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## INDEX

Étude de la faisabilité institutionnelle d'une Union chinoise : analyse des voies d'intégration et des solutions possibles à partir du modèle de gouvernance de l'Union européenne- CHANG, Alex.....	1
Social Media Use and Civic Engagement in the Urbanizing China -YUE, Chunying & Dapeng Wang.....	17
How Does Multiculturalism Shape Populism in the UK: A Perspective of Cultural Backlash- XU, Xiaohong.....	59
The role of culture teaching in English language teaching for Chinese college students-YANG, Lin.....	74
The China-Europe Dialogue on "Datong" (Great Harmony) Ethics: A Case Study of Kang Youwei's Comparative Research on German Political History- WANG, Eric.....	99

**« Étude de la faisabilité institutionnelle d'une Union chinoise :  
analyse des voies d'intégration et des solutions possibles à  
partir du modèle de gouvernance de l'Union européenne »**

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**ABSTRAIT**

Cette étude examine la faisabilité d'une Union chinoise en s'inspirant des mécanismes institutionnels et juridiques de l'Union européenne. Elle analyse les conditions politiques, économiques et juridiques nécessaires à la formation d'une telle organisation et propose plusieurs modèles d'intégration régionale adaptés aux réalités chinoises, incluant des territoires spécifiques tels que Taïwan, Hong Kong, Macao, le Xinjiang et le Tibet. En envisageant l'adhésion progressive de ces entités à un cadre commun, similaire au modèle européen où chaque État membre conserve une autonomie relative tout en participant à des structures communes, cette recherche explore les moyens de réaliser une unité institutionnelle tout en respectant les particularités régionales et historiques.

En évaluant les obstacles potentiels, tels que les disparités économiques et les différences juridiques, ainsi que les stratégies de mise en œuvre, l'étude identifie des scénarios concrets pour établir un cadre de coopération renforcée entre toutes les entités politiques chinoises. L'objectif est de dégager des solutions réalistes permettant de construire une Union chinoise fonctionnelle, stable et durable, dans laquelle même des territoires avec des statuts particuliers peuvent progressivement s'intégrer au système centralisé tout en préservant certaines compétences locales, à l'image de l'intégration européenne.

**Keywords : une Union chinoise, l'Union européenne, intégration régionale,  
les stratégies**

## **HYPOTHESES**

### Hypothèse 1 — Gouvernance commune

H1 : La création d'une Union chinoise est institutionnellement faisable si les entités régionales, y compris des territoires spécifiques tels que Taïwan, Hong Kong, Macao, le Xinjiang et le Tibet, acceptent une forme de gouvernance commune garantissant la préservation de leurs intérêts fondamentaux. Dans ce scénario, chaque entité pourrait conserver certaines compétences locales tout en participant à des mécanismes centraux de coordination et de décision, à l'image des arrangements observés dans l'Union européenne, où l'autonomie régionale est respectée tout en favorisant une intégration politique et institutionnelle progressive. Cette approche permettrait d'envisager une intégration graduelle des territoires avec des statuts particuliers, minimisant les tensions et renforçant la faisabilité institutionnelle d'une Union chinoise unifiée.

### Hypothèse 2 — Cadre juridique harmonisable

H2 : L'établissement progressif d'un cadre normatif commun permettrait une harmonisation juridique suffisante pour soutenir un processus d'intégration régionale en Chine. Dans ce contexte, chaque région pourrait progressivement adapter ses législations locales aux normes communes tout en conservant certaines compétences juridiques propres. Cette approche graduelle, inspirée des mécanismes européens, viserait à réduire les divergences légales et à faciliter la coordination entre le centre et les régions, permettant ainsi une intégration institutionnelle plus harmonieuse et acceptée par tous les territoires participants.

### Hypothèse 3 — Intégration économique comme moteur

H3 : La mise en place d'un marché commun interne ou d'une intégration sectorielle limitée pourrait constituer le principal moteur d'un processus d'unification institutionnelle, à l'image de l'expérience européenne. Cette approche pourrait également inclure des territoires aux statuts particuliers, telles que ces régions, qui pourraient progressivement participer aux mécanismes économiques communs tout en conservant certaines compétences locales. En adoptant des instruments d'intégration graduelle, le centre et ces entités pourraient aligner leurs intérêts économiques, réduire les disparités régionales et renforcer la cohésion institutionnelle de l'ensemble de l'Union chinoise.

Cette recherche analyse la faisabilité institutionnelle de la création d'une Union chinoise, en prenant comme point de référence les structures juridiques et les mécanismes de gouvernance de l'Union européenne (Nicolaïdis & Weatherill, 2003). L'étude part du constat que, malgré les différences historiques, politiques et culturelles entre la Chine et l'Europe, plusieurs dynamiques communes — telles que la nécessité de stabilité régionale, la gestion de la diversité interne et le besoin d'intégration économique — permettent une comparaison utile.

L'objectif principal de cette étude est d'identifier les conditions politiques, économiques et juridiques pouvant rendre possible la formation d'une Union chinoise fondée sur une coopération renforcée entre différentes entités régionales chinoises. L'analyse propose une série de modèles d'intégration inspirés de l'expérience européenne (Hooghe & Marks, 2001), mais adaptés aux réalités spécifiques de la Chine contemporaine.

Sur le plan politique, l'étude examine la capacité des différentes régions à accepter une forme de gouvernance commune sans compromettre leurs intérêts fondamentaux. Sur le plan juridique, elle explore la possibilité d'un cadre normatif permettant une harmonisation progressive des politiques publiques. Sur le plan économique, elle

évalue l’opportunité d’un marché commun interne ou de formes plus limitées d’intégration sectorielle.

La recherche identifie également plusieurs obstacles — notamment la centralisation du pouvoir, les disparités économiques régionales et les différences administratives (Lieberthal, 2004) — qui pourraient freiner le processus d’intégration. Pour répondre à ces défis, l’étude propose un ensemble de solutions, telles que des mécanismes de gouvernance différenciée, des dispositifs de solidarité économique et des institutions communes à mandats limités.

En conclusion, l’étude démontre que, bien qu’un projet d’Union chinoise soit ambitieux, il peut devenir réaliste si son développement est graduel, flexible et adapté au contexte chinois. L’expérience européenne fournit ainsi un cadre de référence précieux (Nicolaïdis & Weatherill, 2003), mais ne doit pas être reproduite mécaniquement : l’Union chinoise doit adopter son propre modèle, fondé sur une intégration pragmatique et progressive.

### **Dimension politique : un pragmatisme croissant depuis la réforme et l’ouverture**

Depuis les réformes de 1978, la Chine adopte une attitude plus pragmatique, axée sur la stabilité régionale, la coopération internationale et la prévention des conflits (Vogel, 2011; Shirk, 2007). Cette orientation plus modérée permet d’envisager une structure de gouvernance multiniveau.

→ Le pragmatisme politique renforce la faisabilité d’une Union chinoise, y compris la possible participation progressive de territoires spécifiques tels que Taïwan, Hong Kong, Macao, le Xinjiang et le Tibet, qui pourraient intégrer le système tout en conservant certaines compétences locales, et il pourrait être envisageable d’accorder à Hong Kong et Macao une autonomie élargie dans certains domaines pour faciliter leur intégration harmonieuse.

L'évolution du pragmatisme politique chinois constitue un élément central de la réflexion sur la faisabilité institutionnelle d'une Union chinoise. Depuis la période post-Mao, les dirigeants chinois ont progressivement privilégié une approche fondée sur la gestion pragmatique des défis économiques et sociaux, plutôt que sur des considérations idéologiques strictes. Cette transformation, mise en lumière par Vogel (2011), a permis à la Chine d'adopter un modèle de gouvernance plus flexible, où l'expérimentation institutionnelle et les ajustements progressifs jouent un rôle fondamental dans la prise de décision. L'inclusion possible des territoires mentionnés s'appuie sur ce modèle flexible, qui permet d'adapter la gouvernance aux particularités régionales et historiques, y compris la possibilité d'une autonomie élargie pour Hong Kong et Macao.

Parallèlement, Shirk (2007) souligne que la politique chinoise contemporaine repose fortement sur l'objectif de stabilité — sociale, économique et géopolitique — ce qui encourage des stratégies d'adaptation plutôt que de confrontation. Ce climat politique relativement modéré offre un terrain propice à l'élaboration de mécanismes de coopération interrégionale, tels que ceux envisagés dans le cadre d'une Union chinoise. En effet, la recherche d'efficacité administrative et l'importance accordée à la performance gouvernementale favorisent l'émergence d'arrangements institutionnels multiniveaux, déjà observés dans certaines politiques pilotes menées dans les provinces côtières (Lieberthal, 2004). Ces mêmes principes pourraient permettre d'intégrer progressivement des territoires aux statuts particuliers, en garantissant que leurs intérêts fondamentaux soient respectés et protégés, et en envisageant une autonomie élargie pour Hong Kong et Macao afin de faciliter leur participation volontaire.

De plus, la gouvernance multiniveau se trouve renforcée par la logique de « fragmented authoritarianism », un concept que Lieberthal et Oksenberg (1988) utilisent pour décrire les interactions complexes entre le gouvernement central et les administrations locales. Cette dynamique, bien qu'elle crée parfois des problèmes de

coordination, montre aussi que les structures étatiques chinoises fonctionnent déjà de manière semi-décentralisée. Ainsi, l'existence de ces relations verticales et horizontales entre niveaux administratifs peut constituer la base d'un système de gouvernance plus intégré, si les mécanismes institutionnels appropriés sont mis en place, y compris pour gérer l'intégration de territoires ayant des particularités légales, culturelles ou économiques spécifiques, avec la possibilité d'accorder à Hong Kong et Macao une autonomie élargie dans certains domaines.

Dans cette perspective, l'expérience européenne fournit un exemple utile de construction progressive d'un système politique multiniveau, dans lequel les États membres conservent une autonomie substantielle tout en participant à une gouvernance commune (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). Toutefois, comme le rappelle Nicolaïdis et Weatherill (2003), tout processus d'intégration régionale doit tenir compte des particularités historiques et culturelles de chaque région. En Chine, cela implique que les formes d'intégration ne peuvent pas reproduire mécaniquement les structures européennes, mais doivent se développer en fonction des priorités nationales, du rôle central du Parti, des disparités régionales persistantes, et de la nécessité d'intégrer progressivement des territoires aux statuts particuliers, en garantissant leur participation volontaire, leur sécurité institutionnelle, et la possibilité pour Hong Kong et Macao de bénéficier d'une autonomie élargie.

Ainsi, l'approfondissement du pragmatisme politique chinois, associé à une tradition de pilotage expérimental et à des formes déjà existantes de gouvernance multiniveau, renforce l'idée que la création d'une Union chinoise pourrait s'inscrire dans un processus graduel et flexible. Ce cadre évolutif permettrait d'introduire des mécanismes de coordination interrégionale adaptés au contexte politique chinois, y compris pour des territoires ayant des particularités spécifiques, tout en évitant les ruptures institutionnelles majeures, en garantissant la préservation des intérêts fondamentaux de tous les participants, et en offrant la possibilité à Hong Kong et Macao d'exercer une autonomie élargie dans certains domaines.

## **Analyse de la faisabilité de l’Hypothèse 1**

L’hypothèse selon laquelle la création d’une Union chinoise serait institutionnellement faisable si les entités régionales acceptent une forme de gouvernance commune s’appuie sur plusieurs dynamiques structurelles déjà présentes au sein du système politique chinois. Depuis les réformes de Deng Xiaoping, la Chine a instauré un mode de gouvernance fondé sur le pragmatisme, la flexibilité institutionnelle et l’expérimentation locale, permettant aux autorités régionales de préserver leurs intérêts essentiels tout en participant à des dispositifs collectifs de pilotage (Vogel, 2011). Le modèle de « fragmented authoritarianism » décrit par Lieberthal et Oksenberg (1988) montre que les interactions entre centre et régions sont déjà organisées autour d’un équilibre subtil entre contrôle centralisé et marge d’autonomie locale. Ce fonctionnement démontre la capacité du système chinois à articuler des mécanismes de coopération verticale et horizontale, condition indispensable à toute gouvernance commune.

De plus, la littérature sur la gouvernance multiniveau suggère que des entités dotées de fortes identités régionales sont susceptibles d’adhérer à des institutions communes lorsque celles-ci préservent leurs compétences essentielles et assurent un partage équilibré du pouvoir (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). L’expérience européenne montre notamment que la coopération intergouvernementale peut se développer sans remettre en cause l’autonomie fondamentale des unités participantes, dès lors que les arrangements institutionnels garantissent la protection des intérêts vitaux (Nicolaïdis & Weatherill, 2003). Dans le contexte chinois, cette logique est renforcée par la priorité politique accordée à la stabilité et à la performance administrative (Shirk, 2007), qui encourage les provinces à soutenir des mécanismes coordonnés lorsqu’ils favorisent la croissance et réduisent les risques institutionnels. Ainsi, l’existence d’un système déjà partiellement intégré, combinée à l’importance accordée au pragmatisme politique, rend crédible l’émergence d’une gouvernance commune à l’échelle d’une Union chinoise, sans menacer les intérêts fondamentaux des régions.

## **Analyse de la faisabilité de l’Hypothèse 2**

La faisabilité institutionnelle d'une Union chinoise reposant sur un cadre constitutionnel flexible s'inscrit dans la continuité de la tradition politique chinoise, caractérisée par l'expérimentation locale et les réformes incrémentales. Comme le souligne Heilmann (2008), les réformes chinoises suivent une logique de « policy experimentation » où les autorités centrales permettent aux gouvernements locaux d'adapter les règles constitutionnelles ou quasi-constitutionnelles avant leur généralisation. Ce mode de pilotage gradué renforce la capacité du système à absorber des transformations institutionnelles majeures sans provoquer de rupture politique. Dans cette optique, un cadre constitutionnel flexible — intégrant des mécanismes tels que des arrangements asymétriques, des statuts spéciaux ou des zones institutionnelles pilotes — pourrait faciliter la transition progressive vers une Union chinoise.

Par ailleurs, l'établissement progressif d'un cadre normatif commun permettrait une harmonisation juridique suffisante pour soutenir un processus d'intégration régionale en Chine. Dans ce contexte, chaque région pourrait progressivement adapter ses législations locales aux normes communes tout en conservant certaines compétences juridiques propres. Cette approche graduelle, inspirée des mécanismes européens, viserait à réduire les divergences légales et à faciliter la coordination entre le centre et les régions, permettant ainsi une intégration institutionnelle plus harmonieuse et acceptée par tous les territoires participants.

Cette double perspective — flexibilité constitutionnelle + harmonisation normative — devient particulièrement pertinente si l'on envisage l'intégration progressive de territoires aux statuts particuliers tels que Taïwan, Hong Kong, Macao, le Xinjiang ou le Tibet. En effet :

Plusieurs de ces territoires disposent déjà de cadres juridiques particuliers : par exemple, Hong Kong et Macao, depuis leur retour à la souveraineté chinoise, opèrent selon le principe « un pays, deux systèmes », avec des lois régionales (« Basic Law ») distinctes de celles de la Chine continentale.

Ces régimes de grande autonomie montrent qu'il est possible d'articuler un ordre juridique pluriel au sein d'un même État, ce qui constitue un précédent institutionnel favorable à l'idée d'une Union chinoise à géométrie variable : certaines entités adoptant des normes communes, d'autres conservant des compétences légales spécifiques.

En prévoyant un cadre juridique flexible permettant le maintien de ces particularités (langue, système juridique, législation locale) tout en introduisant des normes communes (droit du commerce, fiscalité, mobilité des personnes, coordination interrégionale), une telle Union pourrait garantir la coexistence harmonieuse des différences tout en favorisant l'intégration — ce qui relève d'une forme de « fédéralisme asymétrique », comparable à certains modèles observés en Europe ou au Canada (Elazar, 1997; Keating, 2013).

Ainsi, la combinaison d'une constitution souple, d'un effort d'harmonisation légale progressive et de la reconnaissance institutionnelle des statuts particuliers des territoires concernés constitue une base robuste pour soutenir l'hypothèse H2 — même dans un contexte qui impliquerait l'adhésion de régions sensibles comme Taïwan, Hong Kong, Macao, le Xinjiang ou le Tibet. L'approche graduelle, le respect des autonomies régionales et l'adaptation aux réalités historiques et locales permettent de minimiser les frictions et d'offrir une voie crédible vers une Union chinoise institutionnellement intégrée mais politiquement pluraliste.

### **Dimension économique : la coopération économique est réalisable**

L'intégration d'une Union chinoise présente des implications économiques majeures qui renforcent la faisabilité institutionnelle du projet. Premièrement, la coopération interrégionale permet de créer des économies d'échelle et d'optimiser l'allocation des ressources, en particulier dans les infrastructures, l'industrie et le commerce (Naughton, 2007). Les provinces côtières de la Chine ont déjà démontré qu'un pilotage coordonné de zones économiques spéciales peut stimuler la croissance

européenne tout en maintenant la compétitivité des territoires moins développés (Vogel, 2011). Une Union chinoise pourrait ainsi rationaliser la circulation des capitaux, des biens et de la main-d'œuvre à l'échelle nationale, tout en incitant à l'innovation par la diffusion rapide des technologies entre régions. Dans ce contexte, l'inclusion progressive de territoires aux statuts particuliers, tels que Taïwan, Hong Kong, Macao, le Xinjiang et le Tibet, pourrait renforcer le potentiel économique de l'ensemble, en favorisant une coopération multi-régionale bénéfique pour tous. Chaque région apporterait ses atouts spécifiques, tout en profitant des synergies créées par la coordination et le partage de ressources.

Deuxièmement, la dimension économique repose sur des mécanismes incitatifs pour encourager la coopération. Les transferts fiscaux, les subventions ciblées et la mise en commun de certains fonds publics peuvent réduire les disparités régionales et aligner les intérêts économiques des provinces sur les objectifs nationaux (Montinola, Qian & Weingast, 1995). L'expérience chinoise de la « compétition fédérale » montre que les provinces répondent positivement à des incitations économiques bien calibrées, favorisant des comportements coopératifs sans recourir à une autorité coercitive (Shirk, 2007). L'inclusion de territoires comme Taïwan, Hong Kong, Macao, le Xinjiang et le Tibet pourrait être facilitée par des mécanismes incitatifs adaptés, assurant que la participation de chaque région crée un scénario gagnant-gagnant pour l'ensemble de l'Union.

Enfin, une Union chinoise pourrait renforcer la stabilité économique à long terme en offrant un cadre institutionnel pour gérer les risques macroéconomiques, tels que les déséquilibres régionaux, les bulles immobilières ou les fluctuations de la demande intérieure et extérieure (Zhang & Chen, 2020). En créant des mécanismes de coordination économique entre le centre et les régions, l'Union favoriserait un développement harmonieux et durable, tout en consolidant la légitimité du système central auprès des provinces et territoires participants. La participation de régions avec des statuts particuliers pourrait, dans ce cadre, contribuer à une intégration économique inclusive et bénéfique pour toutes les parties, en transformant les divers atouts locaux en un moteur commun de croissance nationale.

### **Analyse de la faisabilité de l’Hypothèse 3**

La faisabilité institutionnelle d’une Union chinoise fondée sur des mécanismes de coopération incitative repose sur des dynamiques profondément ancrées dans le modèle de gouvernance de la Chine réformée. Depuis les années 1980, le gouvernement central a largement utilisé des incitations—financières, fiscales et réglementaires—pour orienter les comportements des provinces et susciter leur participation à des projets nationaux (Naughton, 2007). Le succès des zones économiques spéciales, fondées sur un système d’expérimentation locale et de récompenses administratives, démontre la capacité du centre à mobiliser les gouvernements régionaux par le biais d’incitations plutôt que par contrainte directe (Vogel, 2011). Ces précédents institutionnels illustrent un mode de gouvernance flexible, où la coopération découle d’un alignement d’intérêts plutôt que d’une centralisation autoritaire.

