

Moving towards a Bright Future:

Chinese Students in the EU

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As an important form of international migration, education mobility is one of the instruments for China to establish exchanges with the EU. Chinese students make up the largest group of international students in the EU, showing consistent growth. That being said, there is substantial scope to make student mobility more accessible and effective for students in order to promote mutual understanding and strengthen the overall bilateral relationship between China and the EU.

Focusing on Chinese students in the EU, this paper firstly provides an analytic description of mobility trends of Chinese students pursuing overseas education in the EU. Second of all, major characteristics of Chinese students' mobility are discussed. In the third section, this paper focuses on potential economic and social benefits brought in by Chinese students. The final section aims at addressing existing challenges as well as prospects in promoting educational mobility between China and the EU, as well as retention of Chinese talent in the EU, and a discussion of its implications and a list of policy recommendations.

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Introduction

Over the past few decades, China and the EU have become comprehensive strategic partners and established extensive cooperation in the fields of security, trade, investment, as well as people-to-people affairs. An increasing number of platforms have been set up to further strengthen the bilateral strategic relationship and to facilitate mutual understanding. In particular, China and the EU have been actively conducting sectoral policy dialogues in the fields of education, culture, training and multilingualism, under the umbrella of the third pillar of Sino-EU cooperation, the High-level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD).

The objective of this study is to provide a quantitative overview of Chinese student mobility and the social capital that Chinese students can potentially bring to the host societies in European countries. The study also discusses challenges that Chinese students face when pursuing education in European countries. Accordingly, implications on how to better integrate Chinese international students to promote education internationalization and how the EU can better retain foreign talent for its labour market needs are offered at the end of the paper.

1. Characteristics of student mobility

1.1 Overview of Chinese overseas students

Along with the fast rise of middle-income earners in China (around 28.6 percent of the total population²), Chinese families increasingly have the means, and the desire, to support their offspring's overseas education. The popularity of this trend can be attributed to the widely-held belief that overseas higher education is of a better quality than that in China, and thus can enhance future job prospects. It is believed that the education-first, saving, and extended-family culture amongst Chinese parents will continue to contribute to the rising mobility of Chinese students³. According to a recent investigation conducted by the China Family Panel Survey⁴, over 20 percent of parents would like to send their children abroad for advanced education, regardless of parents' income, geographical location, or educational background. In fact, the demand for overseas education has increased to the extent that a complete industry of studying abroad services that assists students to prepare documents and pass exams has emerged.

Based on data compiled by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, there is a steady, year-on-year increase in the number of Chinese students going abroad in pursuit of tertiary education. Figure 1 shows the total number of outgoing Chinese students from 2011 to 2017. The trend reflects China's increased global involvement, pushing the young generation's awareness and growing need to increase their international competitiveness.

²Bai, Y. (2018, March 14). China creates world's largest middle-income class. *People's Daily*. Retrieved from <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0314/c90000-9437028.html>

³ Liu, W. (2016). The International Mobility of Chinese Students: A Cultural Perspective. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 46(4), 41-59. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1128607.pdf>

⁴Cited in Soysal, Y. & Woodman, S. (2018, October 10). What Chinese students want from UK universities – new research. <https://theconversation.com/what-chinese-students-want-from-uk-universities-new-research-104457>

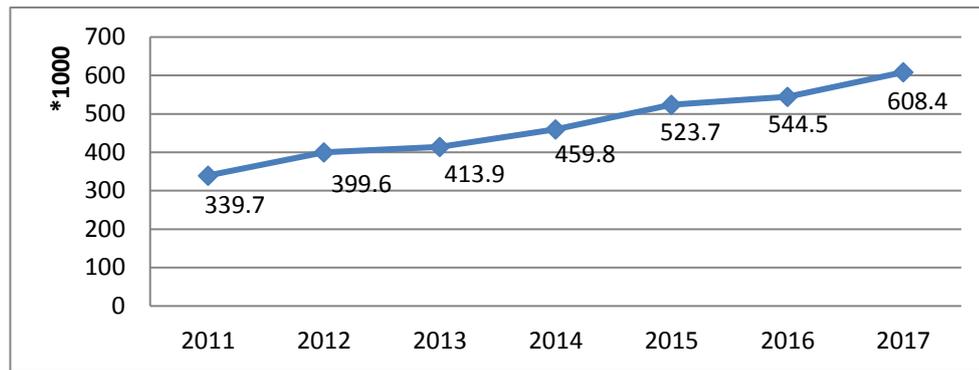


Figure 1: Outbound internationally mobile Chinese students 2011-2017
Data source: Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China⁵

