

# HOW CHINA SEES THE WORLD IN 2023

A survey on Chinese citizens' perception of China's international roles and views on major global jurisdictions





## Chinese Citizens' Global Perception Survey (CCGPS)

*How China Sees the World in 2023*

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*Report by*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There have been rising tensions between China and Western nations in the 2020s. Most friction has centered on China increasingly using its growing economic and political power to assert its influence worldwide, often contra to Western nations' interests.<sup>1</sup> For example, Western jurisdictions have repeatedly accused China of stealing and exporting potential dual-use technologies abroad.<sup>2</sup> This has led to security and regulatory reviews of Chinese-based technology companies that have a close relationship<sup>3</sup> with the Communist Party of China (CPC). Western nations, including the Five-Eyes Alliance – comprising the US, the UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand – have been critical of China's domestic behaviour when it comes to select human rights-based issues.<sup>4</sup> They have viewed China's close relations with Russia during the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict as problematic. Such tensions have ultimately led Western nations to consider China simultaneously as a negotiating partner on select global issues, an economic and military competitor, and a systemic rival promoting alternative governance models, with a greater focus on the latter two.<sup>5</sup>

While China's rise as a major power in the 21st century has undoubtedly made it a key player in global affairs, one crucial aspect that deserves further attention is its own citizens' attitudes towards other foreign jurisdictions. How Chinese citizens perceive the world has profound implications for China's future behaviour domestically and abroad. While the CPC enjoys a monopoly over the political system, it, nevertheless, requires popular support and legitimacy for its public policies and conduct.<sup>6</sup> The CPC emphasizes monitoring public opinion and conducting public opinion analysis.<sup>7</sup>

This ultimately means that the general public's support or dissatisfaction with China's foreign policy and activities can translate to future support or dissatisfaction with the CPC and the state itself.

This report discusses the findings from the first iteration of the Chinese Citizens' Global Perception Survey (CCGPS). CCGPS 2023 is an online and telephone national survey conducted by the authors, in cooperation with a survey firm in mainland China, in the first quarter of 2023. It provides a demographically representative and statistically valid, candid account of how the Chinese general public view other nations and their relationships with China. The CCGPS 2023 notably examined mainland Chinese citizens' perspectives on China's current relations with global actors, including Australia, Canada, the EU, France, Germany, India, Japan, Russia, the UK, and the US. This report discusses the survey findings in five areas: (1) Chinese citizens' general global perception; (2) China's global roles; (3) Foreign tourism, study, work and emigration preferences; (4) Canada-China relations; (5) Chinese citizens' sources and knowledge of global jurisdictions.



*“How Chinese citizens perceive the world has profound implications for China's future behaviour domestically and abroad.”*

The CCGPS 2023 data indicate that the Chinese public perceives the United States as the world's most influential power, followed by Russia and the European Union. Japan, India, and Australia were regarded as the least influential. General trust levels also varied, with Russia being perceived as the most trusted nation and the United States and Japan being the least trustworthy.

The survey data suggests that the Chinese public supports an active global role for China across multiple spheres of international engagement. Respondents demonstrated the strongest favourability for China's global leadership in peace and security, as well as technology and innovation. Furthermore, there is moderate support for China's leadership in global financial standards and environmental governance.

Despite controversies surrounding Chinese students in US and UK universities, the US and the UK remain the most popular intended destinations for Chinese students. Canada was on par with Australia and other Western jurisdictions as a moderately attractive education destination. Russia was viewed as a favoured destination for travel, work, and emigration, indicating a relatively robust relationship between China and Russia.

Respondents generally favoured expanding ties with Canada with the strongest support for cooperation in areas of peace and security and cultural exchanges. However, economic and business relationships, and environmental and climate change initiatives, garnered slightly weaker support. Additionally, citizens viewed factors such as China's growing power and Canada's close relationship with the US as more significant variables that drive current Canada-China relations than cultural and value differences or policy factors.

The report suggests that Chinese citizens increasingly rely on social media and word-of-mouth over state media to learn about global jurisdictions. Moreover, respondents generally view the government as reflecting popular will.

This report offers observations and insights into the Chinese public views on global relations, and the factors that shape these perceptions. In the same breath, the report points to critical nuances that provide a greater understanding of the complexities of Chinese public opinion. The goal is to provide evidence that can aid key stakeholders in developing targeted and considered strategies for engaging with China.



