

European Studies in China : Development and Implication

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I. Development of European Studies in China

European Studies in China went through an interesting period of development. There have been four phases since the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949.

1. *The first phase: the 1950s and 1960s*

During this period, China had no formal diplomatic relations with most of the Western European countries and had direct military confrontation with many of them in Asia (with UK, France, The Netherlands, Greece, Belgium, Luxembourg in Korea and with France in Indochina). Because of the East-West confrontation in 1950s and 1960s, the Western European countries were regarded as part of the Imperialist Camp led by the United States and the little brothers or even the hatchet dogs of the United States. There was no serious research on the Western Europe and European integration. The ECSC and EEC were simply defined as the institutionalization of the state monopoly Capitalism and the result of the contradiction between Western Europe and the United States.¹

2. *The second phase: the 1970s and 1980s*

After President Richard Nixon's visit to China in 1972, the relationship between China

¹ Professor Dai Bingran from Fudan University in Shanghai divided 1950s and 1960s into two phases. For the basic nature of European Studies in China there was actually no big difference. See Dai Bingran, 'European Studies in China', in David Shambaugh, Eberhard Sandschneider and Zhou Hong (eds.) *China-Europe Relations: Perceptions, policies and prospects* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 105-106

and the Western world (the United States, Western Europe and Japan) changed tremendously. Guided by the “Three Worlds” theory of Mao Zedong, Western Europe was regarded as the Second World and part of the United Front against the Soviet Social-Imperialism. Chinese universities and research institutes started to pay attention to the European Communities and the European integration process. Fudan University in Shanghai established the first research institution for European Studies in 1977.

After the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), China started to reestablish its international studies in 1980s. European Studies was one of the reconstructions. But in 1980s, European Studies in China was not focused on European integration, but mainly on country studies such as British, French, German, Nordic studies and the studies on European international relations, especially US-European relationship. For many Chinese scholars, European integration was the main effective tool for Europeans to counter-balance the United States. The major objective of the European economic integration was to deal with the economic crisis in the capitalist world.

Although there was institutional build-up for European Studies in China in 1980s such as the Institute of Western European Studies at Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, European Documentation Centre at Fudan University in Shanghai, China Association for Western European Studies, etc., most of the studies concentrated on Western European countries and there were very few researches on European integration. At the same time many Chinese scholars paid special attention to the social and economic model in Nordic countries, especially Sweden. The so-called “Swedish Model” was very popular in 1980s due to the efforts for Chinese intellectuals to promote social and political reform in China.²

3. *The third phase: the 1990s*

The 1990s was the key period for EU-China relations and European Studies in China.

² There were more than 10 books published in 1980s on the Nordic or Swedish model. See Song Xinning, ‘China’s View of European Integration and Enlargement’, in David Shambaugh, et al. *China-Europe Relations: Perceptions, policies and prospects*, p.179.

There were several very important events that stimulated the European Studies in China.

Firstly, after the 1989 Tiananmen event the European Commission freeze its relations with China and imposes a number of sanctions, including an arms embargo. It is the first time for the EC member states to act collectively towards China. China started to realize that it should not only deal with the major powers in Western Europe such as Great Britain, France, Germany, but also the European Communities and/or European Union. The EC studies had more policy relevant than ever before.

Secondly, the European integration developed rapidly and relatively smoothly due to the Maastricht Treaty and Amsterdam Treaty. The European Union replaced the European Communities. The common foreign and security policy (CFSP) became the second pillar and European Economic and Monetary Union had been on the agenda. Chinese scholars started to have more academic interests in European Studies.

Thirdly, following the New Asian Strategy in 1994 the European Commission set out its first China strategy in the 1995 Communication entitled "A Long Term Policy for China Europe Relations". EU-China relationship began to walk out of the shadow of 1989 event and improved persistently in the second half of the 1990s. It was also in this period that the European Union and Chinese government launched the first EU-China Higher Education Cooperation Programme (1997-2001). One of the major objectives of the Programme was to promote European Studies in China. More than 100 Chinese and European universities and research institutions, as well as 1000 Chinese and European scholars took part in the Programme.