De plus, la littérature sur le fédéralisme chinois et la compétition interrégionale indique que les provinces répondent de manière stratégique aux incitations lorsqu’elles perçoivent que ces mécanismes améliorent la croissance ou renforcent leur position administrative (Shirk, 2007). Les travaux de Montinola, Qian et Weingast (1995) montrent notamment que le système chinois s’apparente à un « marché politique » où les gouvernements locaux adoptent des comportements coopératifs lorsqu’ils bénéficient d’une autonomie mesurée et de perspectives d’avancement institutionnel. Dans ce contexte, la mise en place d’incitations ciblées — par exemple des fonds interrégionaux, des mécanismes de co-décision ou des avantages fiscaux — pourrait encourager les régions à participer à une Union chinoise sans percevoir cette intégration comme une menace.

En outre, l’inclusion de Taïwan dans un modèle de coopération économique et institutionnelle pourrait créer un scénario gagnant-gagnant, renforçant l’Union chinoise au-delà du modèle traditionnel centré sur Beijing. La participation progressive de Taïwan, avec ses atouts technologiques et économiques, pourrait non

seulement stimuler la synergie interrégionale, mais aussi servir de catalyseur pour des mécanismes d'intégration plus flexibles et inclusifs, augmentant la résilience et l'efficacité globale de l'Union (Zhang & Wang, 2021; Chen, 2019).

Ainsi, l'histoire institutionnelle de la Chine démontre que la coopération régionale est le plus souvent obtenue par l'offre d'incitations attractives, ce qui renforce la plausibilité de l'hypothèse H2 et souligne le potentiel d'une intégration plus robuste grâce à l'inclusion de territoires stratégiques.

### **Dimension culturelle — Une coopération culturelle possible au sein d'une Union chinoise**

La création d'une Union chinoise ne viserait pas uniquement l'intégration institutionnelle ou économique : elle pourrait également s'appuyer sur une coopération culturelle profonde, tirant parti de la diversité interne de la Chine (continentale, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, Xinjiang, Tibet) comme d'un atout plutôt que d'un obstacle. Plusieurs éléments rendent cette perspective culturellement plausible et potentiellement fructueuse :

D'abord, la recherche contemporaine montre que la diversité culturelle interprovinciale en Chine ne cesse de croître. Une étude récente utilisant l'indice de diversité de Shannon–Wiener sur les recensements de 1990 à 2020 conclut à une montée continue de la diversité culturelle à différents niveaux (urbain, rural, national), ce qui rend pertinent un effort de coordination culturelle et de gouvernance culturelle partagée.

Frontiers

Ensuite, des initiatives de coopération interculturelle sont déjà partiellement en place, notamment via des politiques de protection et de promotion des cultures minoritaires,

comme en Tibet ou au Xinjiang, où des programmes de sauvegarde du patrimoine culturel, des musées, des troupes artistiques et des centres culturels ont été mis en place.

De plus, des études sociologiques et anthropologiques montrent qu'il existe en Chine une longue tradition d'« indigénisation » des sciences sociales, c'est-à-dire l'adaptation des méthodes et cadres d'analyse aux réalités locales — un processus qui a concerné la Chine continentale, Taiwan et Hong Kong, démontrant qu'un espace culturel commun et dialogué est possible malgré les différences régionales.

En incluant des territoires comme Taiwan, Hong Kong ou Macao, une Union chinoise pourrait construire un modèle culturel pluriel mais unifié : ces régions apporteraient leur histoire, leur culture urbaine ou métissée, et leur expérience d'ouverture internationale, ce qui enrichirait le capital culturel commun. Par exemple, Hong Kong, en tant que métropole multiculturelle avec une population variée, pourrait jouer un rôle de pont culturel entre la Chine intérieure et le monde globalisé, facilitant les échanges, la créativité et l'innovation culturelle, tout en contribuant à une identité chinoise rénovée et inclusive. Ce type de coopération culturelle — fondée sur le respect de la diversité et la reconnaissance des particularités régionales — pourrait permettre de dépasser un modèle homogénéisant, et de bâtir un sentiment d'appartenance commun tout en valorisant la pluralité.

En somme, la dimension culturelle offre une valeur ajoutée majeure à l'idée d'une Union chinoise : elle permet de transformer la diversité interne en un levier d'unité, de cohésion et d'innovation. Sur le plan académique, étudier une telle perspective — mêlant anthropologie, sociologie, politique culturelle et développement institutionnel — présente un fort intérêt théorique et empirique. Cela ouvre des pistes de recherche sur la gouvernance culturelle multicouche, la construction de l'identité nationale dans des sociétés plurielles, et les dynamiques de coopération interculturelle au sein d'un État vaste et divers.

## EN BREF

En résumé, l'intégration d'une Union chinoise repose sur des dynamiques institutionnelles et économiques déjà observables, telles que la gouvernance flexible, les mécanismes de coopération incitative et les expériences d'intégration régionale incluant des territoires aux statuts particuliers comme Hong Kong, Macao, Taïwan, le Xinjiang et le Tibet (Naughton, 2007; Vogel, 2011; Shirk, 2007; Montinola, Qian & Weingast, 1995; Zhang & Wang, 2021). Ces expériences démontrent que, sur le plan théorique et institutionnel, il est possible de créer des mécanismes de coordination interrégionale qui favorisent la croissance économique, la stabilité sociale et le développement harmonieux du pays.

Cependant, il faut reconnaître que la création concrète d'une Union chinoise pourrait relever d'une utopie politique, compte tenu des facteurs géopolitiques, sociaux et historiques qui compliquent la coopération effective entre certaines régions. Malgré ces obstacles réalistes, du point de vue académique et théorique, l'étude d'un tel modèle demeure extrêmement pertinente. Examiner les mécanismes, les structures et les incitations nécessaires pour construire une Union chinoise offre une contribution précieuse à la compréhension des systèmes de gouvernance complexe et à la réflexion sur le développement et le progrès de la Chine dans une perspective régionale et globale.

Ainsi, même si l'Union chinoise pourrait être difficile à réaliser dans la pratique à court terme, elle présente un grand potentiel en termes de recherche et de construction théorique, fournissant un cadre d'analyse utile pour les études comparatives, les sciences politiques et l'économie du développement.

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## Social Media Use and Civic Engagement in the Urbanizing China

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### Abstract

Social media use and civic engagement is at the core of debate in the western academia. Studies document that social media platform has been widely used in civic engagement in these developed countries. What is the link between social media use and civic engagement in the developing world? Take the urbanizing China for example, we argue that social media act as *a non-institutional mechanism* for citizen to express interest and are providing *an alternative platform* for information communication. Our empirical analyses demonstrate that social media use is positively associated with political information attention and informal form of civic participation, but it has no significant effect on formal form of political participation. County population density has a positive effect on political information attention and informal civic participation, whereas urban administrative classification leads to a higher degree of formal political participation. The research adds literature concerning the interaction between social media and civic engagement in the context of urbanization in developing countries. It also gives the implications on the western world as well.

**Keywords:** social media use, civic engagement, urbanization, survey, China

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## Introduction

Media use and civic engagement, including motivation and participation, is a key issue in the field of political science and communication. Citizens in a democracy are expected to pay attention to news and current affairs, show interest in politics, and participate in political processes (Habermas 1989). In the recent decades, social media have been adopted universally following the rapid development of information and communication technology (ICT). This novel media platform has been widely used in civic engagement in developed countries. Accordingly, the existing related studies mostly focus on the social media use in the electoral context (Bode et al. 2014; Bode et al. 2018; Johnson and Perlmutter 2011; Kim, 2023; Yue, Wang and Yan 2018), in following news and political affairs (Dennis 2019; Knoll, Matthes and Heiss 2020; Holt et al 2013; Papacharissi 2010), and in participating in various forms of civic engagement (Chen et al. 2016; Conroy, Feezell and Guerrero 2012; Fisher 2019; Gil de Zúñiga, Jung and Valenzuela 2012; Gil de Zúñiga et al. 2013; Jost et al 2018; Lin, et al 2021; Uldam and Vestergaard, 2015; Valenzuela, Park and Kee 2009; Tufekci 2017; Xenos, Vromen and Loader 2014; Yamamoto, Kushin and Dalisay 2015).

A few empirical studies have investigated the association between social media use and civic engagement in developing contexts. Jost et al. (2018) included four countries, including two developing countries—Turkey and Ukraine, in their discussion of the

relationship between social media and political protest; Valenzuela (2013) discuss the link between frequency of social media use and political participation in Chile. Howard et al. (2016) analyzed social media used as civic exchanges between the candidate and users in Mexican election. And some recent studies (Chan and Guo 2013; Chen et al 2016; Choi et al. 2021; Tang and Lee 2013; Willnat and Aw 2014) discusses the social media use and democratic engagement in Asian context. But it is not clear what role social media play in the political system of developing countries and whether social media use has significant effects—either positive or negative—on political information attention and civic participation.

In this article, we attempt to fill the research gap in the context urbanizing China. Over the past decades, China has experienced an acceleration of the urbanization process. Both the speed and scale of China's ongoing urbanization are unprecedented in human history (Chen et al. 2014). Large areas of countryside have been reclassified as urban administratively (Cartier 2015). Unlike rural-to-urban migrants, the formerly rural residents in the urbanizing areas are pushed to integrate into urban life without leaving their homes (Chen et al. 2015). The case of urbanizing China thus provides us a good example of societies undergoing transformation, in which old systems are being eliminated and new interest groups keep emerging.

We draw on Almond's theory of political system (1966), updating it for the social

media era. We propose that, in an ideal model of political participation, a political system will supply mechanisms that sufficiently allow citizens to express their political interests. Interests are not static in any society at any given time, and citizens find themselves needing to express new political needs and concerns. This is especially true in political systems undergoing transformation, such as the case of China. In contemporary world, political systems, however, fail to provide sufficient mechanisms of interest expression for citizens, especially those representing new interest groups. When new interest groups cannot express their needs to the relevant authorities through existing mechanisms, they may switch to other means, prominent among which are the social media platforms.

Thus, social media has become a milieu for citizens, especially those belonging to new interest groups, to exercise their political rights. In this study, we focus specifically on in-situ urbanized rural residents in the context of urbanizing China, who are facing the dramatically changing environment of their once familiar places. Theoretically, we argue that social media act as *a non-institutional mechanism* for citizens to express interest and are providing *an alternative platform* for information dissemination and communication between local government and in-situ urbanized rural residents. Empirically, we ask: What is the association between social media use and civic engagement among the urbanized rural residents in China? Do they follow news and events that the local government releases on different media outlets and participate in public affairs? How do

township- or county-level urbanization measures influence the urbanized rural residents' political information attention and civic participation? To address these questions, we draw on data from the 2018 Urbanization and Quality of Life Survey and examine the association between social media use and civic engagement to determine if and how the strength of their association varies across political information attention, formal, and informal forms of civic participation, or between substantial versus administrative measures of urbanization.

To the best of our knowledge, the study provides the first evidence on social media use and civic engagement in the context of urbanizing China. The research contributes to the literature concerning the interaction between citizens and government in new media environment. While previous studies have mainly focused on the censorship of Chinese government on social media use (King, Pan and Roberts 2013, 2017), we present social media use from the citizens' perspective, which should not be ignored in the field of comparative studies.

### **Social media use and civic engagement**

Social media, which originated in the U.S., have been adopted worldwide (Mayfield 2004). YouTube and Facebook are by far the most used online platforms among U.S. adults; TikTok's user base has grown since 2021(Pew Research Center 2024). Social

media platforms in China resemble the types and functions of those in the U.S. With functions similar to those of Twitter and Facebook, WeChat is the most frequently used social media platform, with WeiBo gaining an increasing number of Chinese users (China Internet Network Information Center 2020). Social media acts as a platform, where users conduct social communication behaviors on the Internet using personal computer, mobile phone, tablet computer, etc. Like the Internet, social media encourage social networking characterized by open, interactive, equal, free, and shared participation, as opposed to the one-way transmission and restricted threshold of traditional media (Yang and Xu 2011). Social media integrate and reinforce a broad social network, creating close interpersonal relationships (Boyd 2010).

Since the 1990s, civic engagement has received renewed attention in academia (Malik and Wagle 2002). Putnam (2000) puts forward civic engagement by analyzing the civic reinvented phenomena in the American society and distinguishes community civic engagement from political civic engagement. The former refers to citizens' participation in the public services and affairs of their community; the latter refers to their participation in political affairs in order to influence policy making and government systems (Conway 1985). Civic engagement is designed to identify and address issues of public concern and promote the quality of the community. Political participation requires that citizens have a channel to obtain detailed information about public affairs and a means to engage in

public debate and the policy-making process (Bimber 1999; Bimber 2001). Residents in a community interact and work together in both political and non-political actions (Delli Carpini 2016).

In this article, we focus on two aspects of civic engagement—interest and participation. Political interest is a motivational component of engagement. It refers to “a citizen’s willingness to pay attention to political phenomena at the possible expense of other topics” (Lupia and Philpot 2005, 1122), and “the degree to which politics arouses a citizen’s curiosity” (Van Deth 2000, 119). Interest in politics can be considered a motivational prerequisite for civic participation, and also a crucial variable for understanding political information processing, learning, and opinion formation (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1997; Strömbäck and Shehata 2010; Namkoong, Fung and Scheufele 2012). Civic participation, on the other hand, refers to a behavioral component of civic engagement.

Social media first provide a platform for citizen to follow the political information and then participate in public affairs (Shirky 2011). Social media users can easily access political and public information through sharing and reposting within their social network. Users who are not interested in political and public activities are often linked with those who are and, as a result, become informed about current issues (Conroy, Feezell and Guerrero 2012; Strömbäck, Falasca and Kruikemeier 2018). The strength and

direction of the relationship between social media and political information attention depends on what social media are used, the motivations behind this usage and, finally, the levels of use among different groups of people (Boulianne 2015; Norris 2000).

Currently, scholars do not agree on the question of whether this engagement has been to the benefit or detriment of public life (Bimber 2003; Boulianne 2009; Buente 2015; Kushin and Yamamoto 2010; Walter 2008). There are empirical evidences showing that social media have led to a significant increase in civic engagement. Boulianne (2015), for instance, surveyed 36 studies dealing with the relationship between social media use and civic participation and found that 80% consider the effects of social media to be positive. Skoric et al. (2015) undertook a qualitative analysis of a student protest followed by a national survey of young Singaporeans and similarly found that social media use has a positive effect on civic participation. Chen, Chan and Lee (2016) conducted a comparative study of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China to analyze the university students' behavior of social media use and democratic engagement and found that social media use played significant roles in influencing civic engagement in the three political systems. Because social media create or integrate networks (Boase and Kobayashi 2008; Zhang et al. 2010; Choi et al. 2021), users are more likely to mobilize, participate in events (Chen, Sun and Chen 2015; Gil de Zúñiga, Jung and Valenzuela 2012; Kahne and Bowyer 2018), and create new forms of civic participation (Fisher 2019; Tufekci 2017;

Yang and Dehart 2016). Moreover, social media allow users to express their opinions on political and public affairs, which makes them more likely to participate in civic activities (Dennis 2019; Papacharissi 2010).

The effects of social media on formal political participation such as voting are rather mixed. The simple fact of using social media does not seem to have any significant effect (Yue, Wang and Yan 2016), but active participation in political activities via social media is found to positively affect voting behavior (Yue, Wang and Yan 2018). For more general political participation, the effect of social media use is not always positive (Carlisle and Patton 2013; Dimitrova and Bystrom 2013); in some cases, it even deters citizens from participating in political activities (Vitak et al. 2011).

### **Urbanizing China: the study context and research hypotheses**

A number of studies have documented that civic engagement is closely associated with urbanization (Bell and Force 1956a; Bell and Force 1956b; Curtis, Grabb and Baer 1992; Kelleher and Lowery 2009; Kumar and Morris 2009; Oliver 2000; Smith 1994; Sundein 1992; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Liu 2018; Wu et al. 2019). Mass media provide channels of communication during the process of urbanization in developed countries (Markham and Mishra 1971). Very little research has focused on social media and civic engagement in the context of urbanization in the developing world.

We situate our research in the context of China's massive and ongoing urbanization.

Over the past four decades, China has experienced an acceleration in urbanization. The proportion of the country's population classified as urban soared from 624.03 million in 2008 to 831.37 million in 2018 (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2020). The urbanization process has led to the emergence of new interest groups including the rural-to-urban migrants and the in-situ urbanized residents (Chen et al. 2015). These groups have their own particular set of needs during the process of active or passive integration into urban life. Existing research on social media in China has focused primarily on the censorship of government (King, Pan and Roberts 2013, 2017), which is aimed at curtailing collective action by silencing comments that represent, reinforce, or spur social mobilization. Apart from the censorship on social media, it is also of vital importance to explore how citizens use social media and interact with local government, as social media can provide the new interest groups with a *non-institutional* mechanism to express their concerns.

Social media use involves various aspects of life of Chinese citizens, whose offline life has been expanded into virtual community. Social media use includes non-political and political use of social media. The non-political use of social media account for the majority, including interpersonal communication, online shopping, online banking, online entertainment, online education, etc. (China Internet Network Information Center 2020).

We consider that social media use is rather a different concept from political interest and informal form of political participation via social media. We first hypothesize that the more frequently a citizen uses social media, the more likely he/she will pay attention to government information and engage in both formal and informal civic activities.

Urbanization in China can be measured with two indicators. The first one is the administrative classification of urbanization. The centralized power in the Chinese political system enables the central government to establish new cities, enlarge and emerge existing ones, and eliminate others, and classify place and people into urban or rural (Cartier 2015). The second indicator is population density which measures the substantial level of urbanization on the ground (Hooghe and Boterman 2012). In China, administrative classification does not always align with population density (Zhang, LeGates and Zhao 2016). In our analysis, we will examine whether the relationship between social media use and civic engagement will differ between these two measures of urbanization.

We further hypothesize that the level of urbanization will have a positive effect on political interest and civic engagement—both administrative classification and population density will be positively associated with paying attention to government information, and formal and informal civic engagement. The effects of social media use, however, will vary according to the measure of urbanization used. Because the use of social media is

likely to be associated with population density (a substantial measure of urbanization) rather than the administrative classification (which is controlled by Chinese central government), we hypothesize that the effect of social media use on political information attention and civil engagement will be stronger in places with higher population density but will not vary between places administratively classified as urban versus rural.

## **Data and Methods**

### **Sample and data collection**

This study uses data from the 2018 Urbanization and Quality of Life Survey. The survey targeted residents of 40 primary sampling units (PSUs) including 32 township-level administrative units in newly urbanized areas and eight townships that were considered potential sites of urbanization. It was based on a carefully constructed sampling design that took advantage of the implementation of the National New Urbanization Comprehensive Pilot Program in 2014 (for details of the sampling design, please see Chen et al. 2020).

The target population were adults between 18 and 75 years old who were residing in the 40 townships. Spatial sampling techniques were employed in selecting the households within PSUs. Within each household, one eligible respondent was selected using the Kish grid—a pre-assigned table of random numbers commonly used in survey research to

determine which person in a household to interview for the survey (Landry and Shen 2005).

The survey fieldwork was completed from April to June 2018 through face-to-face interviews using the computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) system. After data checking and cleaning, the final valid sample size is 3,229, with a response rate of 65.2%. Approval for the ethical review of research projects involving human subjects was granted by the authors' home institutes. Post-stratification weights were generated to align the study sample with the 2010 China Township Population Census Data (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2010) and applied throughout the analysis.

## Measures

***Political information attention.*** Political information attention is defined as following information government releases to the community via traditional media (e.g., community broadcasts and bulletins), the Internet (e.g., community government websites), and social media platforms (e.g., WeChat and QQ). Three dichotomous variables were coded with those answering “yes” to the question “Do you pay attention to the information government releases?” as 1 and others as 0.

***Informal form of civic participation.*** Informal form of civic participation was

determined based on participation in social media groups organized by community residents. Respondents were asked, “Have you participated in the WeChat groups or QQ circles organized by community members?” Those who answered “yes” met the criteria for informal form of civic participation.

***Formal form of civic participation.*** Political participation is considered as formal form of civic participation. Respondents were asked, “Did you vote for a representative to the 13th National People’s Congress?” (The elections for the 13th Congress were held in March 2018, right before the commencement of the survey field work.) Those respondents whose answer was “yes” were coded as “1” indicating formal political participation.