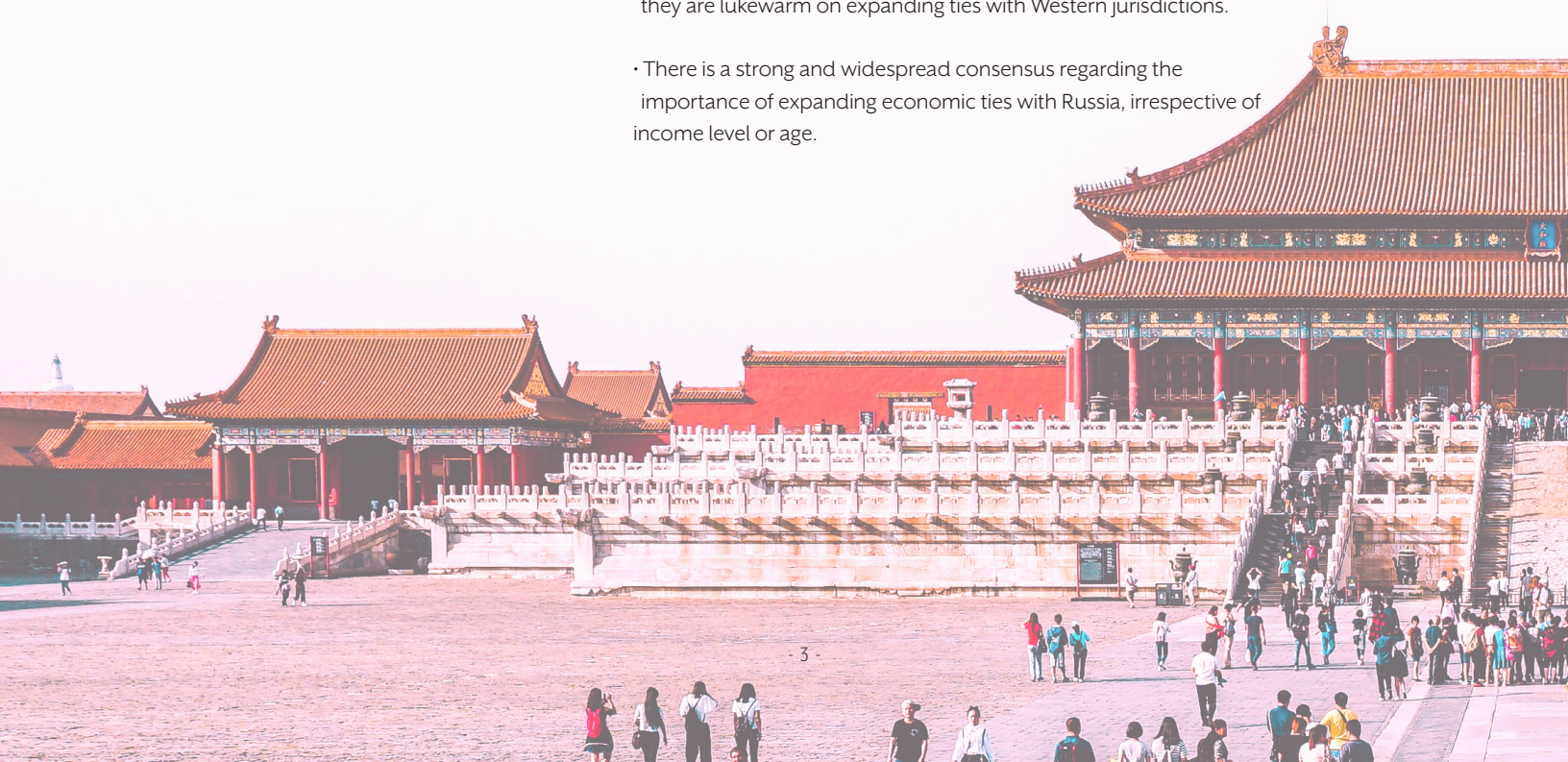
# KEY FINDINGS

## PART I: GENERAL GLOBAL PERCEPTION

- Chinese citizens view the United States as the world's most influential power by a significant margin. This is followed by Russia and the European Union, respectively. Japan, India, and Australia are viewed as the least influential nations.
- Russia is considered the most trusted and important nation to China's future. Respondents ranked the United States and Japan as the least trustworthy nations, with the latter viewed as having the least important relationship to China among the jurisdictions included in the survey.
- Citizens perceive the United States and Japan as the jurisdictions most likely to engage in a military conflict with China in the next decade. Yet, they view a potential conflict with US-allied nations such as Germany, France, and Canada as somewhat unlikely. Russia is perceived as the least likely to engage in a future conflict with China.

## PART II: CHINA'S GLOBAL ROLES

- The citizenry believes China should take an "active global role" across all spheres of international engagement, with the younger cohort most likely supporting a greater global role for China. The most favourable areas for Chinese global leadership are peace and security, and technology and innovation. The slightly less popular sites are global financial standards and global environmental governance.
- While the Chinese public does not favour "decoupling" from Western-aligned nations in economic and technological relations, they are lukewarm on expanding ties with Western jurisdictions.
- There is a strong and widespread consensus regarding the importance of expanding economic ties with Russia, irrespective of income level or age.





# KEY FINDINGS

## PART III: TOURISM, STUDY, WORK & EMIGRATION PREFERENCES

- Despite rising tensions between China and most Western nations, there is still a strong desire for the Chinese population to engage directly with Western countries on a personal level.
- Respondents have highly favourable views of Russia as a destination for travel, work, and emigration.
- The United States is the most popular destination choice for studying abroad, followed closely by the United Kingdom.

## PART IV: CANADA & CHINA RELATIONS

- Despite recent tensions between Canada and China, the Chinese public favoured expanding ties with Canada. Respondents mainly support cooperation in global and regional peace and security, and cultural exchanges.
- The two significant factors that impacted Canada-China relations, according to respondents, were China's growing power and Canada's close relationship with the US. Cultural and value differences and Canada's domestic and foreign policies are perceived to have played a lesser role.

## PART V: SOURCES & KNOWLEDGE OF GLOBAL JURISDICTIONS

- Those living in China are more likely to rely on social media and word-of-mouth than state media (TV, radio, and newspapers) to learn about global jurisdictions.
- Respondents reported they were highly knowledgeable about the US, Japan, and Russia and less about Canada, the UK, and the EU.
- Self-reported higher levels of knowledge of a jurisdiction corresponded with more extreme levels of high or low levels of trust in said jurisdiction.
- Chinese citizens strongly believe that a government's action reflects the popular will. This finding was held irrespective of income or age.

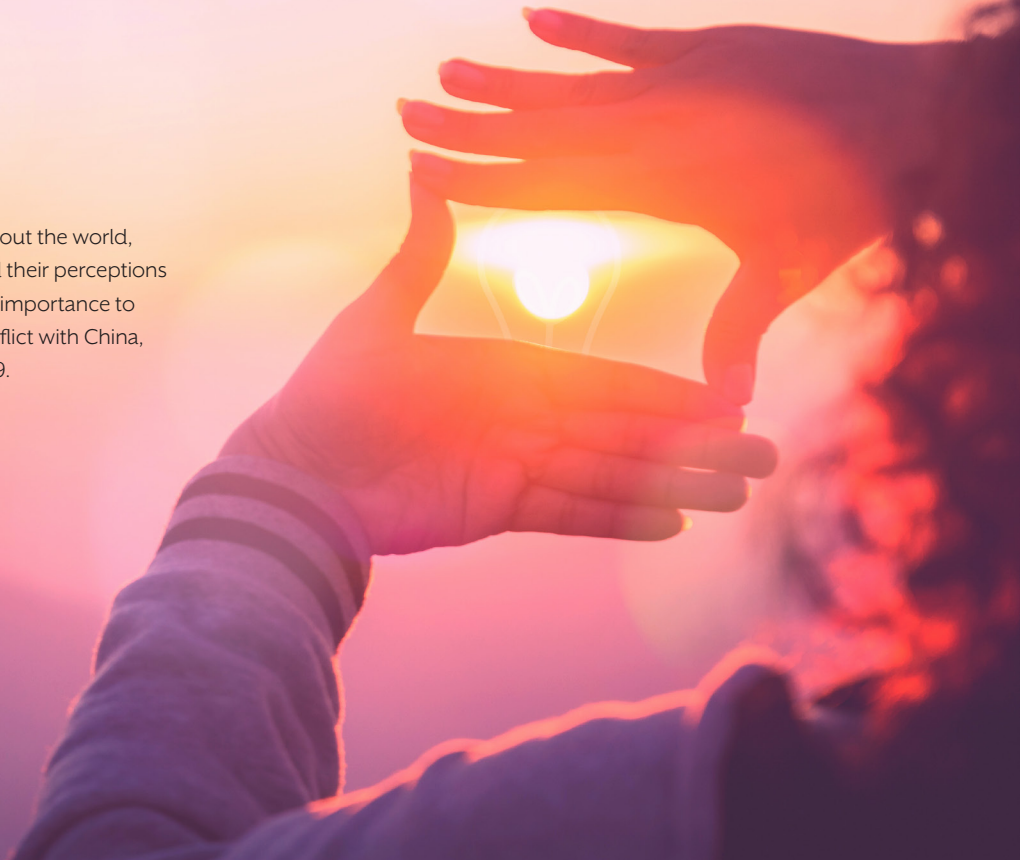




## PART I

# GENERAL GLOBAL PERCEPTION

To understand how Chinese citizens think about the world, several questions of the CCGPS 2023 queried their perceptions of global powers' influence, trustworthiness, importance to China, the potential likelihood of military conflict with China, and perceived success in managing COVID-19.



