

People to People Communication: A case study of Education Cooperation between China and CEECs from 2006-2016¹

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Abstract: - This article analysis the basic situation of 16 CEE Countries students to study in China from 2006-2016 to examine how the “16+1” cooperation framework promotes China-CEECs educational cooperation? The main finds reveals that in 2006-2016, the total number of international students studying in China from 16 CEE Countries in Central and Eastern Europe has been increasing year by year. Especially since the formation of the “16+1” cooperation in 2012, the number of international students from 16 CEE Countries in Central and Eastern Europe has increased significantly, Meanwhile the category of countries and professionals of international students are more and more diversity and balance. The authors suggest that it’s should be more introduction to study in China to promote further cooperation.

Key words: People to People bond; China-CEECs educational cooperation; International students
JEL Classification: F, F19

1. Introduction

The “16+1” platform involves 16 countries from the Central and Eastern Europe and China. The “16+1 ” cooperation framework marks the first time that China takes a leadership role in a region that is not part of what is referred as Global South. After common interest in establishing the platform has been defined in the first round of consultations in China-CEE National Economic and Trade Forum in 2011, ‘16+1’ have been officially established as a multilateral framework in 2012 during then Premier Wen Jiabao’s visit to Poland and meeting with leaders and high-level representative of 16 CEE countries.

Establishment of “16+1” marks a dramatic change in the relationship between China and CEE. During the Cold War period, the two sides fostered their economic ties and political communication in 1950s, regardless of China and CEE were generally quite distant for most of the Cold War due to tensions between the USSR and China. Since the Cold War, the political and economic relations between CEE and China significantly lagged those between China and West European countries, illustrated by lower intensity of diplomatic activities between CEE countries and China, as well as by the fact that trade between China and CEE is only equivalent to 1/10 of China-EU trade . “16+1” was established to explore the untapped potential of expanding and deepening exchange and cooperation between China and CEE. Both sides take a very pragmatic approach toward promoting trade, investment and economic cooperation, all of which take priority over political concerns.

Since 2012, China’s multilateral cooperation with CEE has progressed from “rediscovering” each other to a structured exploration of common interests, as it relies on a number of various increasingly frequent, diverse

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and/or institutionalized mechanisms and practices. “16+1” hence possess all typical characteristics of China-led multilateral platforms. As will be discussed in greater detail in the following paragraphs, the initiative institutionalized an annual meeting of the Head of the States, regular meetings on ministerial and sub-ministerial level, and increasing number of exchange mechanisms spanning various areas, such as trade and investment, agriculture, education and research, culture and media, tourism, and others. Additionally, China has put on disposal USD 13 billion in loans and another USD 3 billion in investment capital for the region, and is financing most of the initiatives under the framework, reflective of both the economic asymmetry between China and other participating countries, as well as of Beijing’s role as a key driving-force and implementer within the “16+1”.

Furthermore, growing economic cooperation are coupled with intensification of people to people communication between CEE countries and China on bilateral level. The China-CEE relationship has experienced ups and downs in the past 70 years. Overall, due to the many differences between the two sides, both politically and with regard to the disparity of economic scale, China and the CEE have had difficulties in reaching mutual understanding. Thus, people to people communication is a very unique channel to rebuild mutual trust. As of December 2017, China and the CEE countries had formed more than 60 friendly provinces and states and more than 100 pairs of sister cities. Since the launch of the ‘16+1 cooperation’, the number of direct flights between China and the CEE countries has increased significantly, in part to ferry the booming tourist flows that have increased by 146 per cent between 2011 and 2016. The CEE countries have also committed to further developing tourist facilities that are more suitable for Chinese tourists’ consumption habits.

In people to people communication area, education Cooperation between China and CEECs also deserves attention. China-CEEC Education Policy Dialogue is held from 2013. The collaboration between China and CEECs’ higher education institutions is of great significance to China’s international cooperation work in higher education. China has signed the agreement on mutual recognition of degree and diploma with 8 CEE countries until May 2018. The number of overseas students in each other’s territory more than 10,000 now. China-CEEC Higher Education Institutions Consortium founded in 2014.²

So, This article analyzes the basic situation of 16 CEE Countries students to study in China from 2006-2016 according to the open data from Chinese Ministry of Education website to examine the question, How the China –CEECs “16+1 cooperation ”platform promotes China-CEECs higher educational cooperation? Three assumptions as follows: 1) What’s the situation of China-CEECs higher educational cooperation before 2012 ? 2) What’s the progress of China-CEECs higher educational cooperation after the foundation of China –CEECs “16+1 cooperation ”platform ? 3) In which areas the “16+1 cooperation ”platform really plays a role in China-CEECs educational cooperation ? The research methods of this study include : Statistical analysis and Questionnaire research.