***Social media use.*** Social media use is measured by frequency of use. The respondents were asked, “How often do you use QQ, WeChat, and other social media platforms to search or read political information and participate in online activities?” The answers were coded from 1 to 5 with 1 = “never” and 5 = “almost every day” to measure frequency of social media use.

***Individual socio-demographic characteristics.*** Demographic variables include age

(years), gender (1=female, 0=male), marital status (1= married; 0=others), hukou status (1=urban hukou; 0=other), and migration status (1= cross-town migrant; 0=others).

Measures of socio-economic status include education (1=less than middle school; 2=middle school; 3=high school or vocational school; and 4=college or above), occupation (1=professional/managerial positions; 0=others), party affiliation (1=CCP member; 0=not a CCP member), household wealth (an index ranging from 0 to 7 based on ownership of a number of consumer items, such as an LCD TV and car), and home ownership (1=home owner; 0=others).

***Township- and county-level variables.*** Two measures of urbanization were used in the analysis. Administrative classification was coded dichotomously with thirty-two township-level administrative units chosen from newly urbanized areas as 1 and eight from potential sites of urbanization as 0. Population density was measured with the number of residents per square kilometer in the county. County GDP per capita was used as a control variable.

### **Analytical strategies**

Because our dependent variables were dichotomously coded, our first step of analysis used binary logistic regressions to fit the equations below to a cross-section data file that

combines township-/county- and individual-level variables. Combining measures of community- and individual-level variables is a standard practice in the literature. To check the robustness of our findings, we further estimated multi-level logistic regressions and produced similar results. The baseline estimation equation is as follows:

$$\log\left(\frac{y_{ij}}{1-y_{ij}}\right) = \alpha + \beta \text{Social media use}_{ij} + \gamma \text{Urbanizing townships}_j + \delta \text{County population density}_j + \rho \text{County GDP per capita}_j + X'\Gamma + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

In the equation, i denotes individuals and j counties or townships.  $y_{ij}$  denotes the five outcome variables: following the information government releases to the community via traditional media, via the Internet, and via social media platforms; participating in social media groups organized by community residents; voting in the People's Congress representative election. Social media use is the independent variable at the individual level. Other individual-level covariates include age, marital status, hukou, cross-town migrant, education, occupations, party affiliation, household wealth index, and homeownership. County-/township-level covariates are urbanizing townships, county population density (ln), and county GDP per capita (ln).  $\alpha$  is the intercept, and  $\varepsilon$  is the error term.

We then added the interactions between the two measures of urbanization (administrative classification and population density) and social media use. In the

equation below,  $\tau$  and  $\varphi$  represent the coefficients of the two interaction terms, respectively. We performed data analysis in Stata 16.0. Robust standard errors were adjusted at the level of SSUs.

$$\begin{aligned} \log\left(\frac{y_{ij}}{1-y_{ij}}\right) = & \alpha + \beta \text{Social media use}_{ij} + \gamma \text{Urbanizing townships}_j + \\ & \delta \text{County population density}_j + \rho \text{County GDP per capita}_j + \\ & \tau \text{Social media use}_{ij} \times \text{Urbanizing townships}_j + \\ & \varphi \text{Social media use}_{ij} \times \text{County population density}_j + X'\Gamma + \varepsilon_{ij} \end{aligned}$$

## Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the study sample. The prevalence of political information attention varies across different media outlets. More than 40% of the respondents reported following government releases to the community via traditional media accounts. Clearly, traditional media still play an important role in keeping citizens apprised of political issues. The percentages of respondents following government releases to the community via social media and the Internet were 5.68% and 4.63%, respectively. New media are becoming the emerging platforms for the in-situ urbanized residents to follow the information government releases. Participation in social media groups organized by community residents—the informal form of civic participation—

was reported by 9.89% of the respondents. This form of civic participation starts to be used by this group of people when coping with the new challenge of their daily life.

Formal form of political participation is not prevalent among the in-situ urbanized rural residents—only 9.97% of respondents reported voting in the most recent election of the National People's Congress. For social media use, the mean of frequency is 2.19 on a scale of 1 to 5.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics of social media use and civic engagement**

		Mean/percentage	Standard error
<b>Individual-level variables (N=3,114):</b>			
<b>Civic engagement</b>			
Political information attention	Following government releases to the community via traditional media (yes, %)	39.219	0.024
	Following government releases to the community via the Internet (yes, %)	4.466	0.006
	Following government releases to the community via social media (yes, %)	5.400	0.007
Informal civic participation	Participating in social media groups organized by community residents (yes, %)	9.406	0.010
Formal political participation	Voting in the National People's Congress representative election (yes, %)	9.661	0.011
<b>Social media use (1-5, mean)</b>		2.156	0.069
<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>			
Age (18-75, mean)		51.278	0.663
Gender (female, %)		49.974	0.011
Marital status (married, %)		78.955	0.015
Urban hukou (yes, %)		14.980	0.017
Cross-town migrant (yes, %)		15.781	0.022
<b>Socio-economic status</b>			
Education (%)			
Less than middle school		46.486	0.018
Middle School		32.231	0.014
High school or vocational school		14.857	0.011

College or above	6.840	0.008
Occupation (professional/managerial, %)	8.751	0.009
Party affiliation (CCP <sup>a</sup> member, %)	6.641	0.007
Household wealth index (0-7, mean)	2.338	0.086
Homeownership (yes, %)	86.677	0.020
<b>Township-/county-level variables (N=40):</b>		
Urbanizing townships (%)	79.402	0.033
County population density (per km <sup>2</sup> )	1435.972	1610.926
County GDP per capita (yuan)	34631.56	241.426

Notes: Sample N = 3,114. Post-stratification weights are adjusted in the mean estimations. Robust standard errors are reported.

a. Chinese Communist Party.

Results of the binary logistic regressions are reported in Table 2. Social media use is positively associated with political information attention via traditional media, the Internet, and social media (the coefficients are 0.858, 0.900, and 1.405 in Model 1, Model 2, and Model 3, respectively). It is also significantly associated with the informal form of civic participation (i.e., participating in social media groups organized by community residents) with a coefficient of 0.940 as presented in Model 4. However, social media use, as shown in Model 5, has no effect on the formal political participation (i.e., voting in the National People's Congress representative election).

At the township-/county-level, the two indicators of urbanization have different effects on both political interest and civic participation. County population density has a significantly positive effect on political information attention. The coefficients for reliance on traditional media, the Internet, and social media are 0.417, 0.505, and 0.813, as shown in Model 1, Model 2, and Model 3, respectively. County population density is also significantly associated with the informal form of civic participation with a coefficient of 0.407 as presented in Model 4. In contrast, being administratively classified as urban has a significantly positive effect on formal form of political participation (coefficient=1.336 as shown in Model 5), but not on political interest or informal form of civic participation.

**Table 2. Logistic regressions estimating the association between social media use and civic engagement**

	<b>Model 1</b> <b>Following government releases to the community via traditional media</b>	<b>Model 2</b> <b>Following government releases to the community via the Internet</b>	<b>Model 3</b> <b>Following government releases to the community via social media</b>	<b>Model 4</b> <b>Participating in social media groups organized by community residents</b>	<b>Model 5</b> <b>Voting in the National People's Congress representative election <sup>a</sup></b>
<b>Individual-level variables:</b>					
<b>Social media use</b>	0. 858***(0.213)	0.900*(0.351)	1.405***(0.294)	0.940***(0.253)	0.399(0.332)
<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>					
Age	0.046(0.025)	0.130**(0.038)	0.155**(0.051)	0.150***(0.042)	0.139***(0.035)
Age <sup>2</sup>	-0.000(0.000)	-0.001**(0.000)	-0.002**(0.001)	-0.002***(0.000)	-0.001***(0.000)
Gender (female)	-0.017(0.097)	-0.034(0.176)	0.137(0.207)	0.043(0.167)	-0.064(0.148)
Marital status (married)	-0.052(0.134)	-0.199(0.284)	-0.429(0.299)	0.128(0.291)	-0.226(0.186)
Urban hukou	- 0.609***(0.171)	0.353(0.251)	-0.063(0.226)	-0.262(0.212)	-0.118(0.193)
Cross-town migrant	-0.633*(0.254)	-0.894*(0.399)	-0.544(0.428)	-0.895***(0.317)	-1.703***(0.501)
<b>Socio-economic status</b>					
Education (less than middle school, reference)					
Middle school	-0.118(0.117)	0.501*(0.255)	0.367(0.284)	0.307(0.204)	-0.347(0.180)
High school	-0.249(0.149)	0.519(0.309)	0.865*(0.341)	0.287(0.248)	0.194(0.222)
College or above	-0.167(0.183)	0.586(0.398)	0.642(0.418)	0.600(0.309)	0.273(0.249)
Occupations (professional/managerial)	-0.187(0.178)	0.659*(0.263)	-0.005(0.307)	-0.232(0.239)	0.611*(0.263)
Party affiliation (CCP member)	0.428*(0.201)	0.150(0.338)	0.443(0.390)	0.524(0.287)	0.600*(0.271)

Household wealth index	0.155*(0.048)	0.292*** (0.078)	0.200* (0.080)	0.280*** (0.066)	0.172** (0.056)
Homeownership	0.557* (0.248)	-0.367 (0.361)	0.371 (0.338)	-0.168 (0.294)	1.898** (0.654)
<b>Township-/county-level variables</b>					
Urbanizing townships	0.452 (0.358)	-0.972 (0.614)	0.512 (0.735)	0.750 (0.562)	1.336* (0.636)
County population density (ln)	0.417** (0.128)	0.505** (0.182)	0.813*** (0.203)	0.408* (0.190)	-0.182 (0.144)
County GDP per capita (ln)	-0.093 (0.192)	-0.300 (0.303)	-0.511 (0.289)	-0.057 (0.241)	-0.226 (0.243)
<b>Interactions</b>					
Social media use					
x Urbanizing townships	-0.048 (0.094)	0.203 (0.163)	-0.045 (0.168)	-0.104 (0.117)	-0.201 (0.150)
Social media use					
x County population density (ln)	-0.100** (0.032)	-0.119* (0.053)	-0.138** (0.043)	-0.058 (0.040)	-0.013 (0.053)
<b>Constant</b>	-5.037** (1.902)	7.268* (2.803)	-8.746** (2.594)	-	-6.181* (2.971)
<b>Model Properties</b>					
Log pseudo likelihood	-1922.340	-493.306	-529.674	-760.997	-864.915
Wald chi <sup>2</sup>	78.79***	155.46***	221.83***	292.90***	147.48***

Notes: Sample N = 3,114. 115 cases with missing data were excluded from the analysis.

Coefficients are reported; robust standard errors in parentheses. \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001.

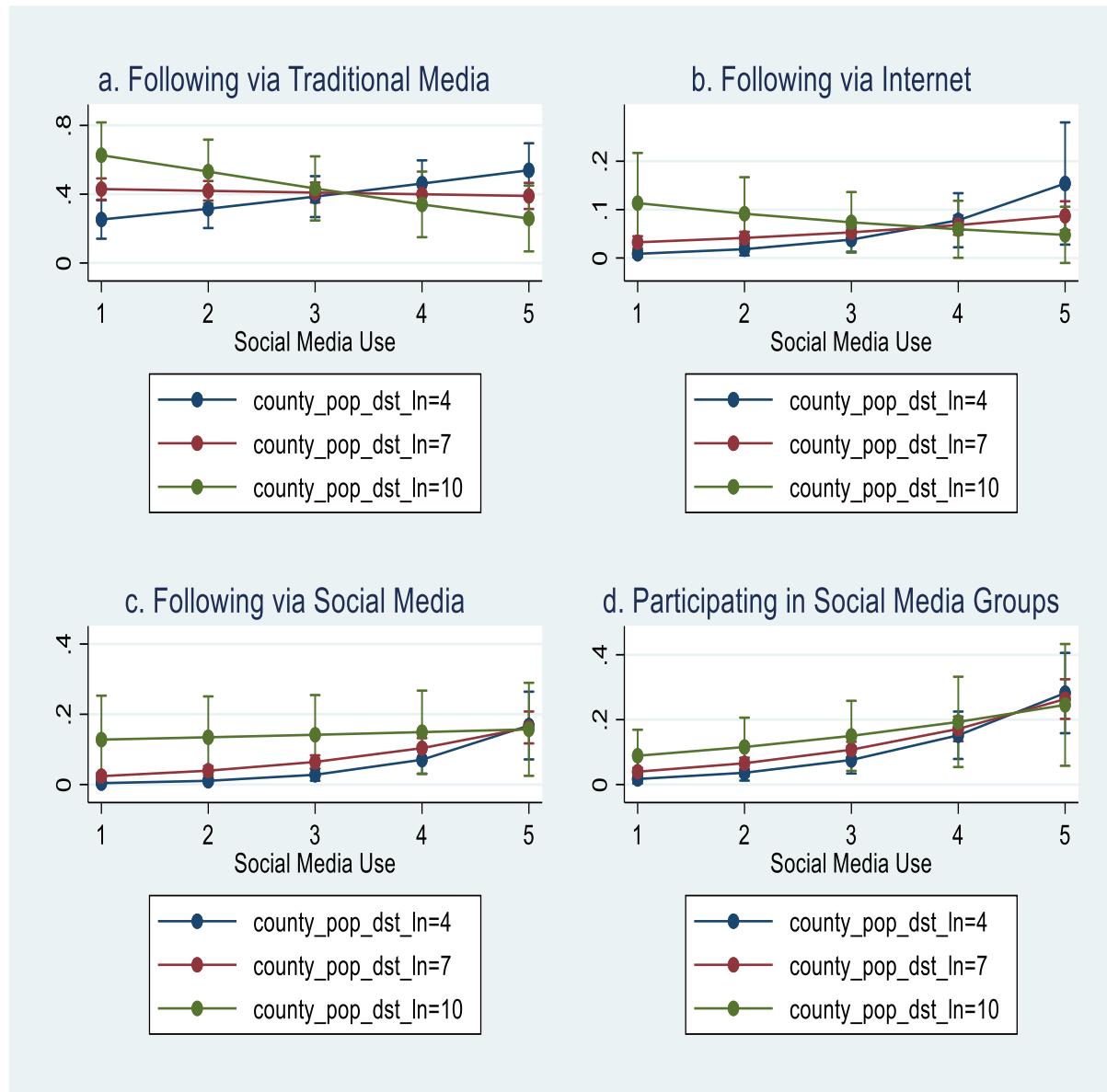
a. We also estimated this model only including respondents aged 20 or above in case those who were below 20 were not eligible to vote in the National People's Congress election before the survey was implemented. The result was almost identical.

The interactions between social media use and the two urbanization measures show different patterns. Population density has negative effects on the associations between social media use and the three forms of political information attention, which indicates that the effect of social media use on political information attention is weaker in counties with higher population density. The coefficients on the interactions between social media use and population density are -0.100, -0.119, and -0.138 for reliance on traditional media, the Internet, and social media, respectively (shown in Model 1, Model 2, and Model 3). In contrast, being urbanizing township does not show any interactive effect with social media use on any of the five indicators of civic engagement.

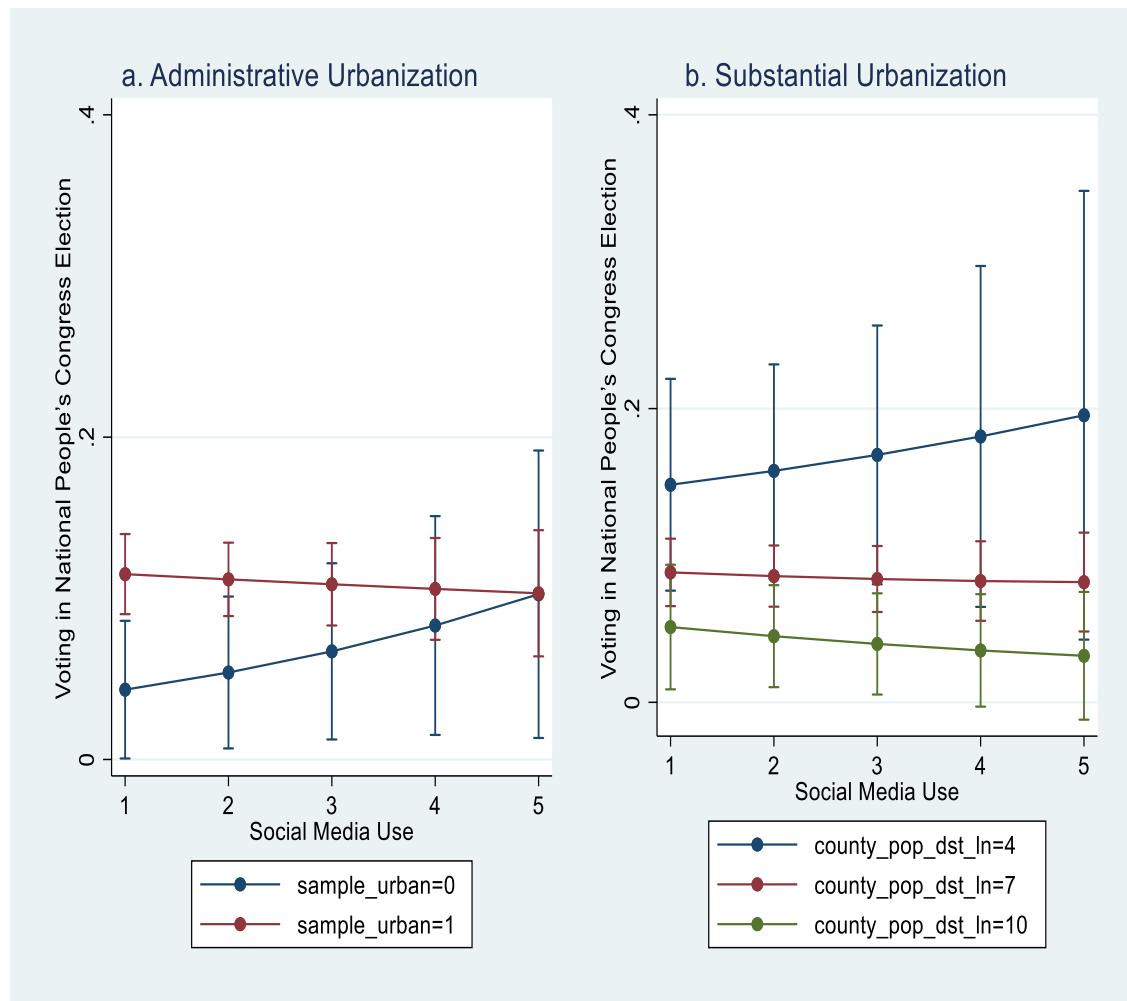
To better illustrate the results, Figure 1 shows the associations between social media use and political information attention and the informal forms of civic participation according to three levels of county population density—high, medium, and low. The association between social media use and political information attention is significantly weaker in counties with higher population density as shown in the first three graphs (this pattern cannot be observed in the last graph). Figure 2 presents the predictive margins (with 95% confidence intervals) of the two urbanization indicators on the association between social media use and voting in the National People's Congress representative election. The graphs indicate that the association between social media use and formal form of political participation does not change with either of the two measures of

urbanization.

**Figure 1. Interaction between county population density and social media use on political interest and informal form of civic participation**



**Figure 2. Interaction between urbanization measures and social media use on formal form of political participation**



### Robustness check

So far, we have established a strong and robust correlation of social media use with political information attention and informal form of civic participation via social media (as shown in Model 3 and Model 4 in Table 2), but the relationship might be spurious. The biggest challenge to inference is that the results could be circular, that is, social

media users are more likely to follow the information government releases to the community and participate in social media groups organized by community residents and vice versa. Although we have controlled individual and township-/county-level variables, we might have overlooked some unobservable variables which could induce measurement errors. Next, we use an IV approach to show that omitted variables and measurement errors are unlikely to bias our estimates.