In the 1990s, especially the second half of the decade, European Studies in China presented a picture of rapid development and flourish. About 20 centres of European Studies were established. Chinese scholars looked into European integration from different perspectives such as political sciences, economics, law, international relations, sociology and history. As the beginning European Studies in China could be characterized as more

introductory and knowledgeable rather than theoretical and multi and/or inter-disciplinary.

4. *The fourth phase: in the 2000s.*

Entering into the 21st Century, European Studies in China does not always follow the evolution of the EU-China relations, but more wide and deep concern about the European experiences and its implication to China. Another feature is the effort to study European integration from more theoretical, methodological and multi-disciplinary approaches.

According to many Chinese scholars, European integration is a process for independent sovereign states to become a single sovereign entity (not necessary a new sovereign state). As the main actors in the process are sovereign states, it is a new kind of inter-state or international relations. As a process for different sovereign states to become a single sovereign or legal entity, it is inevitable to touch upon the transfer or share of the national sovereignties. It is also a process of comprehensive political, economic and social interaction at different levels. There is no simple or pure economic and political integration in the process. Economic integration concludes political integration, and political integration promotes the economic integration. In the process of integration, politics and economics always go along with each other. Political process needs the economic foundation, and economic process needs the political and legal institutions as the guarantee. The European Union is regarded as an entity of regional cooperation and a supranational institution.³

Comparative regional integration studies is a very new field of research in China. Many Chinese did comparison between EU and APEC without clear definition of 'integration' in 1990s. Currently there are more attentions to the comparative studies between Europe and

³ Song Xinning, 'Political Economy Approach to European Integration Studies', *International Perspective*, 5 (2005). See also Song Xinning, 'China's View of European Integration and Enlargement', in David Shambaugh, et al. *China-Europe Relations: Perceptions, policies and prospects*, pp.174-177.

East Asia⁴. Some people argued that it was incomparable because of the total different political, economic, social and cultural conditions. Others argued that the European experience had its universal value. Doing comparative regional integration studies did not mean to copy the European model but to learn the relevant examples.

Some Chinese are more interested in doing comparison between Europe and China. European Union is a community of 27 members with 493 million population and 4.2 millions of square kilometre territory. China has 31 provinces and autonomy regions with more population and larger territory. European Union is a semi-supranational and semi-intergovernmental institution and China is an authoritarian one-party state. Is there any relevance to do comparative studies? The answer may be no. But more interestingly is the Chinese view of European models and their implications to China's domestic development and external relations. When Chinese discusses European 'models', it means that there is not only one, but different kinds of European model which are relevant to China.

II. Main Characteristics of European Studies in China

The current European Studies in China can be characterized into three major features, comparing with European studies in other Asian countries.

1. European Studies spread all over China within a relatively short period of time.

Before 1995, there were only five centres for European Studies in Chinese universities and Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, plus several governmental research institutes. In 2009, the number of centres or institutes increased to more than 30, with seven Jean

⁴ Main Chinese publication include: Tang Bi, *Comparative Studies on Two Regional Economic Integration* (Beijing: China Economic and Finance Press, 2004); Xu Mingqi (ed.), *European Integration and Asia-Europe Relations* (Shanghai: Shanghai Social Science Press, 2007), Winfried Jung and Yan Jiangfeng (eds.), *Regional Cooperation: Experience in European and Practice in East Asia* (Beijing: China Economic Publishing House, 2007), Song Xinning and Luk Van Langenhove (eds.) *Comparative Regionalism: Europe and East Asia* (Beijing: China University of Political Science and Law Press, 2008).

Monnet Professors and two Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence funded by the European Commission. Before 2000, there was China Association for European Studies, with six sub-branch associations such as British Studies, German Studies, French Studies, Italian Studies, Nordic Studies and EU Studies. Nowadays, the sub-branch association enlarged to 10, including European Politics and International Relations, European Legal Studies, European Economic Studies, European Social and Culture Studies.