2. China- CEECs Education Cooperation guidelines in “16+1” summit

The annual China-CEE Summit of Head of States of member countries is the core element of the “16+1” cooperation platform between China and CEE. Cooperative agendas and outlines reached and announced in the past summits have provided the principles and broad directions for cooperation between the involved parties. For example, “China’s Twelve Measures for Promoting Friendly Cooperation with Central and Eastern European Countries” issued at the first Warsaw summit in 2012 set the general context and objectives of the “16+1” cooperation mechanism. Since then, every Summit has been followed by issuance of joint declarations, named “guidelines”, which summarize the achievements of the framework in the past year, and lay out the goals for the upcoming year. At the first China-Central and Eastern European Leaders’ Warsaw Summit held in 2012, China’s twelve initiatives to promote friendly cooperation with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe put forward that 5,000 scholarships should be offered to 16 countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the next five years. Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms in 16 countries should be supported. In the

² China-CEEC Higher Education Institution Consortium , <https://www.ccheic.org/home>, retrieved April 5, 2019

next five years, 1,000 students from all countries will be invited to study Chinese in China. Inter-university exchanges and alliances should be strengthened. In the next five years, 1000 students and scholars will be sent to study in 16 countries. The Ministry of Education of China plans to hold the "China-Central and Eastern European Countries Education Policy Dialogue" in China next year (CEEC- China, 2019).

On November 26, 2013, the second China-Central and Eastern European Leaders' meeting was held in Bucharest, Romania. In the Bucharest Outline issued in 2013, it was pointed out that China-Central and Eastern European countries should hold regular dialogue on education policies. It was actively discussed to establish China-Central and Eastern European Union of Universities (The Bucharest Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, 2019). On December 16, 2014, the Third China-Central and Eastern European Leaders' Meeting was held in Belgrade, Serbia. In the Belgrade Outline issued in 2014, it was pointed out that the Third China-Central and Eastern European Education Policy Dialogue would be held in the Central and Eastern European countries in 2015. Welcomes the Sofia University of Bulgaria as the first rotating president of the China-Central and Eastern European Union of Universities, and supports the Federation in playing an important role in promoting educational exchanges and cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European countries (The Belgrade Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, 2019).

On November 24, 2015, the fourth China-Central and Eastern European Leaders' Meeting was held in Suzhou, China. Premier Li Keqiang put forward the "1+6" cooperation framework, which is one goal and six key points. One of the key points is to expand the breadth and depth of cultural exchanges. In the Suzhou Platform issued in 2015, it was pointed out that the fourth China-Central and Eastern European Countries Educational Policy Dialogue and the third meeting of China-Central and Eastern European Union of Universities would be held in China in 2016 (The Suzhou Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, 2016). People to People exchange is also be strengthened in Medium-Term Agenda for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries ,such as the three points follows: The teaching and learning of Mandarin in CEEC will be encouraged and the teaching and learning of the languages of CEEC will be strengthened in China; China-CEEC exchanges of students will be expanded. The Participants will step up cooperation on mutual recognition of academic degrees, credentials and credit, joint research and country- and region-specific research; The Participants will organize the China-CEEC Education Policy Dialogue alternately in China and one of the CEECs on a regular basis and support the functioning of the China- CEEC Higher Education Institutes Consortium (The Medium-Term Agenda for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, 2019).

On November 5, 2016, the Fifth China-Central and Eastern European Leaders' Meeting was held in Riga, Latvia. Premier Li Keqiang put forward four major initiatives on "16+1 Cooperation". One of them was to further strengthen exchanges and cooperation in the humanities field. In the Riga Outline issued in 2016, it was pointed out that the Fifth China-Central and Eastern European Countries' Education Policy Dialogue and China would be held in 2017 on the Fourth Meeting of the Federation of Universities of Central and Eastern European Countries (The Riga Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, 2017).

On November 27, 2017, the Sixth China-Central and Eastern European Leaders' Meeting was held in Budapest, Hungary. Premier Li Keqiang put forward five suggestions, one of which was to deepen cultural exchanges. In the Budapest Platform issued in 2017, it is pointed out that the sixth China-Central and Eastern European Countries Educational Policy Dialogue and the fifth meeting of China-Central and Eastern European Union of Universities will be held in 2018. The parties welcomed the establishment of the Second Secretariat of the China-Central and Eastern European Union of Universities by the University of Novi Sad, Serbia. All parties welcomed the signing of educational cooperation agreements between China and Central and Eastern European countries (The Budapest Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, 2019).

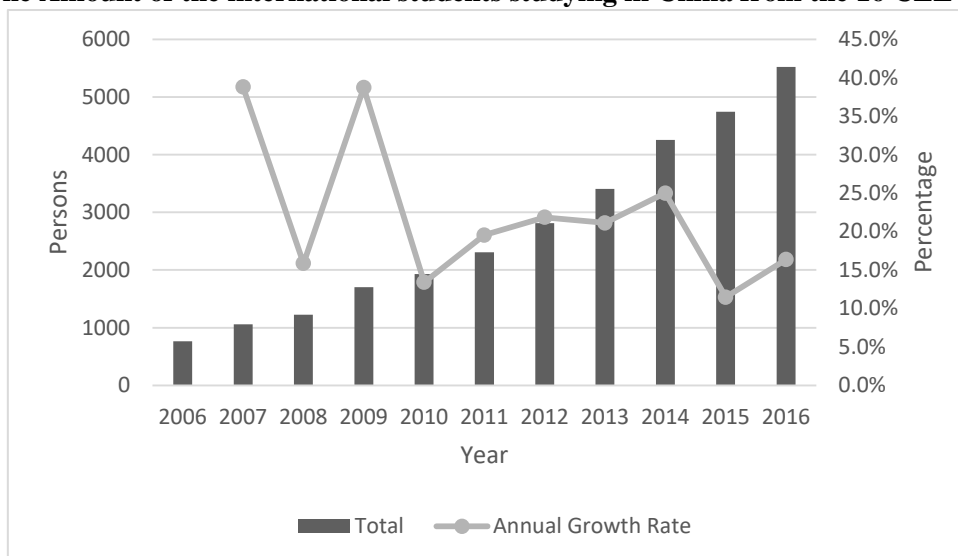
On July 7, 2018, the Seventh China-Central and Eastern European Leaders' Meeting was held in Sofia, Bulgaria. Premier Li Keqiang put forward five suggestions on the blueprint for future development of "16+1 cooperation", one of which is to constantly tighten the ties of cultural exchanges. In the Sofia Platform for China-Central and Eastern European Countries Cooperation issued in 2018, it was pointed out that all parties