An ideal instrument should be a strong, exogenous predictor of social media use. To meet the exclusion restriction, the instrument should also affect political interest and civic participation via social media only through its effect on social media use. We must therefore find an exogenous variable that affects social media use. To achieve this, we use the proportion of population over 65 years old at the township level as an instrument for the frequency of social media use. Below we demonstrate that this measure is a strong and exogenous predictor of social media use, and it affects political information attention and informal form of political participation only through its effect on social media use.

The rationale for this instrument is based on previous literature and the latest report of the China Internet Network Information Center documenting that social media are usually used by the youngsters (Holt et al. 2013; Kushin and Yamamoto 2010; Yang and DeHart 2016; Valenzuela, Park and Kee 2009; Walter 2008; Wang and Yue 2016), and have only recently been expanded to the elder population. Moreover, the elderly follow

the information government releases to the community via social media and participate in social media groups organized by community residents mainly through their use of social media (China Internet Network Information Center 2020). Thus, elder people's political interest and informal civic participation, to a large degree, are determined by their use of social media.

We re-estimated Model 3 and Model 4 in Table 2 using the two-stage regression technique. As shown in Table 3, the proportion of population over 65 years old at the township level is a strong and positive predictor of social media use: the first stage regression shows the coefficient is 2.956 and 1.635, respectively Model 3 and Model 4. The results confirm that the proportion of population over 65 years old at the township level is a strong instrument and meets the requirement to avoid weak instrument bias.

Table 4 reports the second-stage regression results. The IV estimates are remarkably similar to the original logistic regression estimates. According to the Wald test of the exogeneity of the instrumented variable, we reject the null hypothesis of no endogeneity and the original logistic regression was appropriately estimated.

**Table 3. IV estimates of the effects of social media use on civic engagement, first stage**

	<u>DV: social media use</u>	
	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>
<b>Following government releases to the community via social media</b>		<b>Participating in social media groups organized by community residents</b>
<b>Proportion of population over 65 years old at the township level</b>	2.878***(0.532)	2.878***(0.532)
<b>Individual-level variables:</b>		
<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>		
Age	-0.116***(0.010)	-0.116***(0.010)
Age <sup>2</sup>	0.001***(0.000)	0.001***(0.000)
Gender (female)	0.033(0.042)	0.033(0.042)
Marital status (married)	0.041(0.056)	0.041(0.056)
Urban hukou	0.051(0.060)	0.051(0.060)
Cross-town migrant	0.403***(0.081)	0.403***(0.081)
<b>Socio-economic status</b>		
Education (less than middle school, reference)		
Middle school	0.392***(0.053)	0.392***(0.053)
High school	0.639***(0.069)	0.639***(0.069)
College or above	0.772***(0.099)	0.772***(0.099)
Occupations (professional/managerial)	0.381***(0.082)	0.381***(0.082)
Party affiliation (CCP member)	0.044(0.091)	0.044(0.091)
Household wealth index	0.138***(0.056)	0.138***(0.014)
Homeownership	-0.117(0.082)	-0.117(0.082)
<b>Township-/county-level variables</b>		
Urbanizing townships	0.184**(0.055)	0.184**(0.056)
County population density (ln)	0.004(0.023)	0.004(0.023)
County GDP per capita (ln)	0.076*(0.041)	0.076(0.041)
<b>Constant</b>	4.288***(0.415)	4.288***(0.415)
<b>Model Properties</b>		
Wald test of exogeneity chi <sup>2</sup>	6.67**	22.52***

Notes: N = 3,114. Coefficients are reported; robust standard errors in parentheses. \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001.

**Table 4. IV estimates of the effects of social media use on civic engagement,  
second stage**

	<u>Model 3</u> <b>Following government releases to the community via social media</b>	<u>Model 4</u> <b>Participating in social media groups organized by community residents</b>
<b>Individual-level variables:</b>		
Social media use	0.986*(0.380)	1.535***(0.389)
<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>		
Age	0.158**(0.049)	0.216***(0.050)
Age <sup>2</sup>	-0.001***(0.000)	-0.002***(0.000)
Gender (female)	0.056(0.093)	-0.062(0.092)
Marital status (married)	-0.336**(0.127)	-0.037(0.132)
Urban hukou	-0.092(0.117)	-0.212(0.124)
Cross-town migrant	-0.347(0.210)	-0.618**(0.219)
<b>Socio-economic status</b>		
Education (less than middle school, reference)		
Middle school	-0.076(0.192)	-0.304(0.191)
High school	-0.049(0.280)	-0.645*(0.286)
College or above	-0.299(0.346)	-0.769*(0.355)
Occupations (professional/managerial)	-0.227(0.206)	-0.586**(0.220)
Party affiliation (CCP member)	0.261(0.167)	0.273(0.180)
Household wealth index	0.012(0.065)	-0.023 (0.066)
Homeownership	0.254(0.174)	0.152(0.157)
<b>Township-/county-level variables</b>		
Urbanizing townships	0.108(0.153)	0.091(0.146)
County population density (ln)	0.145**(0.049)	0.105*(0.050)
County GDP per capita (ln)	-0.209(0.106)	-0.091(0.105)
<b>Constant</b>	-7.242***(2.063)	-10.766***(2.054)
<b>Model Properties</b>		
Wald test of exogeneity chi <sup>2</sup>	5.35*	17.98***

Notes: N = 3,114. Coefficients are reported; robust standard errors in parentheses. \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001.

## Conclusion and Discussion

In this study, we analyze data from the 2010 China Population Census and a household survey of 3,229 residents of places undergoing rural-urban transition in 2018. The descriptive results demonstrate that traditional media still play an important role in providing Chinese citizens with political information, including government releases. Reliance on the Internet and social media for political information is not high among in-situ urbanized residents yet. Social media groups organized by community residents are also not used widely by this population. Formal form of political participation (i.e., voting behavior) is rather low.

We further looked into the relationship between social media use and different forms of civic engagement. The results show that social media use is significantly associated with political information attention (following government releases to the community via various media outlets) and informal form of civic participation (participating in social media groups organized by community residents), but it is not associated with formal political participation (voting in the election for the National People's Congress representative). The findings suggest that, unlike the United States (Yue, Wang and Yan 2018), social media have not played a significant role in voting behavior in China.

Our analysis also demonstrates that urbanization by administrative classification has a significant effect on formal political participation, whereas population density plays a

significant role in political information attention and informal form of civic participation.

The results suggest that during the process of urbanization, actual changes in demographics have a greater influence on residents' political interest and informal civic participation. In-situ urbanized residents are learning to follow government releases on policy changes in their community life. They are also starting to participate in social media groups organized by fellow residents in order to keep up with the changes to their community.

The results of the interactions further indicate that the administrative classification of urbanization does not influence the relationship between social media and various forms of civic engagement—political interest or civic participation. Population density, however, has a negative effect on the associations between social media use and political information attention. It is likely that in less populous places, the residents have less opportunity to rely on interpersonal interactions for information exchange. They are, therefore, more inclined to search for information from traditional media, the Internet, and social media.

To conclude, our study demonstrates that, in the context of Chinese urbanization, social media play a significant role in citizens' political information attention and informal form of civic participation. In particular, social media provide an emerging platform for the new interest group of in-situ urbanized residents, one that allows them to

consume the political information and express their needs and interests. Although the Chinese political system offers citizens certain means to express their concerns, such as the petition system, the electoral system, and the party system, those means, to a large extent, fail to accommodate the expression of interest of those experiencing in-situ urbanization. They are more likely to follow the political information government releases and participate in informal civic activities on social media platforms. Social media, however, do not promote political participation among them. The research contributes to the literature concerning the interaction between citizens and government in China through new media, which also echoes to other traditional wisdom in China studies, especially about the relationship between Chinese government and different media outlets (Stockmann and Gallagher 2011; Stockmann 2013; DeLisle, Goldstein and Yang 2016; Repnikova 2017). Future research, however, is needed to investigate whether the conclusion is unique in China or the same or similar conclusion could also be drawn from other political systems.

These findings point to several potentials for future research. The findings show new interest groups do use social media as a new platform to participate in political activities and express their political interests in the political system like China. Further empirical evidence is need to see if this conclusion could also applied to other political systems like the United States. The political systems are so different between China and the United

States. For example, the institutional design of China is top-down power while the checks and balance is the institutional design of the United States. If the political use via social media platform plays an equally important role for new interest groups to participate in various forms of political activities, further study needs to explore in different political systems. And the relationship between social media use and civic engagement needs to be examined of the reasons for probing into the logic of political power and political rights to explore the nature of the association in different political systems.

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## How Does Multiculturalism Shape Populism in the UK: A Perspective of Cultural Backlash

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**Abstract:** The rise of right-wing populism in the UK, marked by the Brexit referendum in 2016, reflecting a backlash against UK's deep involvement in globalization and its adherence to multiculturalism after the post-World War II, is the result of the interweaving of economic insecurity, political trust loss, and cultural identity anxiety among the mainstream groups in the UK. The cultural-political conflict triggered by multiculturalism is the key catalyst, in which the "cultural backlash" theory provides an explanatory framework: While multiculturalism pursues recognition and respect for the rights of minority groups, it unintentionally triggers the identity anxiety and deprivation in therefore gives rise to the identity politics of the mainstream groups. Populism in the UK has developed by mobilizing the reactive identity politics of the mainstream group and targeting multiculturalism, by providing simple and exclusive identity identities to counter the complex and diverse identities advocated by multiculturalism. Essentially, populism in the UK is an identity politics of the majority groups, which imitates and reverses the logic of minority identity politics, demanding the recognition of the cultural traditions, historical memories, and legitimacy of the mainstream group's culture. It presents characteristics such as reshaping political and economic issues from the perspective of social culture and identity recognition, establishing a binary framework of "the real people" versus corrupt elites based on a victim narrative, constructing the identity politics of the majority groups, questioning representative democracy at the domestic level and the EU establishment at the international level, etc. This set of conflicts has led to a profound transformation in British politics from the "left-right political spectrum axis" based on materialism, emphasizing factors like class and economic benefit, into the "open-closed axis" based on cultural values and identity. This transformation has occurred not only in the UK but also may be a long-term process in many Western European countries. Whether populism can propose practical solutions to the issues that serve as its mobilization basis will be a key challenge for determining whether populist parties can successfully achieve mainstreaming transformation and sustainable development.

**Key words:** UK; Populism; Multiculturalism; Cultural backlash; Identity politics

In the 1980s, right-wing populist parties emerged in Western European countries; their strong rise in recent years has become a significant feature of politics in European and American countries. The Brexit referendum in the UK in 2016 can be regarded as a sign of sharp rise of global populist forces. After the Brexit referendum, populist forces in countries such as the United States, France, Italy, and Germany were greatly encouraged, and right-wing populist forces have become a prominent trend. Populist forces have entered the mainstream in some countries and have become the ruling party in some cases, such as Donald Trump's second term in power, the victory of the Italian populist coalition led by Giorgia Meloni, and fidesz party led by Orbán Viktor in Hungary. In other countries, the rise of populist parties is not to be underestimated, such as the National Front in France, the Alternative for Germany Party, the Swedish Democrats, and the Vox in Spain, which not only impact the mainstream political agenda and reshape their political landscapes in their own countries, but also promote reforms at the EU level.

The development of right-wing populist forces in the UK reflects both some common characteristics of Western European populism and its uniqueness. Looking back at history, Western European countries did not have a strong tradition or foundation of mass populism, and the traditionally progressive and pragmatic United Kingdom lacked the genes of populism. Its institutional system was the result of design and guidance by the top elites. However, the development of right-wing populist parties represented by the Reform Party in the UK highlights the polarization of British politics. This article mainly explores the basis of the British right-wing populist identity in the context of multiculturalism and summarizes the causes, manifestations, and characteristics of British right-wing populism based on this.

## **1. Multiculturalism: The Background of the Rise of Right-Wing Populism in the UK**

In Western European countries, multiculturalism developed along with the "super diversity" brought about by the immigration waves after World War II, and it was once the main policy orientation for handling immigration issues in countries like the UK. The social reality of coexistence of multiple cultures and the national policies of multiculturalism became the background for the emergence of right-wing populism in the UK and one of the main targets of populist political parties' criticism.

### **(1) Concept and ideology of Multiculturalism**

The term "multiculturalism" first appeared in academic discussions in the early 20th century when American Jewish philosopher Karen formally proposed it in "The Culture and Democracy of America". He questioned the assimilationist ideology hidden

in the "melting pot theory", arguing that the United States should advocate "diversity within unity", and that through the theory of multiculturalism, maintaining the cultures of various ethnic groups within the framework of a democratic society would enable American culture to be more diverse and colorful.<sup>1</sup> Since the mid-20th century, countries such as Canada, Australia, and Sweden have successively announced the implementation of multiculturalism policies, and discussions about the connotation and propositions of multiculturalism have gradually increased. As early as 1966, then British Home Secretary Roy Jenkins proposed that the new form of integration of immigrant groups with the dominant ethnic group "is not a parallel assimilation process, but rather provides equal opportunities, combined with cultural diversity, and reaches an agreement in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance", and that various ethnic groups would "live together, but with differences".<sup>2</sup> Such viewpoints had a significant social impact, promoting the recognition of the current situation of multiple cultures coexisting in British society and the transformation of official policies from assimilation to multiculturalism. In 1991, the UK introduced the concept and methods of ethnic classification to monitor the situation of public organizations and private sectors in adhering to the principles of equal opportunity and anti-discrimination when hiring personnel, and based on this to plan future resource and welfare distribution.<sup>3</sup> For example, the British Civil Service Commission used census results based on ethnic classification to monitor the relationship between equality and ethnic diversity in employment relationships, and the National Health Service used this result to monitor the relationship between labor force and diversity, which were all helpful in assessing the equal treatment of various ethnic groups in various industries.

After decades of heated discussions in academia, public speeches by politicians, policy guidance from the government, and extensive publicity by the media, British society has formed an atmosphere where identifying and promoting the multiculturalism concept and acting accordingly has become a political correctness. Under this public opinion environment, some normal questioning and expressions of dissatisfaction will be labeled as politically incorrect and criticized or even blamed. Therefore, the dissatisfaction of the mainstream group towards immigrant groups and

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<sup>1</sup> Feng Weiliang, Wang Mingjin: "Multiculturalism and European Immigration Governance", *International Forum*, Issue 3, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> "Equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance", speech by Roy Jenkins to the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants, 23 May, 1966.

<sup>3</sup> Office for National Statistics, *2011 Census Analysis: Ethnicity and Religion of the Non-UK Born Population in England and Wales: 2011*, available at

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/2011censusanalysisethnicityandreligionofthenonukbornpopulationinenglandandwales/2015-06-18>.

immigration policies has accumulated over time.

## (2) Multicultural policies in the UK

The renowned anti-racism commentator Yasmin Ali-Brown vividly expressed the dual attitude of the British towards immigrants with a passage: "The British whites have historically been very disappointed with the political elites because they were not prepared to adapt to the changes after the war, and they gave ambiguous information about whether immigrants were beneficial to their country. At this moment, they told the British public that the British were the rulers of the empire and God had entrusted them with the responsibility to educate those barbarians under their control; the next minute, these blacks and Asians were demanding equal treatment in the workplaces where they were living with the British. The political elites told the British whites that black immigrants and Asian immigrants were a threat, but at the same time they demanded that whites treat those already in the UK as blacks and Asians equally."<sup>4</sup> This contradictory dual stance is reflected in the policy field and is embodied in the two parts of the British multiculturalism policy: immigration reception policy and immigration integration policy.

The first part of multicultural policies in the UK would be Immigration Reception Policy. After World War II, the British government successively promulgated several immigration laws and nationality laws. The immigration reception policy can be divided into several stages based on the changes in legal provisions. Overall, the immigration reception policy of the UK after the war showed a trend of gradually tightening.

The first stage: 1948-1962, the period of open immigration reception. In 1948, to adapt to the situation of the collapse of the colonial system after the war and maintain the unity and spiritual cohesion of the British Empire, the British government promulgated the "1948 British Nationality Act", granting "citizens of the United Kingdom and colonies" and Commonwealth citizens the status of British citizens, and stating that "Commonwealth citizens" were equivalent to "British citizens" and could freely enter and exit the British territory. The act established the "open" attitude of the UK in immigration policy, providing legal basis for the immigration of Commonwealth and British colonies residents to the UK, attracting a large number of immigrants from British colonies, objectively transforming the UK from a net exporter of immigrants to a net importer of immigrants. Although the arrival of immigrants objectively alleviated the labor shortage situation in certain industries after the war in the UK, during this period, colored immigrants were regarded as a threat to the homogeneity of British culture, and racial discrimination against non-white immigrants was everywhere, and

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<sup>4</sup> Ali Rattansi, *Multiculturalism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University, 2011, p.31.

racial conflicts occurred frequently.

The second stage: the early 1960s - the late 1980s, the stage of gradually tightening immigration reception policy. The promulgation of the "1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act" opened the conservative period of the UK's immigration policy. In response to the opposition of the British public to immigration, based on the three reasons that colored immigrants might cause overpopulation, rising unemployment rate, and racial relations problems, the Conservative government raised the threshold for immigration from Commonwealth countries into the UK in the new immigration law. That is, except for those born in the UK and those holding British government-issued passports, other holders of Commonwealth passports or those with a definite job in the UK, or having recognized, British-needed and shortage skills or qualifications, or having served in the British army during the war, could obtain priority.

In 1971, the UK revised the "Commonwealth Immigration Act", stipulating that only those with the right to reside in the UK, that is, one of the grandparents or parents was born in the UK, had the right to enter the UK, further narrowing the scope of immigration reception. The revised immigration law in 1972 once again emphasized that if applying for entry for work reasons, the applicant must have a work permit; otherwise, holding a British passport is a necessary condition. The "1981 British Nationality Act" established a strict attitude towards immigration from the perspective of confirming citizenship rights. The act further subdivided the categories of British residents, ended the birthplaceism, and prohibited granting citizenship to children born in the UK but whose parents were not British citizens. Since then, the UK has become increasingly strict in its approval of immigration applicants, making it more difficult for people of color to obtain British citizenship.

The third stage: Since the 1990s to the present, the selective immigration stage. In the 1990s, the UK began to receive a large number of refugee applications, directly leading to the introduction of the "2002 Nationality, Immigration and Refugees Act". This act introduced a testing mechanism, requiring immigrants or refugees applying for British citizenship to have a certain level of English proficiency and sufficient knowledge of the UK and life there. Otherwise, they need to participate in English training and citizenship courses. Based on this act, during the Brown administration, the "2006 Nationality, Immigration and Refugees Act" was introduced, introducing the "trial citizenship" mechanism. This mechanism stipulates that immigrants have a certain probation period before obtaining citizenship, and the length of the probation period is flexible. If they show active participation and volunteer spirit during the probation period, the probation period can be shortened.

From the perspective of the official immigration policy of the UK, it has quietly

shifted from emphasizing "control" of immigrants to "immigration management". The seemingly tightened immigration reception policy has begun to relax. However, during this period, the UK's treatment of immigration reception was selective, that is, it encouraged the immigration of talents needed for the UK's economic development (such as high-tech talents and international students), while restricting those who were not needed for the UK's economic development (such as low-skilled workers). In 2009, the Home Office of the UK introduced the "Score-Based Citizenship System", scoring applicants for UK visas and citizenship and dividing them into five levels. There are over 80 possible work or study channels to be allowed to enter the UK. The Cameron government announced that it would further tighten the approval of the five-level visas, not only canceling the access of third-level low-skilled workers, but also for the first time canceling the regulation allowing non-European Economic Area workers with an annual income of less than 35,000 pounds to stay in the UK for more than 5 years, indicating the arrival of the British-style "guest worker" model.<sup>5</sup> However, this scoring system cannot limit immigrants from EU member states. From the data of internal personnel flow within the EU, before the two EU expansions in 2004 and 2007, the number of immigrants entering the UK from member states remained basically stable and showed a slight growth trend. However, from 2004 to 2005, the number of immigrants from new member states increased sharply from 28,700 to 116,800, and by 2008, this figure had increased to 332,400. Among them, the Poles replaced the Indians as the largest source country of registered immigrants in the UK.<sup>6</sup>

Affected by the zero-sum model of the number of immigrants and welfare. Based on the data of the International Immigration Policy and Law Analysis Program, Tilman and Hobbs studied that there is a trade-off relationship between the number of immigrants received by European countries and the welfare they give to immigrants. Among them, the UK is a typical "high welfare, low quantity" country, granting full welfare qualifications to immigrants. Due to the higher cost of receiving immigrants, the UK tends to strictly limit the number of immigrants and refugees. After the EU expansion, the influx of a large number of immigrants from Eastern Europe objectively transformed the UK's immigration welfare model into a "high welfare, high quantity" model. For ordinary people, an intuitive feeling is that immigrants have occupied a large amount of welfare resources that originally belonged to their own country. During economic downturns, the government reduces fiscal expenditures, and the dissatisfaction and rejection of immigrants by the public are compounded, leading to a

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<sup>5</sup> Home Office, *Statement of Intent and Transitional Measures and Indefinite Leave to Remain*, February 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Tariq Modood and John Salt, *Global Migration, Ethnicity and Britishness*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp.26-27.

stronger anti-immigrant sentiment. The surge in the number of immigrants from EU member states became the main driving force of the 2016 Brexit referendum.