At the same time, with the rapid development of the national economy and China's involvement in the global market, there is a growing need for well-educated talent to satisfy the demands of the domestic market. In 2008, China launched the Thousand Talent Plan or Thousand Talent Program as a national policy to recognize and recruit top international talent in scientific research, innovation, and entrepreneurship⁶. The country has since witnessed a steady upward trend of "sea turtles"⁷ in recent years. Nevertheless, according to the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MoE), the total number of students staying abroad after graduation is growing, indicating that China is gradually losing its young talents to the outside world. Figure 2 shows the trend of outbound and returning students, as well as the ever-increasing brain drain that China is facing, although some recent reports point to the slowing down of this trend.^{8,9}

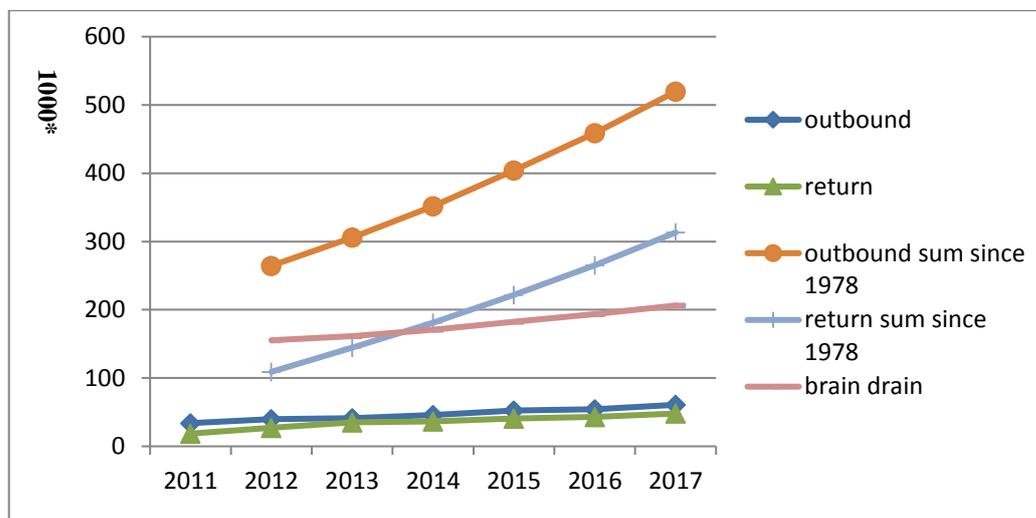


Figure 2: number of outflows and returnees from 2011-2017
Data source: Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China¹⁰

⁵Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2018) Retrieved from <http://www.moe.gov.cn/> For every figure used in this paper, the source with the most comprehensive data available is used.

⁶The Thousand Talents Plan. Retrieved from <http://www.1000plan.org/en/>

⁷Sea turtle: Chinese: 海归; pinyin: hàiguī, refers to students returning to China after studying abroad

⁸Chen, S. (2018, September 6). China's brain drain to the US is ending, thanks to higher salaries and Donald Trump. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/2163001/chinas-brain-drain-us-ending-thanks-higher-salaries-and-donald>

⁹Pells, R. (2018, March 1). China's Brain Drain Is Ending. *Inside Higher ED*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/03/01/experts-see-end-sight-chinas-brain-drain>

¹⁰Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China.

In light of the ever-deepening strategic partnership between China and the EU since 2003, people-to-people exchange, as an indispensable field of collaboration, became an integrated part of EU-China relations in 2012. This vital area of international exchange has been institutionalized as the third pillar of EU-China Dialogue and Cooperation, also referred to as the EU-China High-level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD). Initially covering education, culture, youth, research and multilingualism in 2012, the latest dialogues have added gender and sports as dialogue topics¹¹. In 2016, the first China-EU Education Ministers Conference took place in Beijing. Representatives discussed different educational policies and measures, committing to the deepening of Sino-European cooperation to serve talent cultivation and ensure the stability of the relationship.