declared 2019 the "16+1 Year of Education and Youth Exchange". All parties' support enhancing mutual understanding and deepening cooperation in the fields of education and youth through dialogue, visits and training. The parties appreciate China's hosting of the Sixth China-Central and Eastern European Education Policy Dialogue and are willing to jointly carry out educational capacity-building projects. China will invite education officials and principals from Central and Eastern European countries to visit China and carry out education capacity training. We welcome the Central and Eastern European countries to attend the China Education Exhibition in 2019 to strengthen the exchange and dialogue between China and universities in Central and Eastern European countries. All parties support the establishment of 16+1 youth development centers in Central and Eastern European countries. In 2019, China will continue to hold the "Bridge of the Future" China-Central and Eastern Europe Youth Research and Exchange Camp. In 2019, the Seventh China-Central and Eastern European Countries Educational Policy Dialogue and the Sixth Meeting of China-Central and Eastern European Universities Federation were held in Central and Eastern European countries (The Sofia Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, 2019).

People to People exchange are also one of important cooperation area stated in EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation. Three aims are including :first ,Encourage the learning of the Chinese language and EU languages in the education systems of the EU and China; second, Expand students and scholars exchange, and support mutual exchange visits of Young People .third ,Continue dialogue on education policy, notably in the framework of the Higher Education Platform for Cooperation and Exchanges.³ Therefore, people to people exchanges between China and Central and Eastern Europe is an important complement to the people to people communication between China and Europe. The 16+1 mechanism should be seen as an important part of and a useful supplement to China–EU cooperation. For countries still wishing to join the European Union, the 16+1 cooperation helps them narrow the development gap, which is conducive to their early entry. In the end, actions speak louder than words. The 16+1 cooperation should continue to work hard and do more practical things to prove that China is not aiming to divide Europe but instead wants to promote China–EU cooperation through the 16+1 cooperation.

Results: The number of the international students studying in China from the CEE Countries In 2006-2016, the total number of international students coming to China from 16 countries in Central and Eastern Europe has been increasing year by year. In 2016, the total number of international students coming to China in 16 countries reached more than 5,500, more than seven times that of 763 in 2006, an increase of 16.4% over 2015 (See Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1.: The Amount of the international students studying in China from the 16 CEE Countries



Source: Created by authors.

Table 1.1 lists the total number and growth of international students from China along the “Belt and Road” countries in 2006-2016 and 16 countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Although in terms of the number of

³ http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/china/docs/eu-china_2020_strategic_agenda_en.pdf, retrieved April 5, 2019

students, until 2016, the number of international students from 16 countries in Central and Eastern Europe only accounted for 2.7% of the total number of international students in the “Belt and Road” countries. However, its growth rate in recent years has been significantly higher than the overall growth rate of international students coming to China along the “Belt and Road” countries. Especially since the formation of 16+1 cooperation in 2012, the growth rate has been 7.3% to 17.3% higher than the overall. From 2013 to 2016, the average annual growth rate of international students from 16 countries in Central and Eastern Europe reached 18.5%, which was significantly higher than the average annual growth rate of 9.6% in the countries along the “Belt and Road”(See table 1.1)

Table 1.1 International students from China from the “Belt and Road” countries and 16 CEE countries

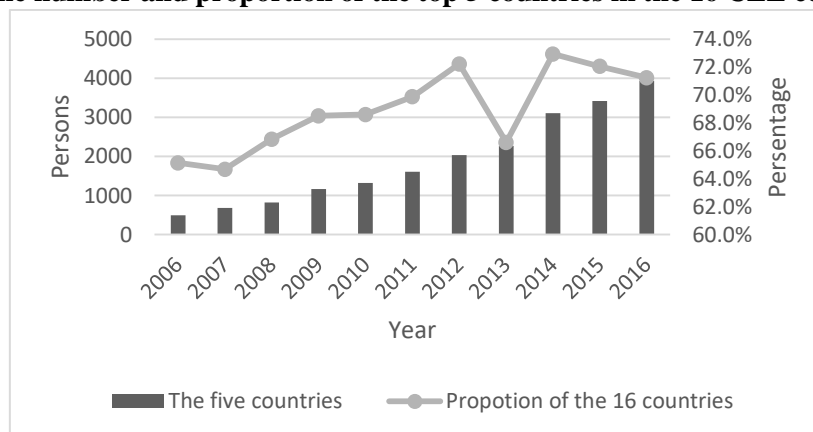
Index Year	International students from the Belt and Road Countries		International students from the 16 CEE Countries of Central and Eastern Europe
	Annual Growth Rate	Annual Growth Rate	Proportion of the Belt and Road Countries
2006	-	-	1.5%
2007	33.2%	38.8%	1.6%
2008	18.0%	15.9%	1.6%
2009	20.5%	38.7%	1.8%
2010	16.3%	13.4%	1.7%
2011	14.8%	19.5%	1.8%
2012	13.6%	21.8%	2.0%
2013	13.8%	21.1%	2.1%
2014	7.7%	25.0%	2.4%
2015	7.4%	11.5%	2.5%
2016	9.5%	16.4%	2.7%