The first part of multicultural policies in the UK would be Immigration Integration Policy. The issue of immigrants integrating into British society is primarily a cultural matter, and also a structural problem that requires addressing the inequalities caused by racial, gender, and class discrimination.<sup>7</sup> The existing discussions and policies on multiculturalism in the past often placed too much emphasis on cultural differences and paid insufficient attention to the recognition and concern of social structural inequalities.

Firstly, cultural rights relate to the freedom of minority groups (such as freedom of religious belief, language rights, etc.) and their equality with the mainstream group. To help immigrants integrate into British society and establish an identification with British values, the government has taken various measures. After immigrants enter the UK, the government, other public organizations, or private sectors will provide various channels of free language courses to improve their English proficiency. If immigrants want to apply for British citizenship, they must pass the language test organized by the government. In addition, some social guidance services are provided in certain parts of the UK to help new immigrants understand British culture, such as social rules, norms, customs, and values, and to help them integrate into the local society. In terms of religion, for certain customs of the Muslim community (such as female circumcision, arranged marriages, etc.) that conflict with the fundamental principles and beliefs of the mainstream society in the UK, the Department for Education of the UK issued a regulation in 2012, requiring the promotion of British values in all private schools, including Muslim schools, and requiring teachers and students to respect the laws and criminal laws of citizens and to discuss political issues in a balanced way.<sup>8</sup> These measures have to some extent promoted the establishment of a unified British value system.

Secondly, through a series of integration measures, efforts are made to promote equality among minority groups in economic, social and other fields. In the economic field, employment and salary issues are the core topics of equality of rights. Historically, there has been a significant gap in employment rates between immigrants and local British residents, especially during economic downturns. The British local governments have taken some effective measures to correct the disadvantages of minority ethnic employees in employment and help them enhance their employment capabilities.

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<sup>7</sup> Iris Marion Young, “Structural Injustice and the Politics of Difference”, Anthony Simon Laden and David Owen eds., *Multiculturalism and Political Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp.60-88.

<sup>8</sup> Department for Education, *Consultation on Revision of the Education (Independent School Standards)*, p.5, available at <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/14207/>.

According to statistics, a large proportion of British immigrants are engaged in high-skilled jobs, and nearly 40% of immigrants have management and professional positions, among which Chinese, Afro-Asians and Indians rank among the top three.<sup>9</sup> For new immigrants, although their overall educational level is higher than others, they often work in jobs that are below their qualifications, such as new immigrants working in food processing and domestic services, which account for up to 30%.<sup>10</sup> In terms of salary, on the whole, although British immigrants have received higher education than local British residents, their salary levels are relatively lower. Among them, Caribbeans and Bangladeshis have the lowest, while the wages of white immigrants are comparable to those of British-born employees.<sup>11</sup> This is a key area where various organizations in the UK are striving to improve.

Thirdly, in the field of social integration, on the one hand, in response to the long history of tense racial relations and the current situation in the UK, the British government has started to formulate multiple racial relations acts since 1965 and established corresponding institutions to promote racial equality, such as the Race Equality Commission, gradually improving racial relations. The 2006 Equality Act and the 2010 Equality Act further expanded the scope of public institutions' response to discrimination to all fields, including age, race and ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief. At the same time, various monitoring institutions were merged into the Equality and Human Rights Commission to ensure the implementation of the acts. These acts, along with other various government projects, work together with communities to seek solutions for promoting equality. On the other hand, the implementation of multiculturalism policies has also promoted the improvement of the living environment for minority groups. For example, the implementation of urban projects to improve the central city environment, 57 urban projects were launched in 1988 to improve the living conditions of minority groups; the introduction of the Black-led Housing Coalition Movement, which became one of the most famous investments in Europe targeting black people and minority groups. This series of measures led some members of the mainstream group to make the following accusations: immigrants not only take away the job opportunities of local residents, but also occupy welfare

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<sup>9</sup> John Rex, "Integration Policy in Great Britain", Friedrich Heckmann and Dominique Schnapper eds., *The integration of Immigrants in European Societies*, Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius, 2003, p.85.

<sup>10</sup> Cinzia Rienzo, "Briefing: Migrants in the UK Labour Market: An Overview", Oxford: the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, 28.08.2012, available at [http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/migobs/Briefing%20-%20Migrants%20in%20the%20UK%20Labour%20Market\\_0.pdf](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/migobs/Briefing%20-%20Migrants%20in%20the%20UK%20Labour%20Market_0.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Yann Algan, Christian Dustmann, Albrecht Glitz and Alan Manning(2010) Op.Cit., p.F15, available at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~uctpb21/Cpapers/AlganDustmannGlitzManning2010.pdf>.

resources, such as houses allocated by the city council, child welfare, free medical care and public education, etc.

The youth riots that occurred in the northern part of the UK in 2001, the 7/7 subway bombing incident in London in 2005, as well as the violent terrorist attacks that took place all over the world, led to widespread skepticism towards multiculturalism in the entire British society. That is to say, the multiculturalism that the British government and the entire nation had painstakingly cultivated for many years not only consumed a large amount of resources but also achieved very little effect. This was the reason why former British Prime Minister Cameron declared multiculturalism a failure, and it also formed the basis for British nationalism to carry out anti-immigration, anti-Muslim, and anti-multiculturalist mobilization.

## 2. Reasons for the Rise of Right-Wing Populism in the UK

In the context of multiculturalism, significant changes have taken place in British society, and the forces of populism have emerged unexpectedly. The representative of the British nationalist parties is the UK Independence Party, which, under the leadership of Farage, particularly focused on the impact of the rising number of immigrants on the white British working class. It experienced a rapid and explosive growth within a short period of time and achieved considerable success in local elections in 2013, the European Parliament elections in 2014, and the UK general election in 2015. The pressure exerted by the UK Independence Party on the government was widely regarded as the main reason for the 2016 Brexit referendum. The propositions of the UK Independence Party represent the main demands of British nationalism: Euroscepticism, pushing the UK to leave the EU; demanding that the government take measures to control immigration and opposing multiculturalism and the Islamization of the UK; being more conservative on social issues, such as opposing the rights of sexual minorities, being relatively conservative in education rights and judicial justice; using populist language and calling itself "the defenders of the people," etc. In May 2019, the Brexit Party led by the former leader of the UK Independence Party, Farage, performed exceptionally well in the European Parliament elections, receiving 31% of the votes and becoming the biggest winner surpassing traditional major parties such as the Conservative Party and the Labour Party.

Overall, the rise of British nationalism is the result of the combined effect of the following three factors: First, the economic and social foundation. Globalization has achieved the redistribution and free flow of personnel, goods, capital, and services on a global scale, not only providing a considerable number of labor forces to the UK, but also changing the industrial structure and social structure of the UK. The re-adjustment

of the global industrial structure has led to the gradual decline of traditional manufacturing and heavy industries in the UK, with a large number of workers losing their jobs and living standards declining; the EU's common fisheries policy resulting from European integration has caused losses for British fishermen engaged in fishing; in addition, low-skilled labor from the EU and other countries was regarded as competitors for labor opportunities in the UK, and these marginalized bottom-level people in the UK, who were marginalized in the process of globalization, held an 消极 attitude towards globalization and European integration. Due to the impact of the 2008 European debt crisis on the UK, economic growth declined, and some industries suffered particularly severely, leading to a clear tendency among the employees of these industries to oppose integration, making them more susceptible to right-wing populism.

Second, the psychological foundation. The economic insecurity brought about by globalization has increased, coupled with the growing "Islamophobia", and the sense of security among the mainstream population is gradually deepening. Like most European countries, the secularization level of British society is already very high. After the war, Britain absorbed a large number of Muslim immigrants from former colonies, and its high birth rate has led to an increase in the proportion of Muslim population in the total population of the UK. There is a claim that London is about to be occupied by Muslims and become "Londonistan", expressing the anxiety of the mainstream population in the UK regarding their identity and their fear of Muslim immigrants. In the past decade or so, violent terrorist incidents initiated by Muslims have occurred frequently in the UK and continental European countries, intensifying the anti-Muslim mentality in British society. This hostile attitude towards Muslim immigrants has also spread to other immigrant groups, and the mainstream society of the UK strongly demands that the government revise immigration policies and control the number of immigrants, especially Muslim immigrants and refugees.

Third, the institutional foundation. Britain is the birthplace of representative democracy, and the principle of parliamentary supremacy is the cornerstone of its democratic system. Through voting and elections, the public can elect representatives who represent their will and interests to participate in national governance and policy design. Regarding the issue of whether to leave the EU, the parliamentary vote before the referendum showed that the majority of MPs supported Britain remaining in the EU. This is contrary to the intuitive feelings and judgments of some people regarding globalization and European integration. In their view, the political elites represented by MPs and government officials, as the beneficiaries of elites in various fields in the process of globalization and European integration, ignore the voices of the marginalized

people and their deteriorating situation, advocate continuing to promote globalization and multiculturalism, and therefore the disappointment with the current elite system is increasing day by day. The demands of Euroscepticism and anti-globalization have finally been released through the populist anti-elitist and anti-reformist approach.

### 3. Characteristics of Right-Wing Populism in the UK

Under the influence of multiculturalist ideology and multicultural policies, British populism has combined with right-wing forces, presenting the following characteristics:

(1) Proposing propositions based on identity issues

This is manifested both in the self-identity of the United Kingdom as a nation-state and the personal identity experiences of the British people. Unlike traditional left-wing and right-wing political parties representing different socio-economic statuses, the rise of this round of populist thought is largely based on people's concern for identity issues. As an island country isolated from the European continent, the United Kingdom completed its state-building and established national identity during its confrontation with European continental countries in history. The myth of the "Empire on which the sun never sets" created by the British people and the resulting sense of being a great power have shaped the sense of difference between "us" as British people and "them" as Europeans. Throughout British history, there have always been voices of Euroscepticism and even Euroskepticism. From the perspective of individual citizens, the increasingly diverse composition of people around them, the large number of Eastern Europeans who have entered the UK since the EU's eastward expansion in 2007, and the possible further eastward expansion of the EU or even the inclusion of Muslim country Turkey, have made people's awareness of the land they live in and their identity as British no longer as clear as before. In the Brexit referendum, the slogan of "Reclaiming Control" and the recent emphasis by the UK on the significance of Britishness have highlighted the attention of the United Kingdom as a nation-state and ordinary citizens to British identity.

(2) Claiming to be the sole and direct representative of the people

This has two implications: Firstly, populist parties claim to be the sole and direct representative of "the people", without the need for any intermediaries, and their legitimacy surpasses any established forms such as parliaments or courts. When the UK High Court stated that initiating Brexit negotiations required a parliamentary vote, one of the major British newspapers, Daily Mail, placed a photo of a judge wearing a wig on its front-page news, with the headline reading "The Enemy of the People", claiming that the High Court's action was a "declaration of war on democracy"<sup>12</sup>; Secondly,

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<sup>12</sup> James Slack, "Enemies of the people: Fury over 'out of touch' judges who have 'declared war on democracy' by

populist parties claim that anyone who does not support them are not truly "the people". In the Brexit referendum, although the Brexit camp had a slight edge over the Remain camp, considering the proportion of those who did not vote, the number of people who voted for Brexit actually accounted for only 37.5% of the total British population. So, who do the British populists claim they represent? The 62.5% of Britons who did not support Brexit (those who clearly supported Remain and those who did not participate in the Brexit vote) are part of "the people"? Can they represent the true "people" based on the support of a minority? Although no convincing answers can be given to these questions, they still claim to be the ultimate definers of "who is the people".

(III) It violates the principle of political prudence and is far more destructive than constructive.

One typical feature of populism is that it only dismantles without building, only criticizes without proposing, and only opposes without proposing solutions. It aims to challenge the existing ruling elites and criticize the existing institutional models, but it does not strive to propose alternative, systematic, and comprehensive solutions. Before the deadline set by the UK and the EU under Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty for Brexit, which was March 29, 2019, the most controversial and intractable issue within the UK and between the UK and the EU was the Northern Ireland border issue. However, this key issue was not fully discussed before the Brexit referendum. Before the Brexit referendum, one selling point repeatedly emphasized by the populists in their anti-immigration stance was that immigrants should pay for the persistently high unemployment rate of the local population and that immigrants occupied a large amount of social welfare resources and became a burden on society. However, the data from the UK's Department for Work and Pensions in 2008 showed that the situation of low-skilled local workers in the UK's labor market was not due to a lack of appropriate job opportunities, but could be attributed more to factors such as skills level, cognition, and motivation.<sup>13</sup> That is to say, although many local people in the UK complained that they lost their jobs due to the arrival of immigrants, the fact was that there were no shortages of job opportunities in the market. The real reason was whether they themselves had the skills that matched the job opportunities and whether they had the sufficient motivation to look for work. Immigrants were merely the scapegoat for their

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defying 17.4m Brexit voters and who could trigger constitutional crisis", available at  
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3903436/Enemies-people-Fury-touchjudges-defied-17-4m-Brexit-voters-triggerconstitutional-crisis.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Sara Lemos and Jonathan Portes, "The impact of migration from the new European Union Member States on native workers", available at  
<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.537.7697&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

dissatisfaction with their own situation.

(IV) Resorting to simple and crude methods such as referendums may lead to a constitutional crisis.

Appealing to referendums and obtaining answers simply and brutally is a common way for populists to resolve differences. The language used by populists for mobilization is often highly inflammatory and can affect the vocabulary style of traditional political parties and even the entire society. The establishment parties and conservatives often need to cooperate with them or even imitate them to ensure and enhance their support rates. The promotion of the UK Independence Party was an important reason for Cameron's government to launch the Brexit referendum. In the Brexit issue, a historical first situation occurred where the parliamentary voting result was contrary to the popular vote result, challenging the foundation of the British political system - representative democracy and even the entire constitutional system. To avoid the occurrence of a constitutional crisis, the parliament needs to respect the results of the popular vote and conduct arguments on the outcome of Brexit and deploy subsequent implementation plans. However, most MPs were against Brexit, resulting in the situation where the Prime Minister's Brexit agreement was submitted to the parliament three times but was not passed each time, causing the Brexit issue to be postponed and delayed until January 31, 2020 to be officially completed. This contradiction highlights the drawbacks of the representative democracy system, such as difficulty in reaching decisions and low efficiency, while the abuse of referendums not only cannot make up for the deficiencies of representative democracy but also leads to the deterioration of democracy.<sup>14</sup> More seriously, it may cause a constitutional crisis due to the conflict between direct democracy and representative democracy results.

(V) Marking the return of implicit racism

The UK is one of the few countries in the world that classifies and manages the population based on ethnic groups. Its original intention was to monitor the equal treatment of each ethnic group by the government and various organizations and departments. However, objectively, it gave rise to ethnic discrimination based on ethnic boundaries. In Western European countries, ethnicity is merely a euphemistic expression for race, and immigrants are considered to be different from the majority of white people in terms of race. In the UK, racism is deeply rooted. For a long period of time, people have equated the British with white people, and Britishness has been equated with white skin. Until now, "multiracial" and "multicultural" are synonymous

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<sup>14</sup> Zhou Shiming: "The Rise and Threat of Populism in the 21st Century", *Foreign Theoretical Trends*, Issue 10, 2016.

and can be mutually converted.<sup>15</sup> As Bicu Barreque said, regardless of your skin color, as long as you are not white, then you are not a British person.<sup>16</sup> Hansen also said: "Being white means belonging." "Being black means being excluded."<sup>17</sup> European multiculturalism has largely been a response to the issue of immigrants from the former colonies of European countries, aiming to reverse discrimination against people of color. The criticism of multiculturalism by British populism objectively indicates the return of racism, although it is more subtle as the word "race" is less frequently mentioned. The persistent use of hateful language and hate crimes against immigrants of color before and after the Brexit referendum are clear evidence of racism.

#### 4. Conclusion

The multiculturalism implemented in the UK in the past can be described as half-hearted. It had good intentions but was poorly designed and not fully implemented. From the demands of the young people involved in the riots in the northern part of the UK at the beginning of this century, it was clear that they were not seeking cultural rights or maintaining the traditions of their parents' countries. Because as second, third or even multiple generations of immigrants, they identify with British values and have no difference in cultural identity and behavior patterns from the locals. What they demanded was full inclusion, equal opportunities, and the right to participate in national affairs and contribute to the country.<sup>18</sup> True multiculturalism, in addition to advocating respect and protection of the cultures of minority groups, also requires the mainstream group to treat minority groups with an attitude of equality and to actively promote the equal participation of minority groups and the majority group in economic, social, and political rights. The latter, however, is precisely what many Western European countries, including the UK, have overlooked. Multiculturalism is one of the main targets of populist criticism. But the coexistence of multiple ethnic groups and cultures is a fact. Including the mainstream group, all social groups are increasingly defining themselves based on identity, which is also an undeniable fact. Any political party that ignores either of these two facts in determining its goals and formulating policies is irrational. If it were not for multiculturalism, if it were not for liberalism, what kind of solution would populism propose to solve the existing problems on which it has risen, and this

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<sup>15</sup> Ali Rattansi, *Multiculturalism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University, 2011, pp.9-10.

<sup>16</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, p.8

<sup>17</sup> Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-war Britain: The institutional Origins of a Multicultural Nation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p.62.

<sup>18</sup> Ali Rattansi, *Multiculturalism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University, 2011, p.92.

will constitute a core issue for testing populist political parties - whether as the ruling party or the opposition party - in the future.

# The role of culture teaching in English language teaching for Chinese college students

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## 1. Introduction

Most peoples in the world need languages for the inheritance and communication of their cultures. Languages could record every aspect of life and carry their own unique cultures. The way that we express the information in our first language or other languages is affected by our own cultural backgrounds to a certain extent (Jiang, 2000; Hinkel, 1999; Kramsch, 1998; Bhabha, 1994; Buttjes, 1990, P.55; Witherspoon, 1980). This connection between culture and language has a significant influence on language education (Risager, 2005). Learners come to realise that if they are to master a target language truly, they have to be very familiar with the culture of that language. Thus, many scholars suggest that culture teaching should be paid attention to in the context of English language teaching (Byram & Risager, 1999; Byram & Fleming, 1998; Lange & Paige, 2003).

However, the development of English has put forward new challenges for cultural teaching in Chinese college English education. Since English is widely spread and universally used in the era of globalisation, English is no longer dedicated to only a single country, but has become a complex and diverse "World Englishes" with different varieties. One of its characteristics is that English gradually deviates from the Anglo-Saxon culture, and uses other local

cultures and world cultures as the reference points for cultural teaching (Saraceni, 2009). The ministry of education of the People's Republic of China (2017) clearly states in the *Guidelines on College English Teaching* that one of the objectives of college English teaching is to cultivate students' ability of English application and enhance their intercultural communication awareness as well as intercultural communication skills. As a Chinese university student, one will communicate in English not only with English native speakers but also with non-native speakers all over the world. It is impossible to meet all the intercultural communicative needs of students by only acquiring the British and American cultural knowledge (Liu, 2012). How to successfully cultivate Chinese college students the ability to intercultural communication with those who speak various types of English varieties, which has become a new challenge for English teachers in higher education.

