitude towards Europeans? Zhengxu Wang and Bogdan Popescu answer this question in [Chapter 4](#). Their hypothesis is that more knowledge contributes to a positive perception.

What are the predictors of Chinese citizens' attitude towards European culture and what are the effects of this attitude on other views concerning the EU? Christian Welzel, Stefanie Reher and Timo Graf answer this question in [Chapter 5](#). The set of possible predictors included intergroup contact, knowledge about the EU, perceived value distance between China and the EU, perceived peacefulness and trustworthiness of Europeans, and patriotism. Attitudes towards European culture are expected to have significant effects on Chinese evaluations of China–EU relations, the EU's role in the world and the EU's relative performance vis-à-vis China in various domains.

How can we explain difference in trust in Europeans among Chinese citizens and what are the effects of trust or the lack thereof on other views about the EU? Jan Delhey and Timo Graf answer this question in [Chapter 6](#). The set of possible predictors includes generalized social trust, intergroup contact, knowledge about the EU, images of the EU, perceived value distance between China and the EU, and patriotism. Regarding the effects, it is assumed that Chinese citizens, like citizens elsewhere in the world, are 'cognitive misers' who utilize the image of Europeans as trustworthy or untrustworthy people as a cognitive heuristic to evaluate the EU's role in the world in general and China–EU relations in particular.

What are popular Chinese attitudes regarding international affairs and foreign policy? This question is answered by Philip Everts in [Chapter 7](#). He also compares the findings of our research with findings from previous public opinion polls.

What do Chinese elites think about controversial issues that affect the EU's China policy, how can we explain differences in their views, and how can we explain differences in views between elites and the general public? Lisheng Dong and Lujun Zhou answer these questions in [Chapter 8](#).

Do elites differ from the general public in their views on the EU, and how can we explain possible differences? Long Sun conducted a systematic comparative analysis of the perceptions between these two groups and presents his findings in [Chapter 9](#). The theoretical explanatory model includes EU travel experience, economic status, and opportunities to obtain information via the Internet.

Do the tightly controlled traditional media and the Internet have different effects on how Chinese citizens view the EU? Daniela Stockmann presents her analyses of the general survey and the media experts' survey data in [Chapter 10](#). The media experts' survey included more than a hundred copies of a questionnaire completed by editors and journalists specializing in international news reporting.

What is taught about the EU in Chinese schools? To answer this question Nicola Spakowski examined school history curricula and analysed current secondary school history textbooks.

Note

- ¹ The consortium members were the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (China), Renmin University (China), the China Policy Institute (CPI) of the School of Contemporary Chinese Studies at the University of Nottingham (United Kingdom), Leiden University (the Netherlands), Jacobs University Bremen (Germany), and the Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House in London (United Kingdom).

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