Source:

Created by authors, based on national statistics.

In 2006-2016, the top five international students in the 16 countries were always Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. The above five countries accounted for 65%-73% of the total number of 16 countries over the years (See Figure 1.2). In 2013, the proportion of international students in the five countries from the 16 countries showed a significant decline. Although it rebounded in 2014, it also showed a downward trend. This shows that since the formation of “16+1” cooperation, international students from in the 16 countries is developing towards diversity and balance.

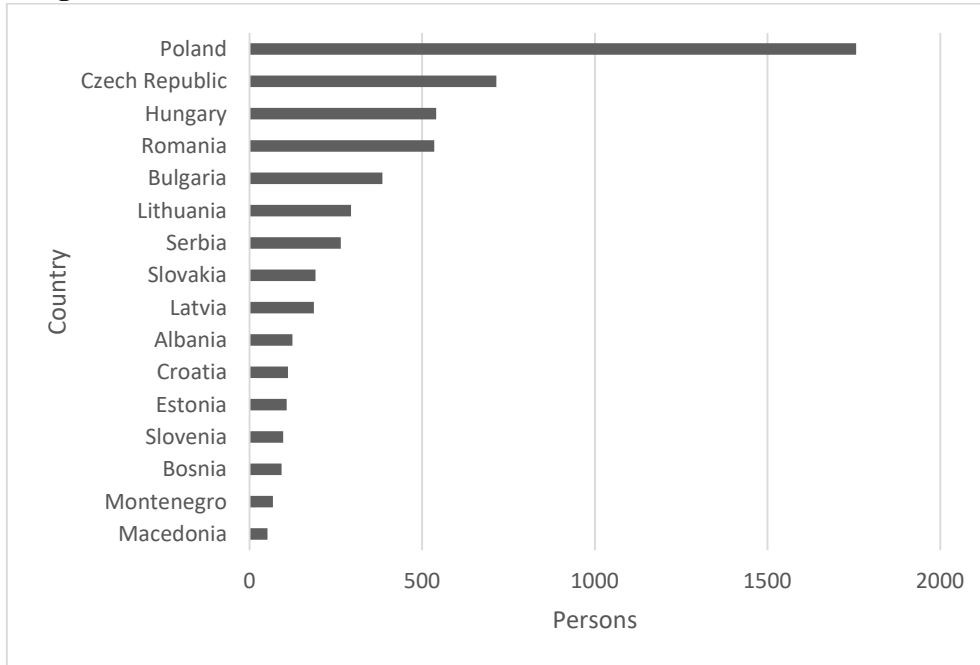
Figure 1.2.: The number and proportion of the top 5 countries in the 16 CEE countries



Source: Created by authors.

In the past 10 years, the overall size of international students from 16 countries in Central and Eastern Europe has grown significantly. The international students from all countries in China have achieved rapid growth in the past decade, but the differences between countries are large. As shown in Figure 1.3, in 2016, the country with the largest number of international students in China, Poland, reached 1,757 in that year. The least countries are Macedonia, with only 52 people.