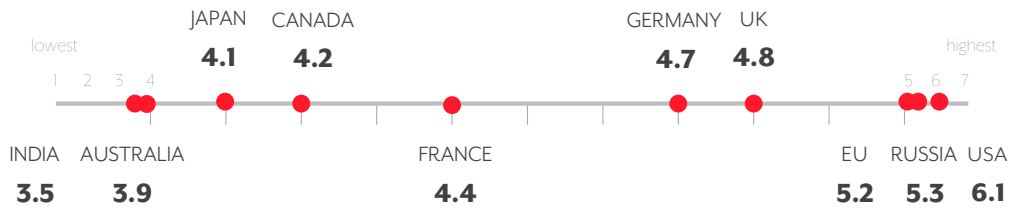
## A. WHO HAS THE MOST GLOBAL INFLUENCE?

As Figure 1a denotes, the majority of respondents rated the United States as the most influential global power with a score of 6.1, outweighing other countries surveyed by a substantial margin.

Russia and the EU were perceived to be the second and third most powerful jurisdictions, respectively. Positive views of Russia's power and prestige are a persistent theme in this report. However, Russia's score of 5.3 – roughly on par with the EU – suggests that the Chinese public views the nation as a second-tier power, well below the United States.

Despite its vast population, growing economy, and possession of nuclear weapons, India received the lowest score (3.5) out of all nations. Respondents similarly rated Japan's global influence rather poorly (4.1), perceiving the nation to have less impact than every other Western nation surveyed, other than Australia (3.9).

**FIGURE 1A**  
Perception of Global Influence



## B. TRUST IN GLOBAL PARTNERS FOR CHINA

CCGPS 2023 queried respondents, “How trusted do you view the following as a global partner to China?” Figure 1b illustrates the results of Chinese citizens’ general trust level in major global powers, which are all substantial trading partners with China.

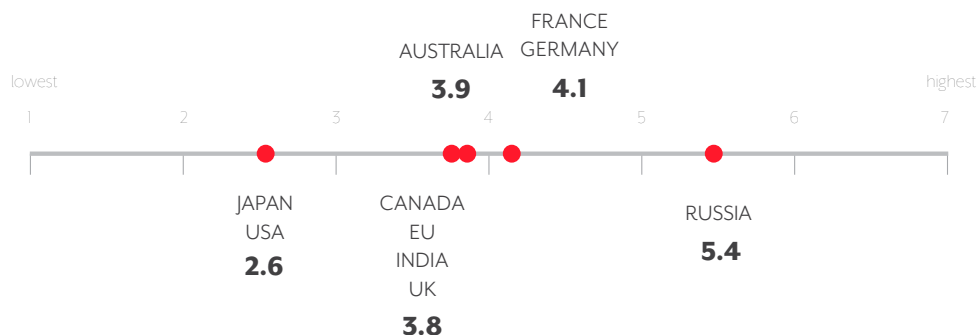
Amidst the escalating great power competition between the US and China, respondents indicated low levels of general trust in the US. Most respondents gave the US low scores, ranging from 1 to 3, with an average score of 2.6. However, Chinese perceptions of the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada, three significant allies of the US, were generally more moderate. In the eyes of Chinese citizens, France and Germany (the two most influential members of the EU) were viewed as more trustworthy than the EU as a bloc.

General trust in Japan was very low (2.6), partially owing to negative images of Japan stemming from major hostilities in the first half of the 20th century – reinforced in the Chinese education curriculum and popular media – and current territorial disputes.

Despite Russia’s recent invasion of Ukraine, Chinese citizens still perceive Russia as a trustworthy partner (5.4).

*“Despite Russia’s recent invasion of Ukraine, Chinese citizens still perceive Russia as a trustworthy partner.”*

**FIGURE 1B**  
Trust in Global Partners





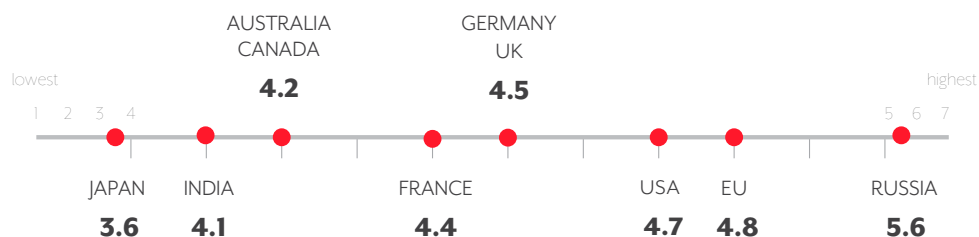
## C. IMPORTANCE OF GLOBAL RELATIONSHIPS FOR CHINA'S LONG-TERM FUTURE

Figure 1c illustrates the respondents' views on each nation's long-term importance to China. Broadly speaking, all jurisdictions examined are perceived as necessary to China in the eyes of the general public. This suggests that the Chinese public believes maintaining relations with various nations is vital to China's long-term success.

Russia was viewed as the most critical nation to China's long-term future (score: 5.6), which aligns with the overall positive views of Russia expressed by respondents throughout CCGPS 2023.

One of the most surprising findings of CCGPS 2023 is the respondents' perception of the relative insignificance of China's relationship with Japan for China's long-term future. Relations with Japan were seen as the least important compared to other jurisdictions. This is striking, given Japan's economic importance to China as its fourth-largest trading partner.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the history of Japan-China territorial disputes, and both nations' growing military power,<sup>9</sup> suggest that their bilateral relationship will require careful management to promote prosperity and reduce conflict.

**FIGURE 1C**  
Perception of Jurisdictions' Long-Term Importance to China



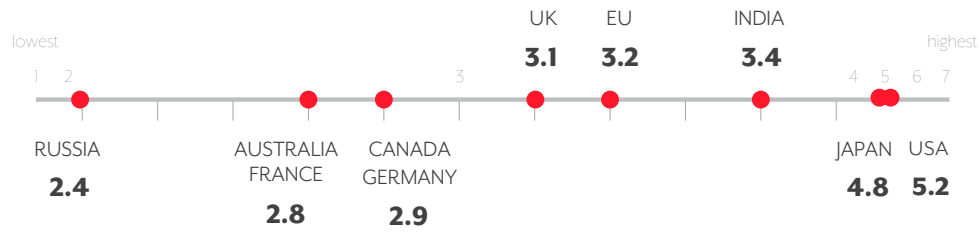
## D. LIKELIHOOD OF MILITARY CONFLICT IN THE NEXT DECADE

Given intensified China-US competition in the 2020s, the public unsurprisingly perceives the United States (score: 5.2) as the nation most likely to engage in a military conflict with China in the next decade.