With respect to education in the EU-China context, China has topped the tables as the biggest sending country of international students to the EU for a number of years. The EU is one of the most popular mobility destinations and the appeal of European higher education institutions is multifaceted. One of the driving forces is the growing interconnection between China and the EU. The establishment of strategic partnerships between the two sides in the fields of politics, economics, technology, and cultural exchange requires a more constructive diplomacy, including the promotion of academic collaboration to boost people-to-people exchange and dialogues. For instance, a number of Chinese universities have set up joint programs with overseas universities from EU countries. The China Scholarship Council, mainly financed by the national central government, has been offering a considerable amount of financial support to Chinese students to study abroad, as well as for foreign students to study in China¹². In the EU-funded Erasmus Mundus program, the budget for China makes up the biggest part of the entire international mobility budget for the Asian region¹³ and has organized mobility for more than 2500 students and staff between 2015 and 2017¹⁴. Also noted is that China ranked the 3rd biggest beneficiary in Asia (after India and Bangladesh) of Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (EMJMDs) students in the period of 2014 to 2017¹⁵.

The second factor that has contributed to the rising popularity of European universities is that studying in Europe is more affordable¹⁶. A specific point of attraction for Chinese students to study in Europe is that universities in some European countries do not charge tuition fees or have low tuition costs for international students¹⁷. In addition, in order to attract Chinese students, some European universities have simplified the visa application process by shortening the examination period¹⁸. Figure 3 presents the share of tertiary education graduates from the three largest sending countries in the EU (except for Spain, France and Slovakia for which data are not available) in 2016. It can be observed

¹¹European External Action Service. (2017, November 15). EU and China strengthen cooperation on education, culture, youth, gender equality and sport. Retrieved from https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/35690/eu-and-china-strengthen-cooperation-education-culture-youth-gender-equality-and-sport_en

¹²The Chinese Government Scholarship. Retrieved from <https://www.cscscholarship.org/>

¹³European Commission. (2018). Erasmus+ worldwide: erasmusplus-regional-asia2017. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/factsheets/regional/erasmusplus-regional-asia2017.pdf>

¹⁴European Commission. (2018). Erasmus+ worldwide: erasmusplus-china-2017. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/factsheets/asia-central/erasmusplus_china_2017.pdf

¹⁵European Commission. (2018), Erasmus+ worldwide: erasmusplus-regional-asia2017.

¹⁶European Youth Portal. (2018). Tuition fees around Europe. Retrieved from https://europa.eu/youth/eu/article/53/21134_en

¹⁷Marcucci, P. N., & Johnstone, D. B. (2007). Tuition fee policies in a comparative perspective: Theoretical and political rationales. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 29(1), 25–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600800600980015>

¹⁸Zhang, Y. (2014, March 17). European universities growing in popularity among students. *Chinadaily*. Retrieved from http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-03/17/content_17350247.htm

that China, as a non-EU country, plays a leading role in the internationalization of education in the EU.

Share of tertiary graduates from abroad by country of origin for the three largest partner countries, 2016						
	Largest origin of graduates from abroad	share(%)	Second largest origin of graduates from abroad	share(%)	Third largest origin of graduates from abroad	Share (%)
Belgium	France	19.2	Netherlands	3.9	Luxembourg	1.6
Bulgaria	Turkey	37.9	Greece	15.7	Cyprus	4.9
Czech Republic	Slovakia	61.9	Russia	9.5	Ukraine	4.3
Denmark	Norway	11.1	Germany	11.1	Romania	7.6
Germany	China(including Hong Kong)	13.0	India	6.6	Russia	4.6
Estonia	Finland	37.6	Russia	7.2	Ukraine	5.5
Ireland	China(including Hong Kong)	14.3	United Kingdom	9.8	United States	9.7
Greece	Cyprus	55.6	Albania	7.6	Germany	5.9
Croatia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	43.6	Slovenia	12.1	France	5.0
Italy	Albania	8.8	China(including Hong Kong)	7.2	Romania	6.3
Cyprus	Greece	55.4	Russia	7.9	Bangladesh	6.8
Latvia	Russia	14.2	Uzbekistan	11.0	Germany	6.8
Lithuania	Belarus	20.7	Ukraine	11.2	India	10.1
Luxembourg	France	27.8	Belgium	16.7	Germany	12.9
Hungary	Slovakia	13.6	Romania	11.7	Serbia	10.0
Malta	United States	10.6	Kuwait	7.6	United Kingdom	7.6
Netherlands	Germany	29.8	China(including Hong Kong)	7.4	Italy	4.0
Austria	Germany	48.0	Italy	11.7	Hungry	2.4
Portugal	Brazil	29.1	Angola	10.5	Cape Verde	8.7
Romania	Moldova	42.9	France	6.2	Israel	5.3
Slovenia	Croatia	34.6	The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	12.4	Italy	7.7
Finland	Russia	13.3	China(including Hong Kong)	9.6	Nepal	4.3
Sweden	China(including Hong Kong)	10.7	Germany	8.3	Finland	5.1
United Kingdom	China(including Hong Kong)	26.7	India	4.6	Nigeria	4.3