Figure 1.3.: The International Students from the 16 CEE Countries in 2016

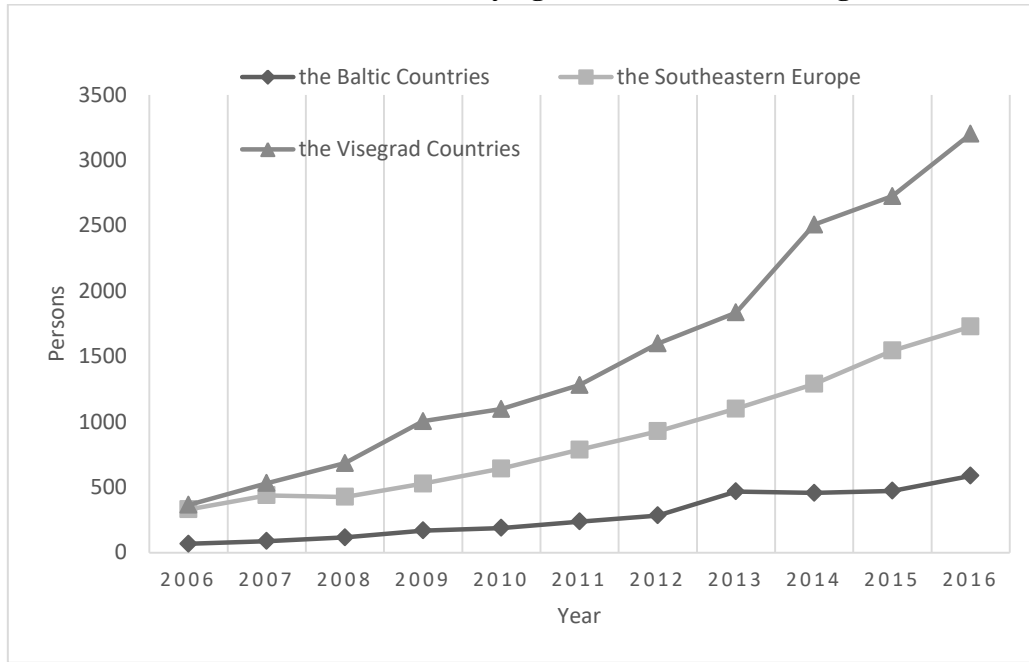


Source: Created by authors.

Differences among the CEE countries in cultural, geographic, economic and political environment and conditions create difficulties for China to cooperate effectively through a single overall platform. On the other hand, such heterogeneity opens the door for customized approaches toward groups of countries with similar “characteristics”. Hence, China is additionally calibrating cooperation with three sub-regional clusters of countries to supplement “16+1”-level exchange. These include Visegrád Group(Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia), Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), and the Southeastern Europe, including Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania.

Figure 2.2 shows the trend of the number of international students coming to China in three different regions of the 16 countries of Central and Eastern Europe during the decade. It can be seen from the figure that the Visegrad four countries are the regions with the largest number of international students in China over the years, mainly due to Poland. The contributions of the Czech Republic and Hungary can be seen from Figure 2.2. Since the formation of the 16+1 cooperation, the sub-regional differences in the size of international students in China have been expanding, showing a trend of stronger development in the region with the basis of the previous exchange experience.

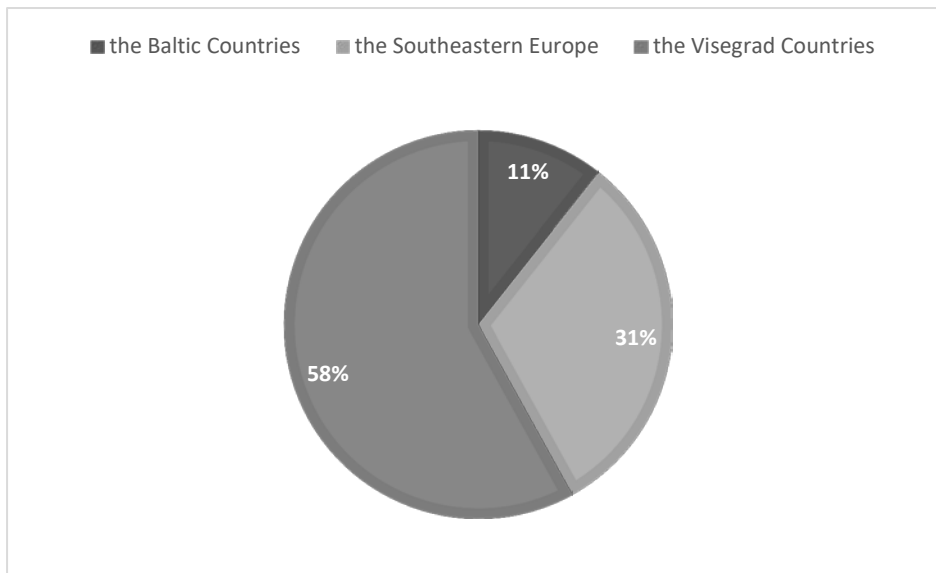
Figure 2.2.: Trends of international students studying in China from three regions of CEE countries



Source: Created by authors

In 2016, the number of international students in the three regions of Visegrad, Southeastern Europe and the Baltic countries of Visegrad was 58.0%, 31.3% and 10.7%. The region of the Visegrad four countries still tops the list (See Figure 2.3).

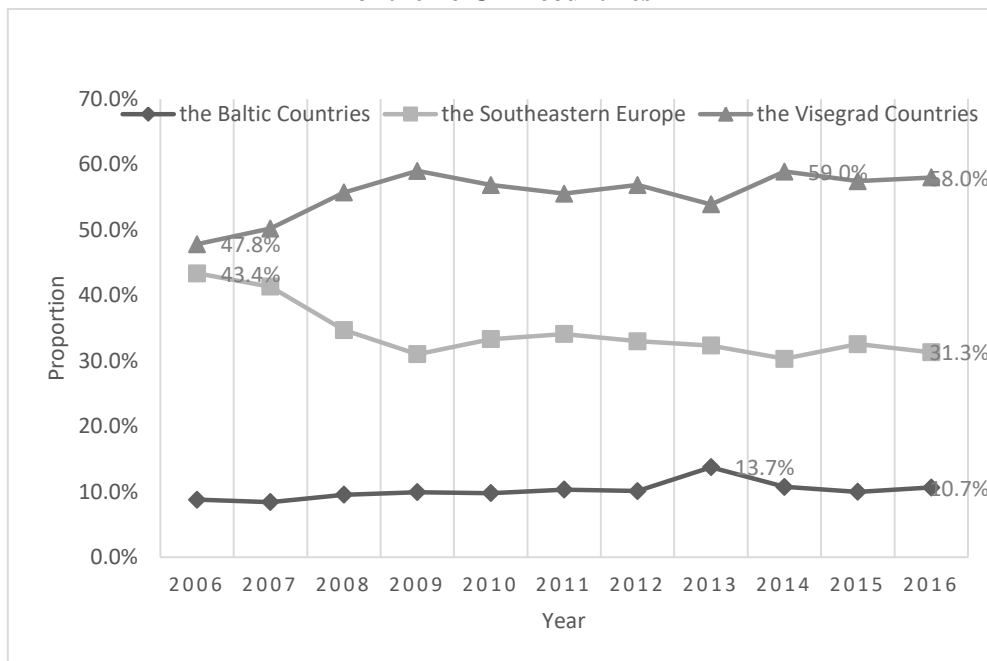
Figure 2.3.: Proportions of the international students studying in China from the three regions in 2016