Japan (score: 4.8) and India (score: 3.4), the two nations that currently have territorial disputes with China, ranked in second and third place, respectively. For India, in particular, there have been reported sporadic skirmishes between Chinese and Indian troops in the bordering areas as recent as the summer of 2020.<sup>10</sup>

*“The public perceives the United States as the nation most likely to engage in a military conflict with China in the next decade.”*

**FIGURE ID**  
**Perception of the Likelihood of Military Conflict**



Respondents believed a military conflict with Russia, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, and the EU will unlikely happen in the next decade. However, they viewed a military conflict with the EU as more likely than other major US allies, including the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada. Respondents viewed a military conflict with the EU as a conglomerate more likely than with two influential EU member states, Germany and France, respectively.

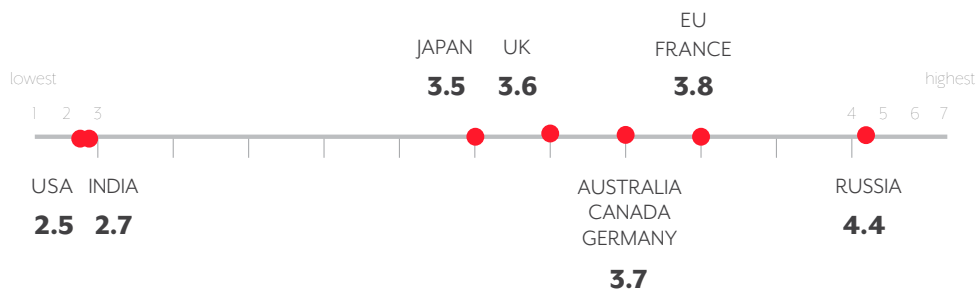
Finally, military conflict with Russia was perceived as the least likely (score: 2.4), demonstrating relatively high public general trust in Russia.

## E. COVID-19 MANAGEMENT

In general, Chinese attitudes toward foreign jurisdictions' approach to managing COVID-19 was negative.<sup>11</sup> Respondents perceived Russia as having the best pandemic performance compared to other jurisdictions by a significant margin and were the only nation with a score above 4. The United States and India received the worst and second worst scores, respectively, well below 3. This is partially due to China widely publicizing the two nations' high death tolls.

Respondents did not differentiate between other jurisdictions – all received slightly negative scores between 3.5 and 3.8. This is noteworthy, given that these jurisdictions had different policy responses to COVID-19 and divergent outcomes. For instance, the UK had a relatively high death toll, while Australia did not.

**FIGURE IE**  
**Perception of Foreign Jurisdictions' Performance in Managing COVID-19**





## PART II

# CHINA'S GLOBAL ROLES

How Chinese citizens perceive China's domestic and foreign role is key to understanding the potential trajectory of state action. In this vein, CCGPS 2023 queried the current attitudes and areas in which respondents desire China to assume an active leadership position on a global level. It also examined how respondents perceive international relations regarding economic cooperation, including technological and research collaboration.

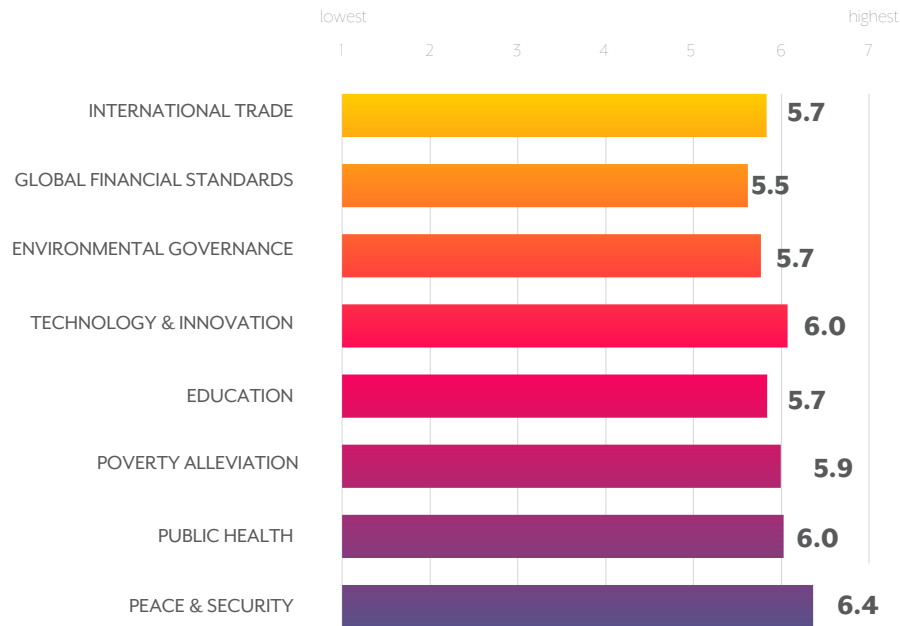
## A. GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

Survey participants were asked to rate the extent to which China should assume “active global leadership” across eight categories of global engagement: (1) international trade, (2) global financial standards, (3) environmental governance, (4) technology and innovation, (5) education, (6) poverty alleviation, (7) public health, and (8) peace and security. Figure 2a provides the illustrative results.

The mean score of 5.9 indicates a consensus among the Chinese public that China should play an active leadership role in all areas of global engagement studied. Even the lowest-scored area of global engagement – global financial standards – was given an average rating of 5.5, well above the neutral middle score of 4.

FIGURE 2A

Which Issue Areas Should China Take an Active Global Leadership Role?



It is also worth considering which areas were singled out as comparatively more or less critical. Peace and security was considered to be the area of most importance for Chinese global leadership by a substantial margin (score: 6.4), followed by technology and innovation (score: 6.0). The latter, technology and innovation, has been a key priority for the CPC during President Xi Jinping’s administration (2013–present).<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, the areas respondents thought were least important for Chinese global leadership – global financial standards (score: 5.5) and environmental governance (score: 5.7) – are generally considered areas of domestic weakness and relatively poor state performance. Namely, China has seen numerous recent financial scandals<sup>13</sup> and environmental protection issues.<sup>14</sup>

*“Peace and security was considered to be the area of most importance for Chinese global leadership by a substantial margin.”*



**FIGURE 2B**

Which Issue Areas Should China Take an Active Global Leadership Role?