Note: data for Spain, France and Slovakia not available

Figure 3: Share of tertiary education graduates from abroad by country of origin in the EU, 2016

Data source: Eurostat¹⁹

1.2 Major destination countries

Although Chinese students are evidently attracted to study at European universities, they are not evenly distributed among all EU Member States. The UK is the most favoured European country by Chinese students, likely due to language issues and aspirations of gaining a quality higher education²⁰. As it stands, students from China significantly outnumber students from other overseas countries according to the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA). It was reported that Chinese students accounted for nearly a third of all non-EU students (including Hong Kong) in 2016/2017²¹. Following the UK, Germany and France are the most popular countries for Chinese students in the EU. With 32,268 individual enrolments, China was the largest source of international students at German universities in 2018²². As China has a high demand for advanced technology in the industrial sector, Germany is expecting an increased influx of Chinese students given its strong focus on engineering. Similarly, France is also an appealing

¹⁹Eurostat. (2018). Retrieved from

http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_uae_mobq02&lang=en

²⁰Counsell, D. (2011). Chinese Students Abroad: Why They Choose the UK and How They See Their Future. China: An International Journal, 9(1), 48–71.

<https://www.worldscientific.com/doi/10.1142/S0219747211000045>

²¹Higher Education Statistics Agency(HESA). (2018). Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2016/17 - Where students come from and go to study. Retrieved from <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/11-01-2018/sfr247-higher-education-student-statistics/location>

²²Studying in Germany. (2018). Germany International Student Statistics 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.studying-in-germany.org/germany-international-student-statistics-2018/>

destination for overseas students. Of all overseas students enrolled in French universities in 2017, 28,760 were Chinese, making China France's second largest partner country according to Campus France²³. The Netherlands is another attractive destination country for Chinese students. According to the Dutch organization for internationalisation in education (Nuffic), there were around 4,500 Chinese students studying in the Netherlands in the 2017-2018 academic year, representing the second largest international student group (after those from Germany)²⁴.

Another reason for choosing one European country over the other relates to existing partnerships between Chinese and foreign universities, the type of university, and when they were established. Nowadays China and its students have greater demands for a more diversified education, pulling higher education institutions around the world towards China in order to build their presence. Institutionalised partnerships and cooperation between Chinese and foreign universities has increased significantly in recent years. As a consequence, students are more likely to choose foreign universities with established partnerships with the home university in China. Moreover, exchange and joint programmes are often accompanied with reduced tuition fees and may even have talent scholarships on offer for excelling students.

Jointly funded academic programs between European and Chinese higher education institutions have been playing a big role in promoting student mobility. For instance, the Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education (STINT) has offered a bilateral mobility funding programme together with the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) since 2015. Recently, STINT launched a new initiative that focuses on presence and trend analysis in China. Its aim is to establish more strategic partnerships between Swedish universities and Chinese higher education institutions²⁵. Also worth mentioning is the long-standing education cooperation between the Sichuan Province of China and Brussels-Capital Region, whose relations can be traced back to the early 1990s. This cooperation covers a wide range of aspects including vocational training, student exchange, and culture. In 2014, a further step was taken with the establishment of the Brussels Academy for China and European Studies (BACES) between the Renmin University of China, Sichuan University, Fudan University and Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). Another example is the Marco Polo project signed by the Chinese and Italian governments facilitating the enrolment of Chinese students at Italian universities without the requirement of prior Italian language proficiency²⁶. Last but not least, coming back to the case of the Netherlands, the establishment of the NESO (Netherlands Education Support Office) office in Beijing is another manifestation of the Dutch efforts to promote its higher education in China and to increase student and staff mobility in both directions²⁷.