Therefore, we believe that it is necessary to rethink about the role of culture in language teaching, explore the objectives of English teaching in Chinese universities, additionally, propose five principles of cultural teaching, which might be beneficial for university students to cultivate their intercultural communicative competence through the culture teaching.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Culture teaching research in western countries

Since the 1960s, many educators have started to pay attention to the importance of culture in foreign language education. Brooks (1964) believes that language teaching should include knowledge about the country and the way of life of the target language group. He (1964) emphasises the importance of culture is not for the study of literature but language education. And it is beneficial to deepen one's own culture well if one understands the culture of the target language (Seelye, 1984).

Scholars have different views on the role of cultural teaching in language teaching. Webber (1987) criticises the idea of over-emphasising on cultural teaching in the language classroom. By analysing the teaching methods commonly used in cultural teaching, he corrects the importance of cultural teaching in language teaching. Byram (2012) believes that foreign language teaching should foster a "critical awareness" of social life, which is likely to be beneficial to reflect the learner's understanding on his values by learning the culture of the target language. Stern et al. (1983) put forward the term "cultural competence", and according to his opinion, cultural competence indicates the implicit mastery of the norms of a society, values, the unspoken rules of conduct, and the orientations which make up the cultural fabric of society.

People pay more and more attention to the contents and goals of culture teaching in foreign language education. Byram (1994, P69) holds that the contents of culture teaching should provide learners sufficient communicative knowledge and language cultural knowledge, so that learners can subtly perceive the target language, so as to successfully engage in intercultural communication. Heidari, Ketabi and Zonoobi (2014) explores the role of culture in language teaching, and puts forward to the importance of culture in traditional, modern and innovative language teaching methods. It is necessary to cultivate intercultural awareness as soon as possible. Salomão (2011) explores the need to reconstruct the cultural components in language teaching and considers the complexity of contemporary intercultural communication in English pragmatics.

Some scholars investigate the opinions and attitudes of students and language teachers on their culture teaching in foreign language teaching. Oranje and Feryok (2013), through interviews with primary school English teachers in New Zealand and classroom observations, find that they lack understanding of the principles of intercultural communication in English language teaching. Atay et

al. (2009) conduct a questionnaire for 503 EFL teachers in Turkey and find that they have positive attitudes towards the role of culture in English classroom education, but they have not taught many culture knowledge in English teaching. They are aware of the importance of developing learners' intercultural competence in foreign language education.

## 2.2 Culture teaching research in China

From the discussions and practice of "cultural guides" in foreign language teaching since the late 1980s, to the explicit requirements for new English syllabus of higher education (including English majors and non-English majors) on "cultural knowledge" and "cultural literacy", English teaching in Chinese universities has finally entered a new stage after a long period of understanding, thinking, exploring and practising, paying equal attention to both English language and culture teaching. However, according to the information obtained from recent studies by Chinese scholars, the progress of this reform in China is not smooth. Most teachers still rely on teaching English language knowledge, while cultural teaching has not been seriously valued.

Zhang (2001) conducts a survey of cultural teaching in foreign language teaching from 204 students majoring in English in Shanghai. She finds that students' cultural knowledge and cultural ability are much less than their language knowledge and ability. The students consider that the current teachers, existing teaching materials and teaching methods cannot meet the needs of cultural learning.

Zhong, Fan and Qin (2001) conduct a questionnaire for 105 non-English majors who have already passed the College English Test Level 4 ( CET-4) in some universities in Wuhan city. They indicate that the correlation between students' language ability and social-cultural ability is low. The social-cultural ability is clearly less than the English language ability.

It is not much different from Wang's (1990) investigation for English majors in the western region of China. One reason is that English teachers do not have many opportunities to add more culture knowledge into exiting teaching tasks within a limited time. Moreover, there are very few questions about culture in the assessments. Another reason is that some people believe that culture teaching is the task of experts who specialise in comparative studies of English and Chinese culture, and it has little to do with other English teachers.

In conclusion, we have reason to believe that the current cultural teaching in English teaching in China is still in a dispensable and subsidiary position. However, this status can neither meet the objective situation of global economic integration, and increasingly frequent international exchanges, nor the requirements for comprehensively promoting quality education and cultivating compound talents. Many factors might cause the reason, but the lack of ideological understanding and the ineffectiveness of specific measures are the fundamental reasons. This essay starts with the importance of ideological understanding of the role of culture in English teaching for Chinese college students. Sequentially, we explore the objectives and principles of culture teaching, that is what to teach, and how to teach.

### 3. The role of culture in English language teaching

Culture teaching is indispensable in English language education. We are going to discuss the vital contribution of culture teaching to successful English learning from four perspectives under Chinese university student's context.

#### 3.1 Cultural teaching can optimise students' knowledge structure

We are aware that students acquire the culture knowledge by the target language, which may include a series of knowledge relevant to target languages about humanities, geography, political economy, education, social system, way of life, customs, social traditions, ethics, and norm of conduct

(Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952). Naturally, students could enlarge their knowledge database via culture teaching. For example, before explaining the sentence "The man who watered his flowers after a good rain is *carrying coals to Newcastle.*", the teacher should introduce the culture background about Newcastle, which is known as an industrial port city in the northeast of England, rich in coal.

### 3.2 Culture teaching can optimise students' competence

Through culture teaching, students could undoubtedly develop their intercultural communication competence. Students can gain some intercultural knowledge such as language structure, pragmatics, as well as non-language cultural knowledge in the aspects of body language, social etiquette, communicative environment, communicative methods, communicative attitude, etc. It is likely to be helpful to avoid sociopragmatic failure in English. Sociopragmatic failure refers to language expression errors caused by differences in cultural background, ways of thinking and values (Thomas, 1983). For example, according to Chinese values on modesty, it is common to reply "*I receive it with shame*" when an American friend said "*Congratulations on winning the scholarship!*" to him. However, according to the culture of the target language, the appropriate reply should be "Thank you".

### 3.3 Culture teaching can improve students' comprehensive understanding of English

The ability of comprehensive understanding in English is beneficial to develop students' intercultural competence, which is one of the goals of English higher education required by the ministry of education of China (2017). Culture teaching could enhance one's comprehensive understanding of English learning. It is difficult to understand some sentences without necessary culture

background, which would affect one's intercultural communication competence. For example, a Chinese student might not quite understand this sentence:

*"You chicken!" He cried, looking at Jerry with contempt.*

Because the animal chicken in Chinese culture refers to the symbol of a hardworking person. However, "chicken" in target language culture means a coward. Without culture teaching, people will not gain the correct understanding.

### 3.4 Culture teaching can motivate students' learning interests

Motivation is one of the most dynamic factors relevant to the achievement of second language acquisition (Ruzek et al., 2015), and plays a vital role in the second language acquisition (Peter, 2015; Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013; Skehan, 1989; Gardner, 1985). Learners' interests are one of the crucial factors affecting an individual's learning motivation (Gao et al., 2003; Crookes and Schmidt, 1991). Interests are the best teachers for English language learning.

English linguistic knowledge with flexible lexical forms and complex grammar structures is not easy to read, memorise and understand by a Chinese student. The difficulty of English is easy to make students become demotivated in English learning. In this situation, it is particularly important to cultivate the direct interest of the students through the English study itself and the content of knowledge. Only when we constantly improve teaching methods, add interesting teaching content, and put fun through the whole teaching process, can we arouse students' direct interest and unintentional attention (Gao et al., 2003).

Culture teaching is different from the traditional teaching mode, both in method and content. The most significant teaching feature is that culture teaching is

not limited to the language material for the mechanical, nor boring interpretation of the words, but through the language to see the culture, through the language learning to understand the semantics of national culture, which could effectively stimulate students' interest in English learning.

For example, when we meet the word "McCoy" in one of English reading materials, we can tell an interesting story to the students to help them understand and memorise the meaning of the word as well as the usage under the appropriate context.

The word "McCoy" is originated from American boxing player Norman Selby, who was well known as a name "Kid McCoy" in the boxing ring. One night, he went to the bar with a formal evening dress to meet friends. A drunk man spoke rudely to him, even wanted to beat him. At beginning, McCoy said nicely to the drunk man that he is McCoy, and tried to persuade the drunk to let him go. However, the drunk man did not believe it, still wanted to fight with McCoy. McCoy got angry and gave the drunk man a fist on his jaw. Serval hours later, the drunk man woke up and found that there was a name card of McCoy in his pocket. "He is the real McCoy," he muttered. Thus, people use "McCoy" to refer to the real goods, great people.

This story vividly demonstrates the meaning of the word "McCoy". Sequentially, more examples could be given for the students to deepen their understanding. Such as "Those paintings are copies, but this one is the McCoy", and "Marathons are the real McCoy, while these little jogs are no challenge at all".

#### 4. The objective of culture teaching for Chinese college students

##### 4.1 What should be taught in culture teaching

Since language and culture have such a close relationship, English teaching naturally cannot escape from cultural teaching. While teaching this language,

people are bound to teach the culture. Vacuum teaching that teaches only the language and does not involve culture is impossible and non-existent. However, what kind of culture, which needs to be taught to college students, should be well considered in English higher education.

It is not appropriate to transmit only British and American cultures or world cultures in Chinese English teaching. First of all, English does not only belong to the United Kingdom and the United States. If English culture teaching only focuses on these two cultures, it ignores the fact that English is applied and owned by people all over the world, which will also accelerate the process of cultural assimilation. Teaching British English or American English as standard English not only denies that English is the medium for disseminating national culture, but also denies the existence of world Englishes (Nault, 2006). Students learn English, not just to communicate with people in the United States or the United Kingdom, but to exchange world-wide. Learning only British and American culture and their English is not conducive to global communication. Secondly, English teaching should also focus on world Englishes, so that students can understand the existence of English and cultures in the world, and thus respect and tolerate other types of Englishes and their cultures. However, this proposal also has problems. There are various types of Englishes in the world. They do not have the standard of form, and few people can learn so many kinds of Englishes and master so many colourful cultures. Finally, Pennycook (2007) proposes a worldwide culture that seems to solve two dilemmas. He believes that blaming culture globalisation on the United States or the Western countries is a narrow way of thinking. The focus of globalisation is on its global nature, and the reasons for globalisation come from the world, such as Japanese cartoons, national homosexual organisations, international conferences, and so on.

Another example is that there are teas in various countries of the world, but the way people drinking tea is different. Chinese people drink tea without milk, and some British people must add cold milk to drink. It seems that there is no meaning in studying the root of tea culture or coffee culture, because they have been combined with local culture to become a worldwide culture. This view does not deny the influence of British and American culture on world culture. It only emphasises that global culture has been deeply integrated into the culture of various countries. However, we still cannot teach this kind of culture as a teaching focus. There might be two reasons. One reason is that focusing only on some popular cultures will make cultural teaching boring, and at the same time, lose the opportunity to teach a variety of rich cultures. Another reason is that most global cultures are American cultures, which might ultimately lead to the Americanization of the world and global homogenization.

It seems that cultural teaching is difficult in English language teaching. Since the British-American culture, the world culture and the worldwide culture cannot meet the needs of cultural teaching, the only solution to this problem is to shift the focus from the cultural category to the cultivation of intercultural communication competence. (Nguyen, 2017; Piątkowska, 2015; Heidari, Ketabi and Zonoobi, 2014; Salomão, 2011). In other words, the ultimate goal of cultural teaching is not to master the culture of a certain country, because English is a world language, people use it to communicate with people from all over the world, but it is challenging to master the cultures of the world, so the objective of culture teaching in English teaching for Chinese university students is to develop the learners' flexible communication competence in a complex intercultural communication environment.

#### 4.2 The understanding of objective in culture teaching

There are a variety of theoretical models of intercultural competence proposed by scholars, such as a compositional model, a co-orientation model, a

developmental model, an adaptation model, and a causal process (Deardorff, 2011). The definitions of different perspectives complement each other and help to deepen and enrich our understanding of the concept of intercultural communicative competence. It is worth further research. With the comprehensive definitions of intercultural communicative competence in the academic community and focusing on the professional orientation of foreign language education in China for university students, we try to describe the core connotation of intercultural communicative competence from the perspective of constituent elements as follows:

First, be able to respect the cultural diversity of the world, with intercultural empathy and critical cultural awareness. World Englishes show that the cultures of different countries and regions of the world are rich in diversity. However, since the history of humanity has entered the process of "modernisation" and "globalisation" led by Western countries, the inherent diversity of world culture is facing unprecedented "westernisation" and homogenization threats. Thus, respecting and protecting the diversity of world culture has become a very pressing global issue. A person with intercultural communicative competence should respect the world's cultural diversity in this sense. Not only that, he/she should also be able to enter the hearts of different cultures and understand the concerns and logic of different cultures. At the same time, a person with intercultural communicative competence should also have a profound reflective ability and be able to objectively and fairly evaluate and identify local culture and foreign culture. It is neither self-abasement nor arrogant.

Second, be familiar with the history and current situation of the language speaking countries, and understand the basic characteristics and similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures. Reconsidering about the traditional communication teaching methods, we can find that an obvious

shortcoming is to equate intercultural communicative competence with some sporadic intercultural communication skills. In fact, without a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the history and current situation of the language target countries, it is impossible to truly understand the beliefs, values, lifestyles and behavioural habits of the language target countries, and it is impossible to carry out in-depth intercultural exchanges. Additionally, students could also get well known of the local Chinese culture, and then discover and understand the surface and profound similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures in comparative learning. Through the intercultural comparative studies, students could be cultivated their critical thinking on intercultural communication. That is to understand the characteristics of Chinese and foreign cultures as well as the reasons for their formation. Also, students can transcend the limitations of Chinese and foreign cultures and construct a broader cultural and worldview. Today, as China is playing an increasingly important role in the global arena, we urgently need a large number of new high-end English language talents who are proficient in English and are also familiar with international rules. They can vividly demonstrate historical China and contemporary China to the world, and gain their understanding and support for China. It is the noble, arduous and urgent mission for the Chinese college English language students in the era of economic globalisation.

Third, be able to interpret and evaluate different cultural phenomena, texts and products. These two things are higher-level thinking activities, which require students to learn to use intercultural theories and knowledge flexibly. Students can be guided to interpret and evaluate intercultural phenomena, texts and products during a large number of English language listening, speaking, reading and writing training and professional knowledge courses. The purpose is not only to ask students to master the language "basic skills" or language, literary and cultural knowledge. Moreover, students could make an in-depth

interpretation of international cultural phenomena, texts and products, as well as national ones from a comparative perspective, through exploring and critically examining the cultural background, gradually improve their Intercultural thinking. A text, a literary work, a film or a piece of art, produced in a specific culture, carries a rich cultural connotation, telling vivid stories of its own culture at different levels from different angles. When they enter a new cultural context and are read, viewed and analysed by people with different cultural identities, they constitute an excellent opportunity for cultural and cultural dialogue, communication (sometimes manifested as a conflict) and mutual recognition. In this sense, the English classroom teaching is inherently intercultural teaching, and English language education is essentially intercultural education.

Fourth, be able to have intercultural communication appropriately and effectively. Some scholars (Chen et al., 1998) have proposed two criteria for evaluating intercultural communicative competence. One is appropriateness, that is, in the process of intercultural communication people can respect each other's values and norms of behaviour, and maintain a harmonious interpersonal relationship; the second is effectiveness, that is, through communicating people could reach the aims, or achieve their cooperation, or enhance their understanding, or strengthen their friendship. In the context of English language education, the index system for evaluating English language ability has long been limited to language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating. It seems that they are entirely neutral tools. Once students master it, they can naturally achieve the goals in an intercultural environment. It means that English language skills are inseparable from intercultural competence. Therefore, incorporate intercultural communicative competence might be considered to the current English language evaluation system.

Last, be able to help others with different language culture background to communicate effectively. A person who has strong intercultural competence is not only able to intercultural communicate effectively and appropriately by himself, but also able to help others achieve intercultural communication goals. That is to say, and translation can be understood as a sub-skill of intercultural competence, with the aim of building bridges of communication among people under different languages and cultural background. A large number of translation studies (Baker, 2018; Pym, 2017; House, 2017; Liddicoat, 2016; Tomozeiu and Kumpulainen, 2016; Bassnett, 2013) have proved that translation promotes not only the understanding and communication of different cultures of human beings, but also that translation itself is a deep understanding and accurate expression of two different cultures (not only language). In addition, A person with intercultural communicative competence should also be able to mediate intercultural conflicts, because he/she might understand the cultural background of both parties, and can help them clarify misunderstandings and restore their relationships.

## 5. Principles of culture teaching for Chinese university students

After clarifying the intercultural communicative competence as the objectives of culture teaching in English education for Chinese university students, this paper will further explore the practical path of intercultural competence training, especially the basic principles of culture teaching in China English for Chinese college students.

In general, in order to effectively improve the intercultural communicative competence for English majors, high-quality intercultural communication courses should be considered to set. Meanwhile, awareness of intercultural education should throughout the curriculum system and each teaching block. It means that the English majors could further strengthen the general humanities education, pay more attention to their Chinese culture learning and

understanding of contemporary national conditions about China. We could consider cultivating their intercultural text interpretation, intercultural, interpersonal communication and critical intercultural reflecting through the entire process of English language skills courses and professional knowledge courses. Several principles in culture teaching as follows:

### 5.1 Critiquing

Students should be taught to use their cognitive skills to solve intercultural issues in cultural teaching. That is the ability we called critiquing. Critiquing is a professionally trained thinking process in which thinkers positively conceptualise, apply, analyse, synthesising, and evaluate with the information from their own observation, experience, reflecting, reasoning or communicating (Scriven and Paul, 1987). If we could guide students to use this principle to conceptualise, apply, analyse, synthesise, and evaluate the intercultural knowledge, information, and cases learnt in the class, both the intercultural competence and critiquing competence would be improved. According to this principle, intercultural teaching should not be teaching-based, but students-centred. Once students mastered the way of critiquing, a variety of designed tasks on intercultural issues would be considered to prepare by teachers. When critiquing competence applied through those task-based learning, intercultural competence, especially the high-end intercultural competence, would be naturally enhanced.

### 5.2 Reflecting

Students should be encouraged to cultivate their critical cultural awareness through their intercultural reflection. Normally, reflecting takes place in two situations: one is that students use the intercultural theories what they have learned to understand and guide their own intercultural practices to test the applicability of the theories; the other way is that students summarise and

analyse their own intercultural practices to reveal experiences or lessons. These two ways of reflecting are aimed at achieving an organic combination of theoretical learning and practical application. Thus, students could continuously improve their intercultural practices, sequentially, enhance their intercultural communicative competence. Some pedagogical and psychological studies (Branch and Paranjape, 2002) have shown that reflecting is a kind of "deep learning", which could promote the individual's cognitive, moral, personal, psychological, and emotional growth. Specifically speaking, reflecting is beneficial for students to get well known about their own advantages and drawbacks, discover and question their own potential values and beliefs, challenge their views and feelings, and think about their shortcomings and improvements. Based on this principle, intercultural teaching can be designed a variety of classroom activities such as discussion, interviews, reflective diaries, so that to promote deep intercultural reflection, and cultivate critical cultural awareness (Costa & Kallick, 2008).

### 5.3 Exploring

Intercultural teaching should become an open-mind intercultural exploring process. The fundamental purpose of cultural teaching is to develop students' intercultural communicative competence rather than input a large amount of intercultural knowledge or standard answers to students (Nault, 2006). In fact, the situation of intercultural communication is ever-changing. Teachers are not likely to provide a panacea for once and for all.

Therefore, intercultural teaching should focus on developing students' exploring ability through intercultural activities. That is to say, students should pay more attention to acquire their independent learning ability and lifelong learning ability, so that it is possible for them to positively acquire the information when they meet the real intercultural communication, think independently, and creatively find the solution to the specific issues. Following

the principle of exploring, cultural teaching should pay attention to the process of exploring intercultural issues, so that learning activities would become problem-based learning, in which the process students could seek for the new knowledge, naturally, develop into deep learning.

Moreover, in this process, teachers are the promoters of learning activities, while students actively and independently explore and take on more and more responsibility for learning (Spronken-Smith, 2012). Therefore, intercultural teaching that follows the principles of exploring is committed to cultivating students' curiosity, openness and tolerance to the world's diverse cultures.