By Age

|                            | < 17       | 18-22      | 23-29      | 30-39      | 40-49      | 50-59      | > 60       |
|----------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| International Trade        | <b>5.7</b> | <b>5.8</b> | <b>5.9</b> | <b>5.8</b> | <b>5.7</b> | <b>5.7</b> | <b>5.6</b> |
| Global Financial Standards | <b>5.5</b> | <b>5.5</b> | <b>5.5</b> | <b>5.5</b> | <b>5.5</b> | <b>5.5</b> | <b>5.5</b> |
| Environmental Governance   | <b>6.0</b> | <b>5.9</b> | <b>5.7</b> | <b>5.6</b> | <b>5.6</b> | <b>5.7</b> | <b>5.5</b> |
| Education                  | <b>6.2</b> | <b>6.1</b> | <b>6.2</b> | <b>6</b>   | <b>5.9</b> | <b>6.0</b> | <b>5.9</b> |
| Poverty Alleviation        | <b>6.3</b> | <b>6.2</b> | <b>6.0</b> | <b>5.8</b> | <b>5.8</b> | <b>6.0</b> | <b>5.7</b> |
| Public Health              | <b>6.3</b> | <b>6.1</b> | <b>6.1</b> | <b>5.9</b> | <b>5.8</b> | <b>5.9</b> | <b>5.9</b> |
| Peace and Security         | <b>6.6</b> | <b>6.6</b> | <b>6.5</b> | <b>6.4</b> | <b>6.3</b> | <b>6.4</b> | <b>6.1</b> |

*Likert Scale: 1 (lowest) - 7 (highest)*

Figure 2b illustrates responses for the areas where China should take an active global leadership role by age category. Perceptions of the importance of China’s global leadership role is highest among the youngest cohort (18-22), with an average rating of 6.1, in contrast to 5.7 for the 60+ age demographic. However, an individual’s education or income is not closely correlated to perceptions of China’s global leadership roles.

## B. ECONOMIC COOPERATION

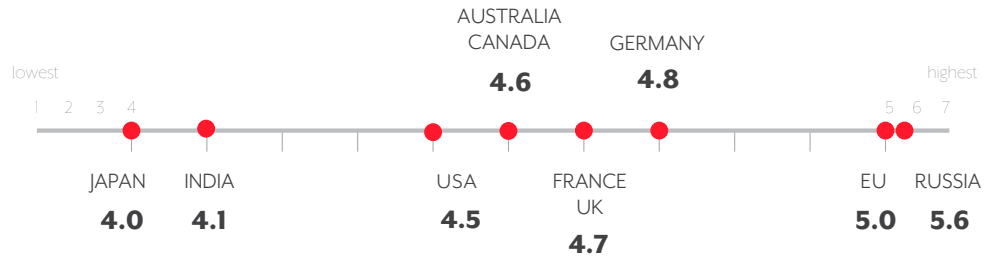
The most increasing publicized debate in Western jurisdictions pertains to economic decoupling with China, e.g., unravelling Chinese trade ties, supply chains, scientific collaboration, and economic interdependence.<sup>15</sup> To gauge the Chinese public perception on this matter, CCGPS 2023 asked respondents, “To what extent should China limit or expand economic cooperation?”

Rather than being especially pro- or anti-decoupling, the Chinese public prefers expanding trade and investment relations with most nations. As Figure 2c suggests, this preference was not particularly strong. All but two jurisdictions had scores between 4.0 – indicating a preference for preserving the current economic relationship – and 5.0 – suggesting an openness for a moderate relationship expansion. In other words, the Chinese public favours a slight expansion of the nation’s existing global economic relationships. Despite varying economic interdependence and political relations with China, Australia, the US, Germany, the UK, Canada, and France, all received scores between 4.5 and 4.8.

***“Rather than being especially pro- or anti-decoupling, the Chinese public prefers expanding trade and investment relations with most nations.”***

FIGURE 2C

Should China Limit or Expand Economic Cooperation?



There are, however, two notable outliers. Japan received the lowest score (4.0), potentially suggesting the public’s desire to limit Sino-Japanese trade and investment ties. Russia’s score of 5.6 was the highest by a substantial margin, 12 percent higher than the European Union, which received the second-highest score. This difference between Japan and Russia is particularly notable given that China’s current economic relationship with Japan is far more substantial than its relationship with Russia. Namely, China’s trade with Japan (USD 333 billion)<sup>16</sup> is nearly double the value of trade with Russia (USD 190 billion) in 2022.<sup>17</sup>

Figure 2d illustrates the responses by monthly household income. The figure suggests a generally consistent viewpoint across income levels. Russia was consistently the most popular nation in expanding trade and business ties, followed by the European Union. Moreover, Japan was the least popular nation, with the public leaning toward keeping the current level of economic ties. One notable exception involves the two lowest-earning cohorts who are somewhat less enthusiastic about expanding trade than the two highest earning cohorts. The average engagement rating across all nations was 4.5 for the 0-4,999 RMB and 5,000-9,999 RMB income cohorts, compared to 4.9 and 4.8 for the 15,000-19,999 RMB and 20,000+ RMB cohorts, respectively.

FIGURE 2D

Should China Limit or Expand Economic Cooperation?  
By Household Income in RMB

|           | ¥ 0-4999 | ¥ 5000-9999 | ¥ 10000-14999 | ¥ 15000-19999 | ¥ 20000+ |
|-----------|----------|-------------|---------------|---------------|----------|
| Australia | 4.5      | 4.5         | 4.7           | 4.8           | 4.7      |
| Canada    | 4.6      | 4.5         | 4.7           | 4.8           | 4.7      |
| EU        | 4.8      | 4.8         | 5.0           | 5.2           | 5.1      |
| France    | 4.5      | 4.6         | 4.8           | 4.9           | 4.8      |
| Germany   | 4.6      | 4.7         | 4.8           | 5.1           | 5.0      |
| India     | 3.9      | 4.0         | 4.3           | 4.2           | 4.2      |
| Japan     | 3.8      | 3.7         | 4.0           | 4.3           | 4.1      |
| Russia    | 5.3      | 5.5         | 5.6           | 5.8           | 5.7      |
| UK        | 4.6      | 4.7         | 4.7           | 5.0           | 4.9      |
| USA       | 4.3      | 4.2         | 4.5           | 4.7           | 4.7      |

Likert Scale: 1 (lowest) - 7 (highest)



## C. TECHNOLOGICAL AND RESEARCH COLLABORATION

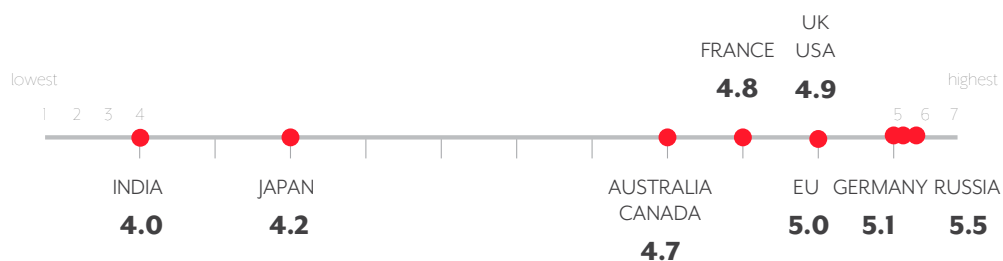
Technological and research collaboration between China and Western jurisdictions has been a particular point of contention.<sup>18</sup> For instance, following a report about Canadian universities engaging in research collaborations with institutions linked to China's military, the Canadian government announced that it would clamp down on projects affiliated with institutional links of this kind.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the United States has enacted export controls that limit cooperation with China concerning research and technology.<sup>20</sup> How have these tensions impacted the Chinese public?