²³Campus France. (2018, April). Chiffres clés. Retrieved from

https://www.campusfrance.org/en/system/files/medias/documents/2018-04/chiffres_cles_fr.pdf

²⁴Huberts, D.; Coningh, M.V. (2018). Incoming student mobility in Dutch higher education 2017-2018. *Nuffic*. Retrieved from <https://www.nuffic.nl/documents/219/incoming-student-mobility-in-dutch-higher-education-2017-2018.pdf>.

²⁵The Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education. (2018). *Academic cooperation: Sweden and China* (2018).

²⁶Contingente riservato agli studenti cinesi aderenti al Programma 'Marco Polo', per l'anno accademico 2019/2020. Retrieved from http://offertaformativa.miur.it/php5/elenco_cinesi2019/

²⁷Hong, T.M.; Pieke, F.N.; Steehouder, L.; Veldhuizen, J.L. van. (2017). Dutch higher education and Chinese students in the Netherlands. Leiden Asia Centre. Retrieved from <http://leidenasiacentre.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Report-Chinese-students-in-the-Netherlands-2017-final.pdf>

2. Social influence

Student mobility leads to a greater exchange of information and knowledge sharing, and can thus lead to positive impacts on various levels. At an individual level, studying abroad has numerous cognitive benefits. It can be conducive to greater creative thinking and intellectual development, as well as enhanced intercultural and interpersonal communication skills. At the national level, international mobility has a positive effect on education internationalization and multilateral collaboration. Moreover, in the context of globalization, student mobility can act as an instrument to strengthen bilateral ties between countries by promoting interaction and enhancing mutual understanding between different cultures. This cultural exchange is naturally a two-way street, with Chinese students making valuable contributions to foreign universities and their host countries through the sharing of China's rich traditions and culture.

The internationalization of higher education can also be a crucial step in the exercise of greater geopolitical influence. Scholars have argued that internationalization of higher education has differing but significant impact on politics, economics, social affairs, academia and culture²⁸ - critical elements of a country's soft power. In this regard, international student mobility has the potential to channel the way a nation presents itself and delivers its core values. To be precise, overseas Chinese students can offer an insight into China and Chinese culture for European students who have an interest in learning more or studying in the country, which in turn is believed to promote mutual understanding and respect. Therefore, in a political sense, student mobility can help develop China's soft power in a globalized world by facilitating more academic partnerships and culture sharing.

Under the right circumstances, international education and its related sectors in the field of people-to-people affairs have the potential to offer considerable benefits to the economy of the destination countries. International students bring in economic benefits and revenues in the payment of tuition fees, accommodation and living expenses, as well as taxes and contributions to GDP paid by students who remain in the country after graduation²⁹. A recent investigation reported that international students contribute EUR 22.46 billion (GBP 20 billion) to the British economy each year, which is 10 times more than their cost³⁰. In the United Kingdom, international students and their visitors added EUR 15.5 billion (GBP 13.8 billion) gross values to the national GDP. On top of the costs of overseas education, international students also spend a considerable amount on items such as food and clothing while staying in the host country. In the UK alone, international students spent EUR 842.13 million (GBP 750 million) in the transportation industry and EUR 774.76 million (GBP 690 million) in the retail industry.

Similar results were found in other European countries. In 2014, France gained an estimated EUR 4.65 billion from receiving international students, while the costs were estimated at around EUR 3 billion. Notably, EUR 466.7 million of the total revenue from foreign students was spent by friends and family visiting them, supplemented by another EUR 364 million attributed to airline operators.