Source: Created by authors

As can be seen from Figure 2.4, during the decade, the number of international students from the Baltic countries to China increased, while the proportion of the total number of people did not change much, and remained at around 8%-10%, with the exception of 13.7% in 2013; In contrast, the proportion of international students coming to China in the nine countries of Southeast Europe has shown an overall downward trend, while the Visegrad four countries have the opposite trend, showing an overall upward trend.

Figure 2.4.: Proportions and trend of the international students studying in China from the three regions of the 16 CEE countries

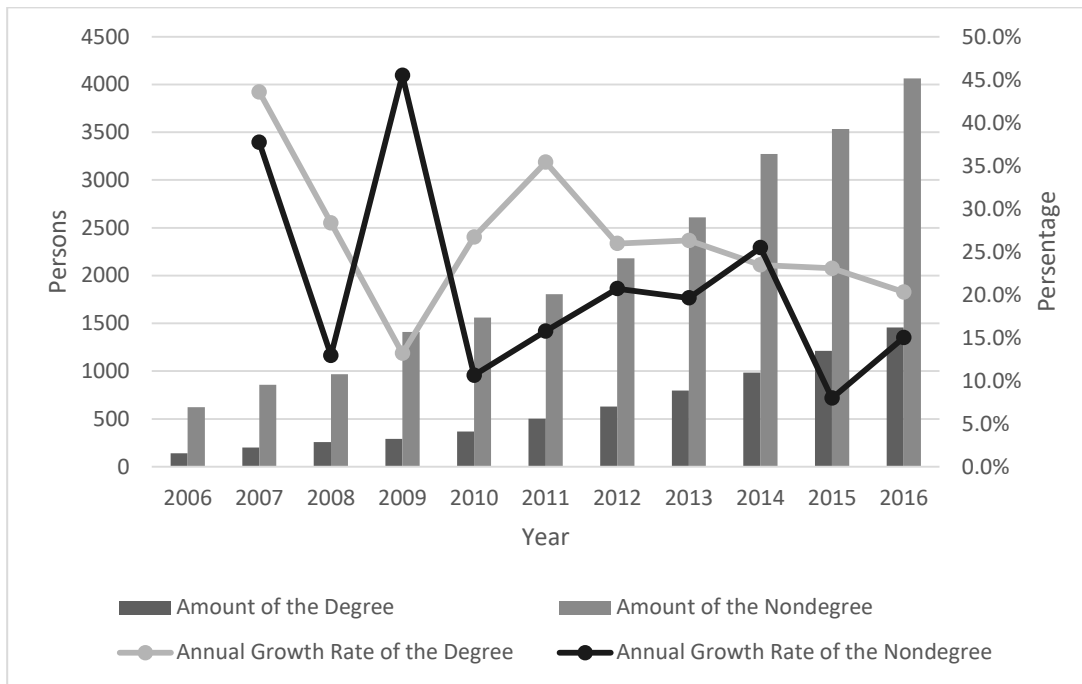


Source: Created by authors.

With the continuous increase in the number of international students from 16 countries in Central and Eastern Europe between 2006 and 2016, the international student structure in China has also undergone great changes. According to the regulations of the International Exchange and Cooperation Department of the Ministry of Education of China, “International students with academic qualifications” including specialist students, undergraduate students, master’s students and doctoral students. “Non-academic International students” refers to all kinds of long-term and short-term foreign students, including advanced, general, language and short-term foreign students, who do not study for higher academic degrees in China. Advanced students refer to those who have master’s degree or above and come to China for further study on a particular subject. General students refer to those who are sophomore or above. Language students refer to those who come to China for further study with the purpose of learning and improving their Chinese language proficiency. Short-term students refer to those who come to China for less than one semester. The following will describe the situation according to the learning categories, academic qualifications and funding sources of international students in China.

As shown in Figure 3.1, in the decade from 2006 to 2016, among the 16 international students from Central and Eastern Europe, the academic and non-degree students showed a trend of increasing year by year. In 2010, the master’s degree exceeded the undergraduate and became the largest group to study in China. Among them, the non-degree calendar has occupied the main position in the calendar, and in 2016 it broke through 4,000 people. In 2013, the differences in the size of students at different levels of education were increasing, and the growth rate of academic students tends to be stable. And the main status of master students and undergraduates was increasingly prominent. There are optimization trends in the academic structure of international students from 16 countries.