Figure 2e suggests that the Chinese public has a lukewarm desire to expand technology and research collaboration. Similar to the case with economic collaboration, virtually all scores were above the neutral point of 4.0 but below 5.0. There are, however, two distinct variations. First, the Chinese public slightly favours the expansion of technological and research collaboration over economic cooperation. The overall average score in technological and research collaboration (4.8) was higher than the overall average for economic cooperation (4.7). Particularly, technology and research leaders such as the US and Germany received higher scores in technological and research collaboration (4.9 and 5.1, respectively) than in economic collaboration (4.5 and 4.8, respectively). Moreover, whereas Japan was ranked at the bottom for economic collaboration, India ranked the lowest in technology and research collaboration – this is likely due to Japan's particular strength in technology and research.

*“The Chinese public has a lukewarm desire to expand technology and research collaboration.”*

FIGURE 2E

Should China Limit or Expand Technological and Research Collaboration?



## D. ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHINA'S GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

CCGPS 2023 asked respondents to rate their agreeableness between 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree) with a series of six statements on Chinese foreign affairs and international relationships:

**FIGURE 2F**

**Attitude Towards China's Global Engagement**

|   | <b>Average Score</b> |
|---|----------------------|
| 1. China should currently concentrate more on domestic affairs than on global matters.                            | <b>3.8</b>           |
| 2. China is currently too open to foreign influence and thinking.   | <b>3.7</b>           |
| 3. The more a nation cooperates with China, the better off those nations will be.                                 | <b>4.3</b>           |
| 4. China's relationship with Western nations will be more competitive rather than cooperative in the next decade. | <b>4.1</b>           |
| 5. China's political and economic model should be exported to other nations.                                      | <b>3.6</b>           |
| 6. China should change international practices and laws to reflect Chinese norms and values.                      | <b>4.1</b>           |

*Likert Scale: 1 (strongly disagree) - 7 (strongly agree)*

In general, as denoted in Figure 2f, all responses hovered around a neutral mark of 4.0. A high score for statements 4 and 6 would indicate that the Chinese public favours hawkish foreign policy decisions that could potentially lead to greater enmity with Western jurisdictions. The scores of 4.1 for both statements, however, suggests some – but not a widespread – appetite for competition with the West.

Similarly, a high score on statements 3 and 5 would indicate an appetite for China to take on a more expansionist foreign policy. The responses illustrate that while the Chinese public favours the view that cooperation with China leads to better outcomes for nations (score: 4.3), the public is less inclined to support the idea that China should seek to export its model to other nations (score: 3.6).

Agreement with statements 1 and 2 would indicate widespread public support for the Chinese state to roll back its international engagement, restrict foreign influence, and focus domestically. The results suggest that citizens believe China is not too open to foreign influence, thus indicating (albeit lukewarm) popular support for continued Chinese global engagement.

***“The public is less inclined to support the idea that China should seek to export its model to other nations.”***

## PART III

# TOURISM, STUDY, WORK & EMIGRATION PREFERENCES

To gauge Chinese citizens' potential future global interactions, CCGPS 2023 explored the preferences of respondents to visit, study, work, or emigrate to various global jurisdictions. Despite rising tensions between China and most Western jurisdictions, the results illustrate a strong desire for the Chinese population to engage with these nations in some fashion directly.

## A. TOURISM

Citizens expressed the strongest desire to visit France (39.2 percent of the sample), followed by Russia (38.9 percent), and Japan (32.9 percent). Respondents were least interested in visiting India (17.9 percent), the US (25.1 percent), or the EU (27.2 percent).

At first glance, Russia's position as a destination of choice for Chinese tourism is surprising. This can be explained in two ways. First, the depreciation of the Russian ruble since 2014 has made travelling to nearby Russia more affordable and accessible for Chinese tourists. Second, there are organizational factors such as the availability of official outbound group packages authorized by the China Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the relative ease of gaining a Russian visa with said travel packages. Coupled with the inaccessibility of other foreign tourist destinations, these factors contribute to the relatively high interest in Russia as a tourist destination.<sup>21</sup>

India was considered the least popular destination for tourism, study, work, and emigration by a wide margin. This negative public perception is partially owing to a popular view in China that the Asian giant remains underdeveloped and a tense contemporary Sino-India relationship, including recent border conflicts, that have been popularized in media outlets in China.



FIGURE 3A

Future Global Interaction Preferences

|           | Visit | Study | Work | Emigration |
|-----------|-------|-------|------|------------|
| Australia | 31%   | 13%   | 9%   | 6%         |
| Canada    | 28%   | 13%   | 10%  | 6%         |
| EU        | 27%   | 11%   | 11%  | 5%         |
| France    | 39%   | 16%   | 13%  | 6%         |
| Germany   | 29%   | 16%   | 13%  | 4%         |
| India     | 18%   | 4%    | 5%   | 3%         |
| Japan     | 33%   | 12%   | 9%   | 3%         |
| Russia    | 39%   | 14%   | 14%  | 6%         |
| UK        | 32%   | 25%   | 12%  | 5%         |
| USA       | 25%   | 26%   | 12%  | 5%         |

Percentage of respondents indicating interest

## B. STUDY ABROAD

Notwithstanding recent controversies regarding the role of Chinese students at US and UK universities, Chinese citizens had the strongest preferences for these nations. The US (25.8 percent of the sample) was the most popular study destination for Chinese students, followed closely by the UK (24.8 percent). These two nations are home to the largest clusters of globally renowned higher educational institutions. The “prestige” value of said education institutions is highly valued in Chinese culture.

Despite the current high number of Chinese international students, Australia (13.3 percent) and Canada<sup>22</sup> (13.3 percent) were viewed as relatively less attractive destinations for studying abroad, falling behind France (16.3 percent), Germany (15.6 percent), and Russia (14.5 percent) in desirability.

Chinese interest in studying in the EU (11.3 percent) was lower than Germany and France (both 16+ percent), though both are significant EU members. This may suggest that academic reputation is more salient at the national level than a supranational level.