²⁸De Wit, Hans (2002). *Internationalization of Higher Education in the United States of America and Europe. A Historical, Comparative, and Conceptual Analysis*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

²⁹Vickers, P., & Bekhradnia, B. (2007). *The Economic Costs and Benefits of International Students*. Retrieved from <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/32EconomicEffectsofInternationalStudents.pdf>

³⁰Sean, C. (2018, January 11). Overseas students 'add £20bn' to UK economy. *BBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/education-42637971>

3. Challenges and opportunities

While the EU remains an attractive study abroad destination, Chinese students have been facing a number of challenges as well. Studies have demonstrated that international students often suffer from cross-cultural maladaptation, depression and loneliness when transiting to a new academic and socio-cultural environment³¹. Firstly, Chinese students in particular are reported to have experienced more adaptation problems relating to learning strategies³², social interaction³³, prejudice, anxiety and lower perceived social support³⁴. Another concern is students' lack of language skills, which may impact students' academic performance, as well as the interaction with locals. The latter could hinder students' understanding of the host culture and further integration into the host society³⁵. Like many other international students from Asian countries, the third most common challenge for Chinese students is the culture shock experienced at the initial stages of overseas studies³⁶. As an East Asian country, Chinese culture is distinct from Western culture in many aspects. In the case of Chinese students, they may leave university peers and professors with the impression that they are excessively timid or shy due to their propensity to be silent and less critical in class. This stems from China's high-power distance orientations, where being critical in class challenges the norm of not criticising one's superiors. All in all, studying overseas can seem appealing and promising whilst simultaneously inciting some significant challenges and frustrations.

When it comes to mobility trajectories after graduation, according to the annual report on the development of Chinese studying abroad published by the Centre for China and Globalization (CCG)³⁷, Chinese students in Europe have a higher rate of returning home compared to their peers in Oceania and North America.

4. Implications and policy recommendations

Europe has an increasing demand for high-skilled workers in critical fields such as health care and the IT sector. It is estimated that between 2015 and 2025, there will be a 23 per cent rise in the number of positions requiring high-skilled labour (68 to 83 million) in the EU³⁸. In response to the conditions of the labour markets, the Blue Card system was set up in an attempt to attract well-educated and highly-skilled workers from non-EU

³¹Sawir, E., Marginson, S., Deumert, A., Nyland, C., & Ramia, G. (2008). Loneliness and International Students: An Australian Study. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 12(2), 148–180. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315307299699>

³²Henze, J., & Zhu, J. (2012). Current research on Chinese students studying abroad. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 7(1), 90–104. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.2304/rcie.2012.7.1.90>

³³Spencer-Oatey, H., & Xiong, Z. (2006). Chinese Students' Psychological and Sociocultural Adjustments to Britain: An Empirical Study. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 19(1), 37–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908310608668753>

³⁴Chataway, C. J., & Berry, J. W. (1989). Acculturation experiences, appraisal, coping, and adaptation: A comparison of Hong Kong Chinese, French, and English students in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science/Revue Canadienne Des Sciences Du Comportement*, 21(3), 295–309. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0079820>

³⁵Henze, J., & Zhu, J. (2012). Current research on Chinese students studying abroad. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 7(1), 90–104. <https://doi.org/10.2304/rcie.2012.7.1.90>

³⁶ Brown, L., & Holloway, I. (2008). The initial stage of the international sojourn: excitement or culture shock? *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 36(1), 33–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069880701715689>

³⁷Wang, H.Y. and Miao, L., (2017). Annual Report on the Development of Chinese Students Studying Abroad. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press

³⁸Attracting skilled international migrants to China: A review and comparison of policies and practices. (2017). *Centre for China and Globalization (CCG)*. https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/attracting_skilled_ch.pdf

countries. For European educational institutions to attract and retain prospective talent, the following suggestions are made by the author.

It is still a common phenomenon that European universities have two-tiered admission policies for third-country nationals. Among all EU countries, only Germany (excluding the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg) has equal tuition schemes for all students, regardless of students' nationalities³⁹. The high fees that institutions charge third-country students and the lack of merit-based scholarships for non-EU students is an obvious barrier and raises the question of the extent to which the EU is genuinely interested in attracting and retaining foreign talent. As education becomes increasingly internationalized, it is reasonable to argue that third-country nationals would favour universities that equalize tuition fees and qualifications required for admission for all students. Considering the various benefits that international students bring to host societies, the author recommends that the EU should establish a set of rules to ensure international students' educational equality, so as to maximise the possibility of talent influx.