#### 5.4 Empathising

Intercultural teaching should be based on empathy ethics and promote the development of empathy personality. In the context of intercultural communication, American scholar Calloway-Thomas (2010) defines empathy as an ability that could through imaging enter and participant other's culture world from cognition, emotion, and behavioural aspects. In other words, intercultural practitioners should be able to enter the material world and spiritual world of the intercultural communication object, observe the things with the "eyes" of the communicative target, and feel the things with his "spirit", and use his "brains" to understand his behavioural logic.

Emotional ethics should be a valuable criterion for both teachers and students to obey in cultural teaching. It means that in the face of different, novel and even incredible foreign cultural phenomena, teachers should guide students to respect, tolerate and even appreciate cultural differences, avoid rushing to make value judgments, and be willing to change feelings and reflect about themselves. Also, cultural differences are seen as a valuable resource for enriching oneself, broadening horizons, and creating new cultures.

#### 5.5 Doing

Intercultural teaching should create opportunities for students to experience intercultural communication, which might promote the internalisation of intercultural competence. Learning by doing, also known as experiential learning, has become an effective teaching philosophy widely recognised by various disciplines in the education sector.

According to the theoretical model proposed by Kolb (2014), experiential learning is a linearly related four-stage cyclic process, including four steps of experience, observation, conceptualisation and experimentation. The English learner first undertakes and completes a task, then reflects on the specific process of performing the task, then raises the specific experience into a concept or a theory, and finally puts the acquired new knowledge into further experiments.

This theoretical model and its learning principles can introduce into cultural teaching, and which could promote the effective internalisation of intercultural competence. Experiential intercultural teaching can be carried out in the classroom, such as asking students to indirectly experience intercultural communication by playing intercultural roles, watching intercultural movies or reading intercultural cases, then reflecting through discussion or brainstorming, and then conceptualising the theory and summarising, and finally the findings of the analysis are put into practice to exam. More effective experiential intercultural teaching should be conducted beyond the traditional classroom, such as organising students to participate in overseas summer camps, short-term study abroad or overseas volunteering services. In fact, more and more universities in China are actively pursuing a variety of international education opportunities for students. Unfortunately, these arrangements often stay at the level of inner classroom learning or travelling browsing. In order to make these study or study activities truly promote the development of students' intercultural communicative competence, every stage of oversea

practical activities should be well designed, with the shadow and guidance by experienced teachers. If so, students could truly experience the overseas intercultural learning, and ultimately achieve effective internalisation of intercultural competence.

## 6. Conclusion

China has the most massive population learning and teaching English. As an international communication tool, English in China lies at the expanding circle of World Englishes (Kachru,1985). Since language and culture are inseparable, the role of culture in English language teaching for Chinese college students is more and more critical. However, the current culture teaching situations in Chinese colleges could neither meet the communication needs under development of globalisation, nor meet the requirements of college English education by the ministry of education of the People's Republic of China.

Therefore, the role of culture in English teaching for Chinese college students is well discussed. The content of culture teaching becomes more and more complicated with the evolution of this language. There are a variety of problems among British and American culture, world culture, and worldwide culture as the content of culture teaching. In this situation, the objective of culture teaching pays more and more attention to cultivating student's intercultural communicative competence. Combined with the current situation for culture teaching in higher English education in China, the core connotations of intercultural communicative competence are discussed from 5 perspectives. And then, the 5 fundamental principles of intercultural teaching are suggested, which are critiquing, reflecting, exploring, empathising and doing.

It is hoped that suggestions might be helpful to provide some thoughts for culture teaching in Chinese colleges. Because of the limited time, the reason for the current teaching situation cannot be explored.

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**The China-Europe Dialogue on "Datong" (Great Harmony) Ethics: A Case Study of Kang****Youwei's Comparative Research on German Political History****Eric Shuihuan Wang****(School of Marxism, North China University of Technology, Beijing P.R.C.)****Abstract:**

The Datong ethics in the Chinese tradition emphasizes the "public good" that transcends the self-interest of rulers, and correspondingly manifests as attention to the power of a "public government" in interstate relations. Through comparative research and investigation into Germany's political evolution, Kang Youwei argued that "Datong" could be gradually realized via the German-style path of federal unification. The German scholar Jürgen Habermas also advocated eliminating national state boundaries to reduce wars, but proposed that national states should serve as the foundation for bearing diverse cultures. The theoretical bases and analytical approaches of these two conceptions of "Datong" differ from each other. Through his comparative political history research practice, Kang Youwei pointed out that China's political evolution had no fixed rules to follow; instead, under the general principle of "no permanent governance methods," institutions should be created in light of national conditions, time and local circumstances. Retrospection through comparative research and dialogue helps identify the uniqueness of each other's development models and new possibilities for mutual learning.

**Keywords:** Datong (Great Harmony) Ethics; Kang Youwei; Germany; Jürgen Habermas; comparative political history

Many detailed designs regarding the "abolition of national boundaries" in Kang Youwei's Datong thought are related to his early accumulation of knowledge on the history and politics of European countries through reading, as well as his subsequent multiple visits to Europe for investigation. The scholar Gan Chunsong mentioned in his new work ***Protecting Religion and Founding the Nation: Kang Youwei's Modern Strategy that Kang Youwei*** was adept at using comparative methods to interpret political and historical issues even before his overseas travels, and persisted in this approach throughout his years of wandering (Gan, 2015, pp. 326 - 327). However, the academic community in the past paid far less attention to and elaborated on Kang Youwei's such Chinese-Western comparisons than it did to the excavation and research of similar ideas of his disciple Liang Qichao. This phenomenon has undergone a significant change in the past five to six years. One manifestation is that scholars from many fields such as political science, sociology, law, and comparative literature have begun to engage in discussions on Kang Youwei's ideological changes after the Wuxu Reform, and strive to present the world significance embodied in Kang's Chinese-Western comparative practices.

In fact, European scholars have long held the view that Sino-European comparative research may bring unique insights to both European and Chinese thought. For instance, based on years of research on the intellectual relationship between China and Europe, the French scholar François Jullien pointed out: "Do not forget that all cultures exist in a relationship of tension, and thus have been tempered by hybridity. When certain consistencies (li) establish their prestige, they bury and obscure other consistencies (li); from then on, only by stepping out of those assimilated perspectives—assimilated to the point of becoming 'taken for granted,' or what I call 'the fold of thought' (le pli de la pensée)—can we rediscover those obscured consistencies (li). However, such a breakthrough and examination of oneself can only occur through encountering an external other and engaging in contrast with it" (Jullien, F. ,2014,p29). Regarding China as a suitable reference for European thought to reflect on its own characteristics, Jullien also expressed similar views in his early work *Detour and Access*. As European scholars recognize, among the world's major civilizations today, most have formed their modern civilizations under the influence and leadership of European culture, except for China (see Jullien, F. 1998,p3). Kang Youwei conducted concentrated and multiple visitations to various European countries from the spring of 1904 to the late summer of 1909. The political and historical commentaries within his extensive travel journals have become distinctive intellectual outcomes from a scholar deeply rooted in Chinese classical tradition, yet standing at a "distance" from Europe, viewing it from a distinct Chinese perspective.

The systematic discourse of the French scholar Francois Jullien was inherited by numerous European thinkers, including those from Germany. This intellectual lineage helps explain why, in the early 21st century, visits to China by influential German philosophers such as Jürgen Habermas were interpreted by the Chinese scholar Cao Weidong as a sign that these German academics recognized the special relevance of China's intellectual and cultural characteristics and developmental trajectory for German theoretical circles. They hoped, through dialogue, to gain insights that would aid the German project of "self-understanding" [Cao,2010,pp.5-6]. In contrast, Kang

Youwei's observations of Germany represent a conscious Chinese effort to treat Germany as an "other" and a mirror. In this process of mutual observation and reference, he discovered that Germany, as a leading "late-developing" nation in Europe, held a particular appeal for thinkers like himself, who were eager to find a path to China's strength and prosperity. This appeal stemmed from Germany's grand ethos and its practical experience of moving from a confederation of autonomous states toward a "Great Unity" (\*Datong\*).

This paper pursues three main lines of inquiry. The first is to reconstruct the course of Kang Youwei's political and historical observations of the major European states—Britain, France, and Germany—and to survey his related essays and publications, noting their distinct historical features. The second is to analyze Kang's high evaluation of Germany's political conditions in the early 1900s in order to elucidate his principal answer to the question: which practical experiences should China have adopted from the powerful European nations of that era? Third, the paper evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of Kang Youwei's discourse. In his detailed comparison of the political and social systems of China and Europe, Kang argued that China was unsuited for the radical democracy of the French Revolution. He also contended that China could not, like Britain, gradually accumulate lessons from failure over centuries of slow constitutional evolution. Instead, he asserted that China could only follow the model of Bismarck's German Second Empire, achieving the efficient utilization and full mobilization of national resources through the guidance, design, and continuous intervention of an exceptional leader. Although this "national interest first" development model might contradict the peaceful path to "Great Unity" (\*Datong\*) that he championed, it nonetheless coincides with the view of the contemporary German thinker Jürgen Habermas, who emphasizes the enduring value of the nation-state. Among the outstanding ones, Germany, with its practice of moving towards "great unity" through autonomous union of individual states and its grand vision, is particularly attractive to thinkers like Kang Youwei who are keen to seek the path to China's prosperity.

## 1.The Reason Analysis of Kang You Wei's Good Evaluation of German Political System

During his intensive study of major European powers from 1903 to 1909, Kang Youwei's exploration of Germany proved the most thorough and extensive--a fact widely acknowledged by scholars. The opening of his 1907 work *Supplement to the Travel Notes of Germany* features frequently cited passage extolling Germany's eleven "firsts," preceded by an introductory section that sets the stage for the formal narrative.

Having spent considerable time in Germany, I visited Berlin nine times and traversed the entire federal territory, passing through dozens of cities. I met with local residents, toured factories and government offices, studied historical records, collected images, and researched customs. After compiling these materials, I found that over a dozen details were lost, leaving less than one-tenth of the original. Tired, I returned home. A guest asked me, "You've traveled through nearly every country in the world—what country do you think is the best?" I replied, "One shouldn't judge by such superficial details. Each has its own merits. When it comes to governing a country, Germany is paramount."

In this introductory section, Kang Youwei outlines his extensive travels to Germany (he actually visited the country multiple times within two years of writing this article). With a modest tone, he acknowledges that each nation has its own cultural strengths, while highlighting Germany's particular advantage in statecraft—a topic of his deepest interest. The following analysis elaborates on this point:

Germany's governance is rooted in moral excellence, while ancient civilizations that prioritized ethical transformation are beyond our scope. When examining governance through political means, I find that the vast expanse of our world across time and nations offers no comparable model. The ancient world's shortcomings lay in unrefined material culture and incomplete mechanical/electrical systems, whereas modern nations face similar deficiencies. America's emphasis on freedom and law seems excessive, Britain's self-respect stagnates, and other nations lack the resources of small states with limited

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For reference, see Fei Lu's(German name as Roland Felber) "Kang Youwei's View of Germany," published in the Journal of Qingdao Ocean University, Issue 1, 1993. In recent years, Professor Zhang Yongle, a renowned young legal scholar, has conducted systematic research on Kang Youwei's perspective on Germany. In his new book "Competition Among Nations: Kang Youwei and the Decline of the Vienna System" (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2017), he systematically expounds his research findings on Kang Youwei. Kang Youwei, compiled by Jiang Yihua and Zhang Ronghua: Kang Youwei's Complete Works, Volume 8, Beijing: Renmin University of China Press, 2009, p. 336.

populations. Otherwise, they cling to outdated practices. This explains why Germany now stands as the sole leader.

After such a comparison of the political governance principle, Kang Youwei praised Germany's many world achievements under this excellent governance model, and this great success was achieved in just three or four decades.

Three or four decades ago, the small nation was in disarray, with all governance in disarray, yet it was still despised. After the collapse of the law and the unification of the empire, all fields were reformed and clarified, and thus the nation soared to the pinnacle of all nations. Today, it excels in virtue, military preparedness, politics, literature, medicine, electricity, craftsmanship, commerce, architecture, roads, towns, and even music. Its rapid advancement is like a whirlwind, leaving others in the dust. No other nation has evolved so swiftly and remarkably in the world! There are many reasons for this, but fundamentally, it is based on constitutional civil rights as the essence and absolute monarchical power as the function. Perhaps this is the latest form of political system in the competition among nations!

Here, Kang Youwei ultimately attributed the multiple "firsts" achieved in the short period to Germany's adoption of the "most advanced political system." During his multiple visits to Germany between 1904 and 1909, Kang remained committed to his "royalist" mission, as Emperor Guangxu was still alive before the winter of 1908. Driven by this sense of duty and his idealized vision of "jointly building a great cause" with Guangxu's court after his restoration, his travelogue about Germany contained numerous imaginative accounts. For instance, he vividly and even exaggeratedly described how Wilhelm II forced Bismarck to resign, perhaps hoping that Emperor Guangxu would possess similar wisdom and courage to expel powerful ministers.

Kang Youwei often held an idealized vision of the industrialization and modernization paths of modern nations he was still unfamiliar with. This imaginative narrative, infused with his own aspirations, frequently obscured and distorted the complex details of the various twists and turns experienced by the countries under discussion during their reform and modernization processes. Kang made this mistake in his understanding of Meiji Japan, but later had the opportunity to live in Japan for an extended period. His disciples and followers conducted long-term activities in

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Ibid., p. 336.

Japan for over a decade, and the cultural and academic similarities between the two countries allowed him to interact with high-ranking figures in Japanese politics and culture such as Okuma Shigetake(1838—1922), Fumimaro Konoe(1891—1945), and Inukai Tsuyoshi(1855—1932). Consequently, his understanding of Japanese politics gradually returned to rationality and clarity. However, he lacked knowledge of Germany's upper echelons of politics and could not, like Zhang Deyi, the Qing Dynasty's envoy to Germany who was proficient in both English and German, discover the dark aspects of German politics and society through interactions with high-ranking officials, reading critical German political publications in English-language media, and his own detailed observations of the lives of the lower classes in Germany.

Zhang Deyi documented that in Germany, "the people endure hardships,<sup>4</sup> with some developing rebellious spirits and others deceiving foreigners." He observed that despite Germany's formidable political and military might, its social customs and cultural reforms progressed slowly. The leisure activities of Berliners remained far simpler and more <sup>5</sup>monotonous compared to those in London or Paris, and little changed during his three years as an aide. He concluded, "Though Germany has recently grown strong, its national strength remains limited, and many people still suffer. All old customs remain unaltered."

In contrast, Kang Youwei noticed the existence of slums in the capital and big cities of Britain, France, Italy and other countries, and there were often orphans and widows on the streets, so he criticized the blind worship of the western imagination of the Chinese at that time.

Those who have never traveled to Europe might imagine its lands as if adorned with jade palaces and celestial towers, and its people as if all were sages and virtuous souls. Little do they know how filthy and unclean the land is, with deceit and theft rampant as they are! Thus, as the saying goes, 'seeing is believing.' When I once visited Europe, especially Britain, I found the reality fell far short of the dreamlike visions I had read about, leaving me utterly disappointed.<sup>6</sup>

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Zhang Deyi: "Five Narrations of the Strange", Volume 2, in "Manuscript Compilation of Maritime Narratives", (photocopy), Volume 5, Beijing Library Publishing House, 1997, p. 163.

Zhang Deyi: "Five Narrations of the Strange", Volume 9, in "Manuscript Compilation of Maritime Narratives of the Strange" (Reprint Edition), Volume 6, Beijing Library Publishing House, 1997, p. 229.

Kang Youwei, edited by Li Bingtao: Travel Notes of Eleven European Countries, Beijing: Social Sciences

In his travelogues about Germany, Kang Youwei either intentionally avoided mentioning the country he admired, or simply overlooked <sup>7</sup>it, or perhaps the German government at the time prioritized "national image management," purging or concealing elements in major cities that might undermine Germany's image of prosperity and progress. In any case, Kang's accounts contain little documentation of the hardships faced by Germany's lower classes. This may have been because Kang, who viewed the burgeoning "new political system" as a political ideal he nurtured, found it difficult to criticize the "people's suffering" that Zhang Deyi had observed, and thus left few records of these issues.

## 2. From Federalism to Great Unity: A Comparative Study of Kang

### Youwei's Political Views of Britain and Germany

Kang Youwei expressed the view that "Britain is the ancestor of contemporary constitutions" in various works. Even in the preface to the aforementioned *"Supplement to the German Travel Notes,"* Kang still praised "Britain as the pioneer of constitutionalism." After visiting the University of Oxford in June 1904, Kang Nanhai admired Britain's governance state, which "preserves both the old and the new, and values both progress and conservatism," considering it a beneficial correction to the utilitarian academic style represented by the United States at the time. Meanwhile, Kang Nanhai consistently compared his observations of British political and social governance with those of China <sup>8</sup>at the time. For instance, he noted that Oxford University, composed of 21 independent colleges, was united into one institution in a manner similar to the American federal system, believing this to be the foundation of Oxford's academic excellence. Observing the joyful, open, and confident spirit of Oxford students during rowing competitions, he reflected on the dialectical relationship between "ritual" and "joy," "community" and "self," as well as the governance concept of "sacrificing the small self for the greater community." This

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Academic Press, 2007, p. 3.

See Hu Kai, *China-Germany Convergence: Germany's Image in China Since 1840*, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2013, pp. 2-3.

Kang Youwei, compiled by Jiang Yihua and Zhang Ronghua, *Kang Youwei's Complete Works*, Volume 8, Beijing: Renmin University of China Press, 2009, p. 118.

marked a significant shift for Kang Nanhai. However, given his repeated emphasis in articles like "*The German Travel Notes*" on the unique historical conditions of Britain's constitutional formation—such as its isolated national status, weak royal power, and powerful aristocracy—along with its special and irreplicable geographical environment and historical habits, which limited other countries' ability to emulate Britain's path to prosperity, Germany's federal system seemed more likely to serve as a model for other late-developing nations. While the British constitutional system is indeed perfect, having remained free from major internal strife for over three centuries since the Glorious Revolution, and its governance customs are universally admired, its unique endowments make it an ideal model for late-developing countries to learn from.

In contrast, Germany gradually moved from a state of chaos and division toward unification and prosperity, with France and Russia as powerful rivals on both sides (much like China having Russia to the north and Japan to the east). This arduous process ultimately succeeded, becoming a subject of study for many theorists. Whether it is Marx's theory of social development stages or Max Weber's emphasis on the "Protestant Ethic" as the psychological and cultural foundation of Germany's late-mover advantage, both are ideological or theoretical models based on European historical experience. Marx's well-known theory of class struggle assigns the responsibility of building an ideal society to industrial workers. Although the gentry in China by the end of the 19th century had generally recognized the importance of "the precision of machinery manufacturing," valuing "work" was still not their tradition. In Kang Youwei's travelogue of Germany, there is little documentation of industrial workers. However, large factories associated with the lower-status industrial workers piqued Kang's great interest, and he devoted considerable space in his travelogue to recording the scenes of large factories and his observations and comments. Among these, Kang's <sup>9</sup>observations on German industrial organization

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Lenin: "Imperialism is the Highest Stage of Capitalism," Selected Works of Lenin, Vol. 2, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1972, p. 808. Interestingly, when Lenin wrote this famous popular revolutionary treatise in seclusion in Zurich in 1916, most of the monopoly enterprises he cited were German companies of that era (see

were particularly enlightening. Kang recorded in his travelogue: Germany's industrial organization, where various links within an industry are interconnected (similar to the organizational form of the **Concern**), although the profits of individual links appear to decline, the overall competitiveness of the industry strengthens, which in turn benefits each specific link. This line of thinking laid the foundation for the later "deprivatization" theory. Lenin also mentioned that the full development of capitalism requires the merger and union of various industries in his theory of "imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism".