**“Despite the current high number of Chinese international students, Australia (13.3 percent) and Canada (13.3 percent) were viewed as relatively less attractive destinations for studying abroad.”**

## C. WORK ABROAD

The most attractive destination for working abroad was Russia (14.3 percent of the sample), followed by France (13.5 percent) and Germany (12.9 percent). India (5.0 percent), Australia (9.0 percent), and Japan (9.3 percent) were the three least attractive destinations.

Interestingly, Chinese citizens' interest in working in the EU (11.3 percent) was significantly lower than expressed interest in working in Germany or France (both 13+ percent).

## D. EMIGRATION PREFERENCES

The vast majority of the citizenry did not express a willingness to emigrate in the near future. Nonetheless, Russia (6.3 percent of the sample), Canada (6.2 percent), France (6.1 percent), and Australia (6.1 percent) were the top destinations for emigration. India (3.1 percent), Japan (3.2 percent), and Germany (4.7 percent) were destinations with the least interest.

While Canada and Australia are home to a sizeable immigration population from mainland China, which explains a continued interest in both nations as migration destinations, the popularity of Russia is perhaps the most surprising. Overall, the popularity of Russia as a destination for tourism, work, and emigration suggests widespread support for expanding China-Russia political, economic, cultural, and people-to-people relations.

*“The vast majority of the citizenry did not express a willingness to emigrate in the near future.”*

## PART IV

# CANADA & CHINA RELATIONS



Canada and China established official diplomatic relations on October 13, 1970, making Canada one of the first Western nations to do so. Since then, trade between Canada and China has grown significantly, reaching CAD 100.2 billion (~USD 74.8 billion) in Canadian imports from China and CAD 28.7 billion (~USD 21.4 billion) in Canadian exports to China during 2022.<sup>23</sup>

Against this backdrop, however, bilateral relations have deteriorated since 2018 over frictions such as the detention of the “two Michaels,”<sup>24</sup> China’s ban on Canadian canola,<sup>25</sup> and allegations of interference in Canadian elections.<sup>26</sup> Recent polling shows that most Canadians hold an unfavourable view of China.<sup>27</sup> This has, in part, led to Canadian politicians

calling for greater de-coupling with China in terms of trade and increased scrutiny on select Chinese investments and engagement under the guise of potential national security risks.

However, CCGPS 2023 finds that Chinese respondents are generally warm towards Canada. As Figure 4a denotes, Chinese citizens had a favourability score greater than 5 in all areas of cooperation between China and Canada examined. The highest level of agreement was a call for Canada and China to increase cooperation in global and regional peace and security (score: 5.3), and the lowest level of agreement was for economic and business relationships (score: 5.0).

## A. ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS

For every Canadian dollar China has imported in goods and products from Canada, China exports three times the amount. Given the apparent unbalanced trade relationship, it is interesting to observe that among the priorities of Chinese citizens to expand cooperation between Canada and China, the economic and business relationship regarding investments and trade ranks the lowest in priority.

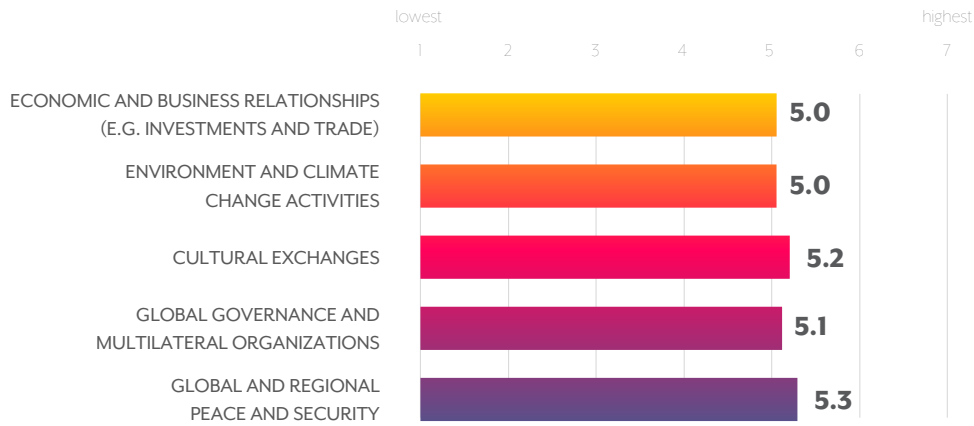
One possible explanation is that the Chinese population does not consider Canada a significant trade partner and lacks meaningful knowledge of Canadian businesses and industries. Canada ranked 21st among China’s export markets in 2022.<sup>28</sup>

However, the CCGPS 2023 suggests that the Chinese public does consider Canada a trusted global partner for China (see Part I). Thus, greater effort can be made to advocate for increased economic and business cooperation.

*“The Chinese population does not consider Canada a significant trade partner and lacks meaningful knowledge of Canadian businesses and industries.”*

FIGURE 4A

In What Areas Should Canada and China Expand Cooperation?



## B. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE ACTIVITIES

Chinese respondents showed a general willingness to cooperate with Canada to combat climate change and protect the global environment. While the environmental agenda has been relatively stymied between the US and China in the 2020s, a collaboration between Canada and China during the 2022 COP 15 summit on biodiversity suggests that both nations are willing to work together on climate change and environmental change issues. CCGPS 2023 reiterates this stance, with the average Chinese citizen wanting increased cooperation.

## C. CULTURAL EXCHANGES

CCGPS 2023 respondents were broadly inclined to expand Canada and China's cooperation on cultural exchanges. While conventional wisdom suggests that perceived cultural variations can impede cooperation between nations such as Canada and China, CCGPS 2023 indicates this is not necessarily the case.

## D. GLOBAL GOVERNANCE AND SECURITY

There is a positive correlation between responses to increasing cooperation between China and Canada in global governance, multilateral organizations, and global and regional peace and security. On average, however, respondents were more inclined to support cooperation for the latter.



## E. MAIN FACTORS INFLUENCING CANADA AND CHINA RELATIONS

CCGPS 2023 queried Chinese citizens about the perceived factors that have the greatest impact on Canada and China relations. Four options were provided: (1) China's growing international power; (2) Canada's relationship with the US; (3) Differences in values between Canada and China; (4) Canada's domestic politics and policy environment.