Figure 3.1.: The number and proportion of the Degree students and the Non-degree students from CEE countries

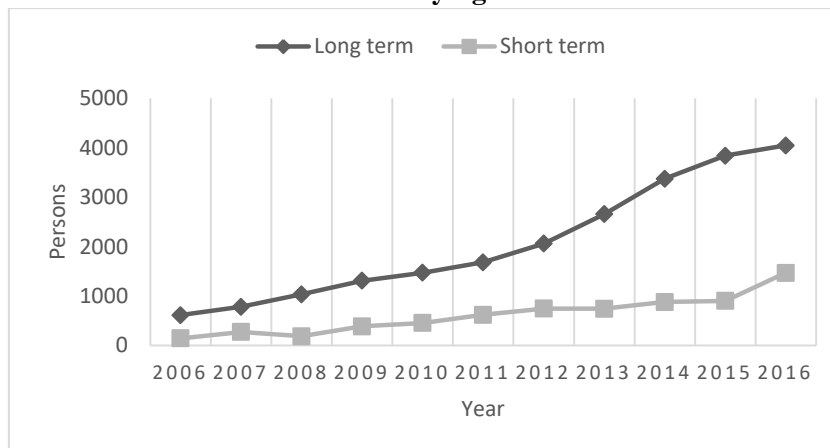


Source: Created by authors.

It is noteworthy that since the formation of the 16+1 cooperation, the top five countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria) signed mutual recognition agreements with China. The further strengthen the education cooperation between China and these countries.

Figure 3.2 shows the long-term international (more than three months) and short-term (less than three months) of the 16 countries in Central and Eastern Europe. It can be seen that since the 16+1 cooperation was concluded, it has achieved rapid growth in long-term life. The distance between the students and the short-term students is opened year by year. In 2016, the long-term student broke through 4,000 people.

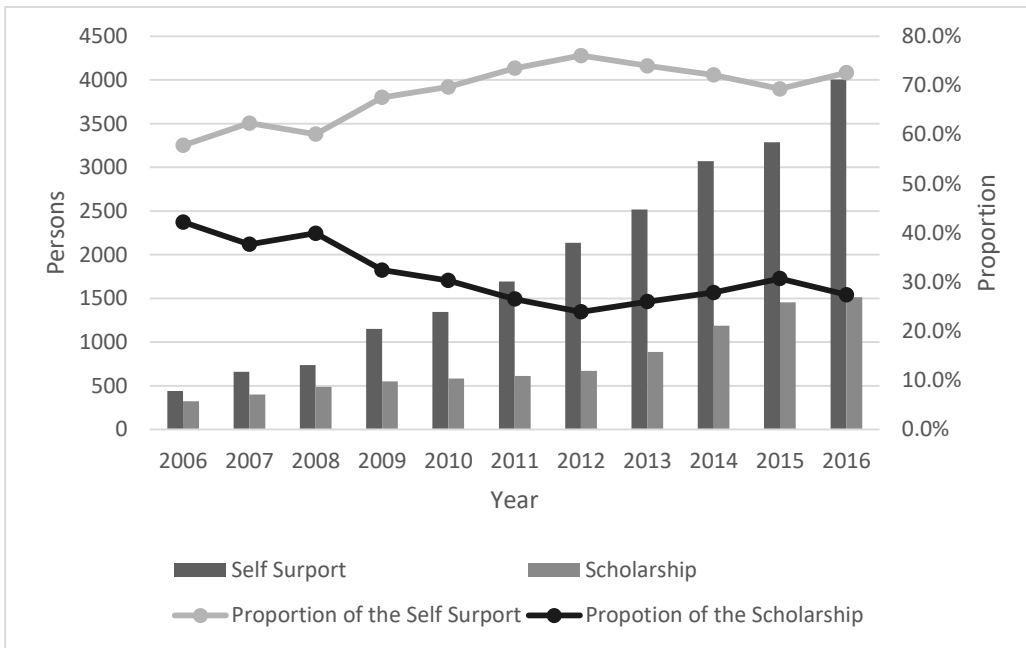
Figure 3.2.: The trends of the Long term and the short term(less than 3 months) students from CEE countries studying in China



Source: Created by authors

The number of Self- Support Students continued to grow, the number of students was significantly higher than that of scholarship-supported students. In 2016, the proportion of self-Support students reached 72.6%, and the proportion of scholarship students was 27.4%. (See Figure 3.3)