From 2005, many Chinese universities started to have MA programmes on European Studies. Hundreds of undergraduate and graduate courses are offered in Chinese universities. The Chinese publications on European Union and European integration have tremendous numbers, hundreds and thousand if including articles in academic journals.

2. Chinese have more interests in European integration

According to a research project headed by Prof. Martin Holland of New Zealand on the images of EU in Asian Pacific, the European Union has the highest profile in China. It means that not only Chinese intellectuals but also Chinese public know more about European Union and have more interests than other Asian Pacific countries. What are the reasons for this?

Firstly, the rapid and smooth development of EU-China relations in the past decade, especially since 1995. The EU-China relationship was regarded as the best bilateral relations of China's foreign relations, comparing with Sino-US, Sino-Japanese and Sino-Russian relations by many Chinese. The EU is number one trade partner of China with 425 billions of \$US in 2008 and the most important technological supplier to China (about 50% since 1978 when China started its reform and open-up). There has been more good news in Chinese media on Europe. There are also good relationship between China and major EU member states. Unfortunately, it has not been the case since 2008.

Secondly, it seems to many Chinese that we have more commonality with Europe than any other major power in the world such as the United States, Russia or even Japan. Chinese

more like the European history, philosophy and culture, even the political culture such as multilateralism and human rights.

Thirdly, the European experiences are more relevant to China's domestic development and foreign policy. That is the so-called European models. One of the dynamics of European Studies in China is to learn from the European experiences or European models in order to serve to the development of China, economically, socially, even politically.

Conclusion

From later 1990s, European Studies in China developed rapidly and smoothly. The reasons for it are not only the funding from European Commission and Chinese government, the great improvement of EU-China relations since 1995, the rapid growth of EU-China economic relations, but also the interests of Chinese in learning from the European experiences. Comparing with the United States, Chinese are more interested in European in terms of history, cultural and the so-called European spirits of humanity and civilization. The pragmatic reason is that the European models are more relevant than the American ones to China especially in terms of domestic political and social development.

According to the recent surveys in China done by different institutions the image of the European Union enjoys highest respect in China than any other Asian Pacific countries.⁵ Among 600 college students interviewed by China Foreign Affairs University in 2005, 80% of them knew the EU very well. 52% of them regarded the EU as one "pole" of power in today's world. 65.82% of them regarded the European integration as the advantage in international affairs. 42.55% of them regarded the European way as the better model to deal with the international affairs, 22% of them saw both the European and American way, and 26.18% of them were in favour of the American way. 62% of them viewed the EU as the most important partners of China and 31% of believed the EU as

⁵ Martin Holland, Peter Ryan, Alojzy Nowak and Natalia Chaban (eds.), *The EU through the Eyes of Asia: Media, Public and Elite Interviews in China, Japan, Korea, Singapore and Thailand* (Warsaw: Warsaw University Press, 2007). More details can be seen from: http://esia.asef.org/AboutESiA_Meetings.htm#esiapublication

fare important one.⁶ A survey among Chinese public done by Chinese Academy of Social Science in 2007 showed the similar result. Most of the Chinese gave relatively high marks to the Sino-EU relations and were fairly optimistic towards the future of the bilateral relationship.⁷

Looking at the evolution of China's domestic political-social development and external relations, we can see the silhouette of the European models. But we cannot conclude that China has known the European experiences very well and follow the European models consciously. Due to the sensitive political reasons, Chinese officials will not acknowledge it even they are doing so.

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⁶ Zhu Liqun, 'Chinese Perceptions of the EU and the China-EU Relationship', in David Shambaugh et al, *China-Europe Relations: Perceptions, Policies and Prospects*, pp.148-173.

⁷ Research Group of the Institute of European Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Science, 'The Chinese Perception of the EU (2007): A Preliminary Analysis of the Survey on the Chinese Public Perception of the EU and Sino-EU Relations', *Chinese Journal of European Studies* 2 (2008), pp.1-52.