While the consolidation of German industrial organizations boosted productivity, it simultaneously heightened unemployment risks and poverty among the working class. Despite the Bismarck-era social security system serving as a "firewall," Germany's social tensions became fully exposed after World War I entered a stalemate. This compelled Emperor Wilhelm II to implement parliamentary reform in late September 1918 and invite Social Democrats to form a coalition government in early October. Yet these measures ultimately failed to prevent the November 1918 revolution. In his seminal work *\*Lessons from German History\**, Albert Norden, a later Social Democrat, delivered a scathing critique of the corporate conglomerates and syndicate alliances during this period in the first chapter:

This new form of capitalist economy brings no benefit to the people. The dominant monopoly capital and cartels now arbitrarily inflate prices, doubling the exploitation of consumers. They relentlessly restrict production to maintain artificially low commodity supplies, keeping prices at unreasonable levels and thereby causing unemployment and poverty. Many inventions meant to benefit humanity are either bought out by them and destroyed, or sold at prices several times higher than their costs to reap huge profits (as seen with the pharmaceuticals of the Franco Trust).

Kang Youwei's criticism of the developed industrial countries still stays at the level of the inequality of the rich and the poor caused by the free competition. The limitation of the theory of "competition leads to prosperity" is mainly based on the general law of "three generations evolution", that is, the theory of competition is

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Selected Works of Lenin, Vol. 2, pp. 584–585).

[German] Albert Norden, translated by Mao Gong: *Lessons from German History*, Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 1958, p. 5.

applicable to the chaotic times, and will gradually lead to the great harmony in the future.

Thus, there are no states or rulers, all people live in harmony and equality, and the world is held 11in common—this is called the Great Unity.

On the path toward achieving Great Unity, the foremost obstacle lies in the existence of national borders. To eliminate these boundaries, excessive bloodshed (or even any bloodshed at all) should be avoided. One of the most ideal approaches would be for nations to voluntarily renounce their borders through mutual negotiations and unite as a single entity—a model exemplified by Germany. A key feature of Germany's federal system is its ability to merge states through ostensibly preferential treatment, which aligns perfectly with Kang Youwei's vision of achieving "Great Unity" through voluntary state negotiations. The reason Kang repeatedly praised Germany in his articles and treatises stems from his endorsement of this development model. In the political evolution framework presented in the "Three Generations of Great Unity Unification" table from his treatise \*The Book of Great Unity\*, Kang predicted that Germany would gradually merge with other European nations, ultimately leading to a renewed unification of Europe. This prophecy, rooted in political development theory, finds partial validation in the current trajectory of European political evolution.

Not only at the time, but even more than half a century later, many scholars still believe that Germany's unification process through voluntary negotiations among its constituent states can provide valuable lessons for today's European integration efforts. According to American scholars, the renowned international relations theory of "civil society"<sup>12</sup> proposed by contemporary German thinker Jurgen Habermas actually has deep roots in the <sup>13</sup>modern social science paradigm pioneered by Max Weber. Habermas linked the beginning of modernity with the formation <sup>14</sup>of European nation-states, tracing its origins to the French Revolution, then further back to the

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Kang Youwei: The Book of Great Unity, Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2005, pp. 71-72.  
 Sitton, John F. Habermas and contemporary society ,New York : Palgrave Macmillan ,2004,p21.  
 Jürgen Habermas, translated by Cao Weidong, Inclusion of the Other, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2002, p. 125.  
 Ibid., pp. 144–147.

Thirty Years' War and the 1648 Peace of Westphalia. Building on this foundation, Habermas developed his famous concept of "sublation of the nation-state." Like Kang Youwei, he recognized that the existence of "national boundaries<sup>15</sup>" within nation-states led to interest divisions and conflicts, yet politicians and scholars who created these conflicts did not consider themselves responsible, as they operated under the legitimate banner of "national interests above all." Therefore, he argued that democratic procedures in international politics were necessary to resolve conflicts arising from narrow national interests. However, unlike Kang Youwei, Habermas did not believe that establishing a "global government" worldwide could solve these issues. Instead, he advocated preserving the autonomy of nation-states, allowing them to participate equally with individual citizens or non-state civil society organizations in managing the affairs of the World Assembly. In fact, Kang Youwei not only emphasized the role of the public government in his book "Datong Shu", but also provided opportunities for individual citizens and non-state groups to participate in politics. He explicitly stated that this was to prevent the drawbacks of state oppression. However, this supplementary amendment appears less prominent when contrasted with his extensive discussions on the public services that the "general government" could provide.

In the background of the west learning in the late Qing Dynasty, Kang Youwei has a certain understanding of the history of Prussia and the following Germany through reading the European history works such as "The Record of the Law-Enforcement War" and "The New History of the West". However, in "The Book of Great Unity", this history is discussed in "the pain of having a country boundary".

So, for thirty years, the new and old religions fought, the west, England, France, Germany fought one hundred battles, the number of dead was ten million; but the German died 18 million, the population<sup>16</sup> was greatly reduced, the cities were scattered, the land was barren, the Netherlands and Switzerland therefore became independent.

In his works such as *Inclusion of the Other*, Habermas traced the origin of

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See Cao Weidong, Towards a World Without a World Government: The Historical Background and Practical Significance of Habermas' Discourse Politics, *Social Science Research*, No.6, 2003.

Kang Youwei, *The Book of Great Unity*, Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2001, p. 67.

modernity in Europe from the <sup>17</sup>French Revolution to the Thirty Years' War, which is the Thirty Years' New and Old Religion Struggle mentioned by Kang Youwei.

Yet when Kang Youwei and Habermas envisioned Europe's and the world's future in different historical contexts, they shared several strikingly aligned 'consensus.' Their perspectives on the European Union's prospects and Germany's role within it, for instance, were remarkably close. In his *\*Book of Great Unity\**, Kang Youwei discussed the process of global unification, specifically citing Prussia's model of forming the German Empire through negotiated unification, which he termed the 'system of the age of peace.'

The system of federal self-governance with centralized governance, as seen in the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, the Spring and Autumn period rulers like Duke Huan of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin, and modern Germany, represents a form of political unification. While the Jin king held equal status with the feudal lords and shared governance with Qi and Jin, the hegemony of Huan and Wen lacked structural solidity. In contrast, the Three Dynasties and modern Germany achieved a more robust unification. Both systems, however, involved emperors who enforced their rule through military might, despite differing governance structures.

In the German Confederation, while all member states are permitted to elect representatives, Prussia alone holds seventeen seats. Other major states, such as Prussia, elect six representatives, and Saxe-Wheldenburg four... After unification, the Grand Diet acquires supreme authority, establishing a central government to oversee all member states. Although it does not interfere in internal affairs, it enforces public law and military discipline to maintain order—a system akin to the German Confederation. However, all leadership is elected, with no imperial authority. This constitutes the ideal form of a united confederation.

Kang Youwei meticulously documented the electoral quotas and internal power-sharing mechanisms of German federal states in this work, which he refined after extensive travels to Germany to study its federal governance. Having lived in the United States longer than in other European countries, Kang — whose royalist association members owned substantial American assets, and whose wife He Zhanli

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Jürgen Habermas, translated by Cao Weidong, *Inclusion of the Other*, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2002, pp. 125-126.

Kang Youwei, *The Book of Great Unity*, Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2001, p. 71.

and daughter Kang Tongbi had studied there for years—was well-versed in the U.S. electoral process where presidential candidates (often former legislators or governors) are nominated by state electoral colleges. He recognized that American federal democracy far surpassed Germany's political system under Wilhelm II, while most late-developing nations at the time hadn't even achieved the "semi-democratic" unity of the German federal model. Kang thus opposed the "global utopianism<sup>19</sup>" that assumed perpetual peace through leaders' benevolent political will. Jurgen Habermas later critiqued this abstract vision, arguing that nation-states remain vital as bearers of diverse values and unique cultural identities. Equal participation of these pluralistic entities is essential for international justice, warning against the New Conservative approach of using unilateral force to resolve disputes — a tactic reminiscent of American neoconservative politics.

It is worth noting that Kang Youwei's belief in the German-led, voluntary merger approach to the "Great Unity" model persisted throughout his entire later years after his visit to Germany. However, not all Chinese intellectuals at the time shared the same optimistic view of Germany's political prospects during the reign of Wilhelm II. For instance, Zhang Deyi, mentioned earlier, believed that Wilhelm II's governance capabilities were questionable. At the time, Zhang resided in Berlin as a diplomat under the Qing government's envoy to Germany, Counselor Hong Jun, and had the opportunity to interact with Germany's upper echelons, hearing genuine assessments of the ruling class's capabilities from politically experienced and historically insightful German elites. While in Britain, Kang Youwei had access to high-ranking figures such as Admiral Berthold von Prieskow and Professor John R. T. Ziegler of Cambridge University, and his daughter Kang Tongbi and personal secretary He Zhanli were both fluent in English, providing him with deeper insights into British society. However, his opportunities to engage with Germany's upper echelons were far fewer. The German communication skills of Kang Youwei's tour guide and assistant

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Jürgen Habermas, translated by Cao Weidong, *Inclusion of the Other*, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2002, pp. 137-138.

were insufficient to initiate interactions. At that time, the academic accumulation of German sinology was relatively weak, and German scholars could not actively provide opinions through direct communication with Kang Youwei, as evidenced by Weber's research on China's religion. Even when Kang Youwei paid attention to folk customs and attempted to understand public sentiment through interviews, the ideological and speech control in Germany at the time prevented ordinary people from openly criticizing Emperor Wilhelm II's mistakes (as police would intervene and arrest them). Foreign tourists could only hear positive praise, leading to Kang Youwei's limited understanding of Wilhelm II and significant deviations in his perception of his true capabilities. This also resulted in major errors in his political predictions based on this information.

### 3. The Initial Practice and Value of Kang Youwei's Comparative Political History Research

During his September 1904 visit to Britain, Kang Youwei made a special trip to meet the renowned sinologist Herbert Allen Giles (1845–1935), then a professor of Chinese studies at Cambridge University. He emphasized that his primary focus in studying the political and social conditions of Britain and America had been the 'rise and fall of ethnic groups.'

I have traveled through various countries, harboring a profound desire in my heart. I believe that the comparison between our nation and those of Europe and America does not depend on the strength or weakness of our current national power, but rather on the prosperity or decline of our race in the future. If our race is indeed foolish and weak, then even if our country can achieve what the Huns 'Helaunus did to destroy the Western Roman Empire, or what the Turks' Suleiman did to conquer the Eastern Roman Empire, and even rival the strength of the ancient Tibet, Khitan, Jurchen, and Mongols, it will ultimately be no more than a promotion and expansion of China. 20In that case, what can we rely on for temporary prosperity? Therefore, if our race is indeed foolish and weak, it will inevitably perish alongside the dark and brown races. But if our race is indeed strong and wise, then just as the Romans were trampled by the Ottomans and Hungarians, why can't we become the dominant power of the earth today? Hence, what I observe and contemplate deeply while traveling among the people of Europe and America is precisely this

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"Meeting with Zhai Lushi(Herbert Allen Giles ) , the Chief Chinese Language Instructor at British University of London", in Kang Youwei's Complete Works, Volume 8, Beijing: Renmin University Press, 2009, p. 28.

matter.

In this dialogue, Kang Youwei proposed his views on the criteria for the prosperity and decline of Chinese culture, emphasizing that what matters is the quality of the national race and the capacity for civilizational creation, rather than temporary military strength or vast territory. According to his understanding of world history, nomadic military empires that once conquered Eurasia, such as the Xiongnu and Turkic empires, though they could dominate for a time, were eventually assimilated by more advanced cultures with stronger assimilative capabilities. However, what he pondered was the situation of China at that time in the process where the creativity of this racial civilization interacted with the rise and fall of national power. Since the Chinese race, unlike black and brown races, had not been historically disadvantaged for long, nor had it been glorious in history, and was even oppressed everywhere at the beginning of the 20th century, but had successfully assimilated powerful nomadic dynasties such as the Tuoba tribes of Xianbei, Khitan, Jurchen, and Mongols, it demonstrated that Chinese culture and race still possessed considerable creativity. Yet, since China had once been as glorious and powerful as the Roman Empire in history, and European powers that claimed to be the inheritors of Roman culture rose again at the beginning of the 20th century, why did China not become "the hegemony of the earth" like them? In the following paragraphs, Kang Youwei compared the characteristics of the European and American countries he had seen with those of China in terms of racial features, educational systems, superiority and inferiority of thinking, invention and manufacturing capabilities, as well as dietary habits. He responded to the "China inferiority theory" circulating among scholars in Europe, America, and China at that time, pointing out that the Chinese were not inferior to Westerners in these aspects. The reason for China's declining national strength and continuous military and diplomatic setbacks at that time was that the unification period was too long, lacking an institutional and cultural environment conducive to competition and innovation.

Yet today's defeat stems from our centralized governance. This system stifles intellectual competition and overreaches the ruler's authority, thus failing to nurture creativity. The Europeans,

who accuse us of clinging to antiquity, are mistaken. Our millennia-old adherence to tradition is profound indeed. They seek new frontiers through global rivalry; upon gaining these, they develop new perspectives. When comparing these with the old, the flaws of outdated ways become glaringly apparent. The old is discarded, while the new is embraced and nurtured. With solid foundations, success comes naturally—requiring only minor adjustments to achieve remarkable results.

Kang Youwei's argument that "free competition is conducive to enhancing the creative capacity of knowledge and ideas" closely aligns with the utilitarian interpretation of the value of freedom by European liberals at the time (as seen in Mill's *\*On Liberty\** with similar logic). In fact, Kang Youwei was also aware <sup>22</sup>of the immense influence of Bentham's doctrine during that period. "It was precisely because of the initial enlightenment of academia that Bentham's new theories emerged, much like the various philosophers of the Warring States period, who, lacking a unified tradition, each expressed their own biases." However, Kang Youwei did not believe that <sup>23</sup>China faced significant obstacles in promoting the formation of a free competition system. This was evident from the qualities of individuals he observed during his travels, such as an electrical inventor in Chicago, USA, the mayors of New York and Philadelphia, and the "governor" of Erie. These people did not see their moral and intellectual standards improve simply because they were born in a free environment. Moreover, Chinese inventors like Liang Mou in Philadelphia and Yu Huanhe in Portland also made significant technological innovations in free environments, demonstrating that the Chinese people were not inherently inferior in quality; what they lacked was merely a suitable institutional environment.

As mentioned above, when Kang Youwei conducted political investigations in Europe, he never forgot to compare his observations with the domestic situation in China. This painstaking effort was later recognized by successors such as Shu Xincheng. For most young people at the time who were concerned about the future of the country, it was still quite difficult to conduct in-depth investigations <sup>24</sup>into political customs in Europe and America through long-term study abroad. According

<sup>22</sup>"British Supervisor of British University Chinese General Instructor Zhai Luoshi Meeting Record", see "Complete Works of Kang Youwei", Volume 8, Beijing: Renmin University Press, 2009, p. 29-30.

<sup>Ibid.</sup>, p. 31.

<sup>Ibid.</sup>, p. 30.

<sup>23</sup>Li Yunguang, *A Critical Study of Kang Youwei's Family Letters*, Hong Kong: Huiwen Pavilion Bookstore, 1979, p. 17.

to the research of Professor Li Yunguang, Kang Youwei's granddaughter's husband, the Royalist Society once allocated \$100,000 from the raised million-dollar funds specifically for President Kang Youwei's "political investigations" in Europe and America. The six-year European tour supported by this substantial amount was clearly beyond the reach of ordinary students. Thus, Kang Youwei's comparative political history research between China and Europe also held rare pioneering significance.

Furthermore, Kang Youwei's German travels and comparative analyses reveal an alternative "latent possibility" within European intellectual discourse from the Franco-Prussian War to the eve of World War I. This manifested in debates about the merits <sup>25</sup> of the "German model" among late-developing nations versus the constitutional parliamentary sovereignty path of Britain. Kang's critical assessment of the French Revolution stems from his emphasis on the experiences of Britain and Germany. By framing the French Revolution as a unique national phenomenon and tracing its specific causes through historical, cultural, institutional, and social lenses, Kang demonstrated early awareness of comparative political science. Indeed, he can be regarded as a pioneer and practical architect of comparative political historiography.

German scholar Fei Lu once wrote an article titled "On Kang Youwei's Analogical Method in European Historical Research," pointing out that Kang Youwei extensively used the "list analogy" method<sup>26</sup>, which combined the characteristics of traditional Chinese historiography with modern historical inspiration, when examining the reasons for the rise and fall of major European countries in modern times. For Fei Lu and other German scholars, his concern might have been how Kang Youwei compared China with Germany, a model developed country, involving the issue of "seeking wisdom" from heterogeneous Eastern and Western civilizations with little cultural commonality. The similarity between Japanese and Chinese cultural traits made the problem of learning, imitating, and selecting more complex. Many

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See Ye Jun, \*Literary and Historical Fieldwork and the Bismarck Era: A Study of the Interaction between German Literature, Thought and Politics\*, Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2013.

[German] Fei Lu( Roland Felber ): On Kang Youwei's Analogy Method in European History Research, published in Journal of Foshan University of Science and Technology, April 2000, Volume 18, Issue 3.

scholars felt the need to trace back to the source to examine whether Western doctrines, filtered through Japan, remained in their original form. Liang Qichao, who had lived in Japan since the autumn of 1898, actively participated in politics after returning to China. During the political turbulence of the early Republic of China, he deeply felt that his previous understanding of European political and social systems through Japanese translations was flawed. After announcing his withdrawal from politics at the end of 1918, the first thing Liang did was to visit Europe to study politics, which also somewhat revealed that studying in Europe and clarifying the principles of Western political and social systems became a common pursuit for Kang Youwei and his successors who cared about the fate of the nation. The discussion topics Kang set forth back then have also continued to influence later "seekers of wisdom" who went to Europe.

#### 4. A brief conclusion: What can contemporary Chinese thinkers learn from the historical lessons of modern Europe?

As the German scholar Roland Felber, cited in this article, pointed out, Kang Youwei seriously studied the history of modern political changes in major European countries in the 1890s. Based on these studies of the politics and history of major European powers, Kang Youwei advised the then Emperor Guangxu that China should avoid two possible tragic fates: the monarchy being overthrown by a popular revolution like in France, or its territory being partitioned by powerful neighbors like Russia and Germany did to Poland. From a certain perspective, Kang Youwei's prophecy did not fail. The rule of the Qing dynasty monarchs was indeed overthrown a little more than a decade later, and Russia, this powerful and greedy neighbor, seized several million square kilometers of China's historical territory by participating in imperialist alliances that divided China.

Kang Youwei's attitude toward history was quite open and pragmatic. Despite the fact that China in the late Qing Dynasty had been invaded by Russia and Japan, he still advised Emperor Guangxu to learn from these two neighboring countries.

Meanwhile, when he wrote papers and works on the historical and political studies of European countries, the UK, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy had all participated in the 1900 invasion of China by the Eight-Nation Alliance. He still called on the Chinese people to study the excellent political organizational forms of European countries, even though the powerful representatives of these countries had once forced China to sign humiliating unequal treaties. In Kang Youwei's research on political history, countries such as France, Russia, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, and even Poland and Sweden all have certain superior systems from which Chinese politicians can learn. The idea of 'learning from the developed countries of Europe,' after being vigorously promoted by Kang Youwei and his student Liang Qichao, profoundly influenced several generations. If we set aside the more than twenty years of the Soviet Union's special influence on China, the trend of Chinese people wanting to learn political governance experiences from European countries lasted for nearly a hundred years, only recently beginning to undergo some subtle changes.

So how should contemporary Chinese young intellectuals confront Kang Youwei's intellectual legacy? Can the internal driving forces or lessons from European countries gradually moving toward 'grand unity' and peaceful alliances after political fragmentation and two world wars, as mentioned at the beginning of this article with reference to French scholar Francois Jullien's view, serve as a valuable 'historical mirror' for contemporary China? Should we be wary of Russia's territorial expansion ambitions and avoid becoming the 'second Poland' in history or a weakened Qing government? Or how should we make the European powers believe that, although contemporary China has strong economic strength, its knowledge of participating in international political interactions between modern civilized countries is still relatively limited, similar to Max Weber's observations on Germany's political immaturity in the early 20th century. History is still waiting for a rational answer.

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