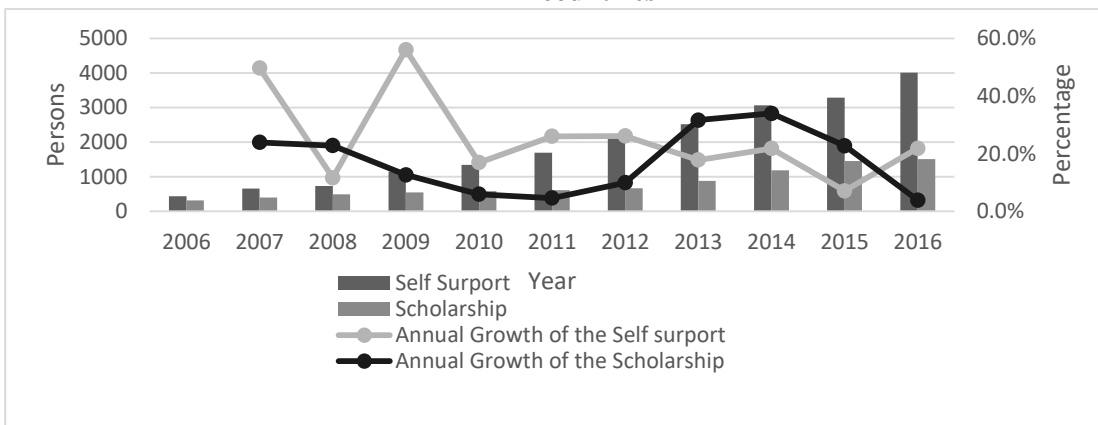
Figure 3.3.: The number and Proportion of the Self Support Students and Scholarship Students from CEE countries



Source: Created by authors

Although the overall growth of self-support students is much higher than that of scholarship students, it is very obvious that in 2013-2015, the growth rate of scholarship students exceeded the growth rate of self-funded students in the same period (See Figure 3.4). Regardless of the scale and the number of growth, self-funded students were much more than scholarship students in the past 10 years. It can be seen that self-support students from CEE countries are increasing year by year. At the same time the growth rate of scholarship students has surpassed the self-support students in recent years, which is partly affected by the “16+1” policy.

Figure 3.4.: Annual Growth of the Self Support Students and Scholarship Students from CEE countries



Source: Created by authors

3. Discussion

The average growth rate (18.5% ,2013-2016)of international students from CEECs coming to China is significantly higher than the growth rate(9.6% 2013-2016)of along the “Belt and Road” countries in recent years. In this sense ,“16+1 cooperation ” platform is a model for "Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) in people to people communication level.

From 2006 to 2016, Most international students were always Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. The above five countries accounted for 65%-73% of the total number students from 16 countries

over the years. The education cooperation between these five countries and China has a solid foundation in the past. It is noteworthy that since the formation of the “16+1 cooperation”, these countries signed mutual recognition agreements for degree and diploma with China.

The CEEC students studying in China for PhD, MA and BA degree was increasingly prominent, most of them choose to study China for practical reasons. Short-term (Less than 3 month) and long-term exchanges both increased dramatically. International students have a very significant growth after 2012, one of the reasons is Chinese government and local government Scholarship covered more CEEC University after 2012.

Considering the scale, self-supporting students were much more than scholarship students over the year. It can be seen that self-supporting students from CEE countries are still increasing year by year. At the same time the growth rate of scholarship students has surpassed the self-funded students in recent years, which is partly affected by the “16+1” platform for education cooperation. The students in CEE countries are, concerned about China’s development and take seriously the growth of China's influence in Central and Eastern Europe. The CEEC students are unsatisfied with learning about China from their own media and publications, they are suspicious towards Chinese propaganda and messages issued by Chinese official sources.

Since the economic gains of cooperation with China are not immediately forthcoming, the sense of disappointment with the relationship with China is growing. The strengthening of people to people communication helps to overcome such disappointment and short-term interest demands from both sides. Which also help to increase the knowledge and understanding of each other's market conditions, investment environment, technical standards, industrial advantages and related laws and regulations, In the process of their post-1989 political and economic transition, CEE countries have adopted liberal values, and anti-communist sentiments are strong across the CEE region. The memory of the Stalinist socialist period and the Brezhnev Doctrine has a direct impact on the way that China is perceived in larger parts of CEE, and contributes to a negative image of China. China’s official communist ideology provokes antipathy and China is perceived as the “other” that is substantively different than the west. Through studying in China, the younger generation in Central and Eastern Europe can reverse their negative impression of China.

Overall, The 16+1 cooperation platform has also become an important avenue for China to promote the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China and the CEE countries have been actively working around the BRI’s ‘five types of connectivity’: that is, policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds. China sees the 16+1 cooperation as an important gateway to incorporate the ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ into the European economic community, a priority platform to step up China–EU ties, as well as a new engine to drive China–EU cooperation.

4. Conclusions

The increasing importance of China in the foreign economic and trade agenda of CEE provides opportunities for China to develop public and cultural diplomacy in this region. The immediate goal for China’s public diplomacy in CEE is to consolidate the existing diplomatic achievements, create mutual understanding and win support from local governments and civil institutions. Higher Education Cooperation between China and CEECs is an important part for people to people communication.

The growth of international students from CEECs coming to China is Continue to grow but grows faster since 2013, it means The China –CEECs “16+1 cooperation ”platform promotes China-CEECs higher educational cooperation through related mechanisms and policies. In deepening of substantive collaboration of higher education, its need to improve the quality of China’s higher education and make it more international, promoting the students exchange programs, scholars exchange programs. Meanwhile, Expanding the members of China-CEEC Higher Education Institutions Consortium. Due to the uneven proportion of students from CEECs studying in China, the above-mentioned policies should cover more of under- cooperation CEE countries.

Needless to say, China needs time and patience to evaluate whether its influence in CEE countries goes beyond economics.

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