The second recommendation is for the host country to allow students to apply for a settlement permit for a certain period of time after graduation, so that they have time to look for a job on the host's labour market. EU member states should harmonize the visa extension policy for international students concerning post-graduation job seeking permits. The current common regulation allows non-EU nationals to stay for another 9 months after completion of studies or research in order to find work or to start a business in the Member States where their academic host institution is located⁴⁰. But Member States can set up their own rules regarding the length of time students are permitted to remain based within their borders following graduation. For instance, Germany has issued a policy allowing students from non-EU states to apply for an 18-month residence permit. A longer period of time for job seeking will increase the chance of non-EU talent becoming employed in the labour market. If a country's awareness is raised regarding the importance of international students as a talent pool, easing work permit and residency rules should be considered as a strategic move to retain talent and encourage them to put their knowledge and expertise into the host country.

A university is a place where domestic and foreign talent converge and exchange knowledge. Hence, universities can position themselves as important actors in boosting people-to-people dialogues and high-level academic exchanges. Accordingly, the third suggestion that is likely to promote student mobility between China and the EU is to encourage universities to establish joint programmes. Students that are mobilised through these programmes are expected to gain increased intercultural learning experiences, develop global views, as well as facilitate high-level communication among higher education institutions. Such platforms should be set up in line with the development of students, subjects, and the aspirations and priorities of participant universities. Several points should be taken into account along with this suggestion. The first thing to be noted is the necessity to prepare students for their overseas education before setting out. Making sure students are academically and psychologically ready for the journey could be helpful in reference to difficulties students might encounter during the transitioning period. The second point is to examine the effects and impacts of joint programmes in order to ensure

³⁹German Academic Exchange Service. (2017). Financial Security and Tuition Fees. Retrieved from <https://www.daad.de/deutschland/nach-deutschland/voraussetzungen/en/9198-financing/>

⁴⁰European Commission. (2018). Migration and Home Affairs. Study and Research. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/legal-migration/study-research-or-training_en

academic and financial resources are best managed so that subsequent programmes can learn from previous experience.

In October 2018, the 19th China Annual Conference for International Education and Expo (CACIE 2018) was held in Beijing, focusing on the topic of China's education modernisation and internationalisation. Over 100 institutions from about 20 countries and regions participated in the conference where the common objective of building direct relationships with foreign educational institutions was met⁴¹, highlighting China's determination to further internationalise its education system. At the same time, at the 12th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang stressed in his speech: "People-to-people and cultural ties, (...) deserve greater resource input from all of us to build up momentum and support for (...) economic cooperation. There should be more exchanges between our parliaments, social organizations, think tanks, universities and media outlets to enhance understanding and friendship between our peoples."⁴² As an essential aspect of EU-China relations, people-to-people exchange and cultural ties deserve more attention from both sides in order to facilitate greater political trust and economic cooperation.

China has sent a clear message to the world that it is keen to promote and advance education internationalisation. This will require the proactive engagement and collaboration of educational institutions around the world. The EU and China are starting to realise the untapped potential in this area and are making strides towards formalizing and institutionalising higher education cooperation and student exchanges. On all accounts, considering that Chinese students make up the biggest proportion of international students in the EU, the author argues that the retention of foreign talent is in the EU's best strategic interest. For this to be realised, the EU should harmonize its transnational education policies for third country nationals in terms of, *inter alia*, tuition fees, student visa application, post-graduation job seeking permits and talent planning. What is certain is that, closer cooperation in education will play a critical role in creating closer ties and cultivating greater cross-cultural awareness between Europe and China, thereby supporting the goals of the High-Level EU-China People-to-People dialogue.

⁴¹2018 China Annual Conference for International Education and Expo. (2018). CACIE 2018 was Held Successfully. Retrieved from <http://www.cacie.cn/f/news?langType=en&cid=e914600ba444a17865c58807ff1f200&childid=702d625f7a3a43d185dd00dc49c93b99>

⁴²Chinadaily.com.cn. (2018, October 20). Premier Li's speech at the 12th ASEM Summit. *Chinadaily*. Retrieved from <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201810/20/WS5bcb1ba3a310eff303283927.html>