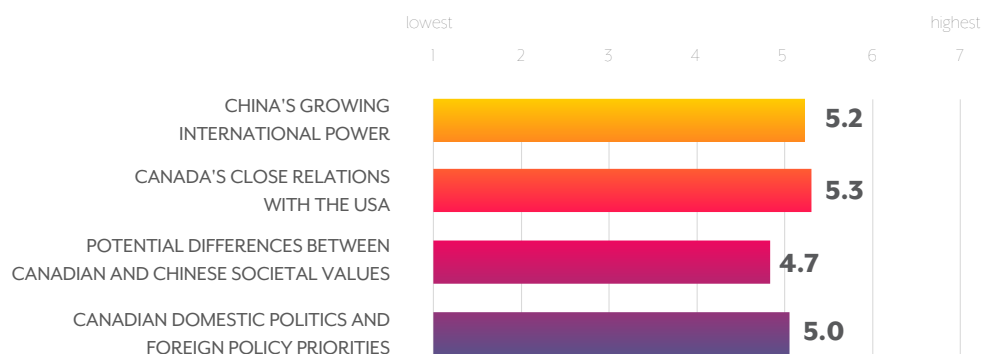
As Figure 4b illustrates, the average responses across the four options were above the neutral score of 4.0. This suggests that the citizenry believe all these factors play a role in impacting bilateral relations.

Canada's close relations with the US received the highest score shaping Canada and China relations. There was a positive correlation between respondents believing that Canada's close relationship with the US was most important and the belief that the US has the most global influence (see Part I). In other words, Chinese citizens who believed that the US had the most global influence were more likely to believe that Canada's relationship with the US impacted its relationship with China.

The lowest reported factor shaping Canada and China relations was potential differences in values and norms between nations. While Canada and China have distinctively different governance systems that have, in part, led to underlying diplomatic tensions in various areas outlined in this report, the Chinese citizenry does not perceive cultural and value differences as a significant barrier to collaboration.

FIGURE 4B

What Affects Canada and China Relations the Most?





PART V

# SOURCES & KNOWLEDGE OF GLOBAL JURISDICTIONS

Understanding Chinese citizens' sources and knowledge of the world is critical to gauge how their global perceptions are formed and shaped. CCGPS 2023 asks respondents about their understanding and trust of various jurisdictions, the configuration of their daily sources of information on global affairs, and their views on whether government actions reflect the general popular will.

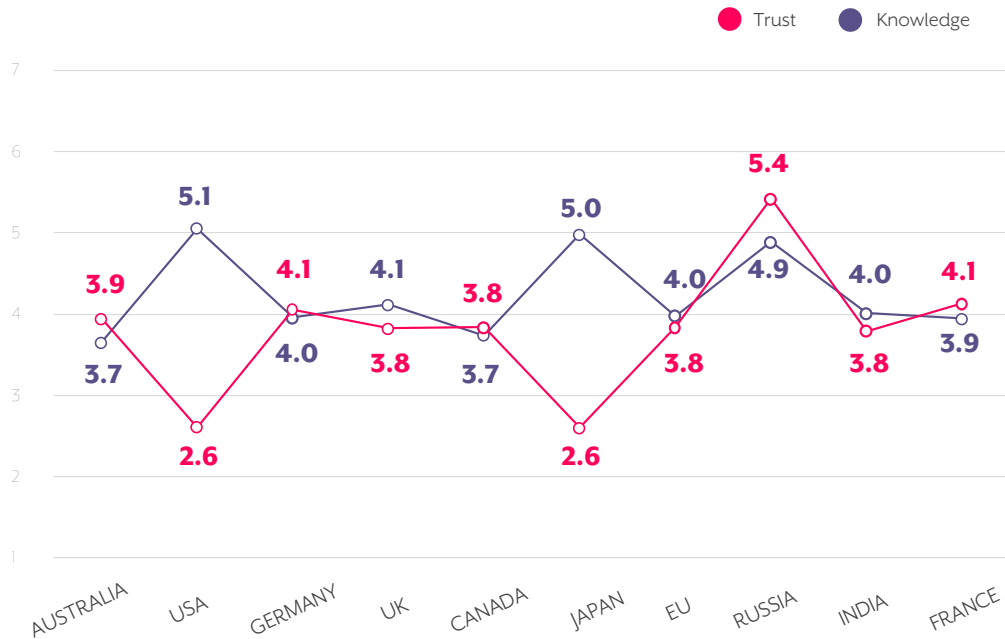
## A. KNOWLEDGE AND TRUST OF GLOBAL JURISDICTIONS

Figure 5a depicts Chinese citizens' self-perception of their knowledge of various jurisdictions. Respondents consider themselves relatively knowledgeable about the United States and Russia – which received scores of 5.1 and 4.9, respectively. This is partially attributable to both jurisdictions' dominance in global and domestic news cycles in early 2023 and months prior. Moreover, respondents consider themselves more knowledgeable about Japan (5.0), perhaps owing to Japan's proximity and historical ties to China.

Chinese citizens had substantially less knowledge about all other nations. Respondents considered themselves at the median point for two countries (UK: 4.1 and India: 4.0). In contrast, for Australia, Germany, Canada, the EU, and France, respondents regarded themselves as lower on the knowledge spectrum.

Figure 5a also displays Chinese citizens' trust in jurisdictions. Notably, there are few consistent correlations between knowledge and trust in jurisdictions. For instance, the three jurisdictions with the highest knowledge scores – the US, Japan, and Russia – had very different trust ratings, with the US and Japan deemed the most untrustworthy and Russia considered the most trustworthy. Furthermore, jurisdictions in the middle range of respondents' knowledge have roughly neutral levels of trust.

**FIGURE 5A**  
Knowledge and Trust in Global Jurisdictions



## B. SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT GLOBAL AFFAIRS

CCGPS 2023 asked respondents to rate how often they used a variety of sources to obtain information about global affairs. Social media was considered the most common way to obtain information, with respondents awarding it a score of 6.1. This was followed by television (score: 5.1) and discussion with others (score: 5.0). Newspapers (score: 2.9) and radio (score: 2.4) were the lowest by a significant margin.

**FIGURE 5B**

### Sources of Information about Global Affairs By Age

|              | < 17       | 18-22      | 23-29      | 30-39      | 40-49      | 50-59      | > 60       |
|--------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| TV           | <b>5.3</b> | <b>4.7</b> | <b>4.9</b> | <b>5.0</b> | <b>5.0</b> | <b>5.4</b> | <b>5.5</b> |
| Radio        | <b>1.7</b> | <b>1.9</b> | <b>2.1</b> | <b>2.3</b> | <b>2.4</b> | <b>2.7</b> | <b>3.6</b> |
| Newspaper    | <b>2.2</b> | <b>2.5</b> | <b>2.6</b> | <b>2.7</b> | <b>2.9</b> | <b>3.4</b> | <b>4.1</b> |
| Social Media | <b>6.1</b> | <b>6.4</b> | <b>6.4</b> | <b>6.3</b> | <b>6.1</b> | <b>5.9</b> | <b>5.4</b> |
| Discussion   | <b>5.4</b> | <b>5.1</b> | <b>5.0</b> | <b>5.0</b> | <b>5.0</b> | <b>5.1</b> | <b>5.1</b> |

Likert Scale: 1 (lowest) - 7 (highest)

Figure 5b deconstructs the data by age. Here, social media was the most common way to consume information about global affairs amongst all age categories. Discussion with others was also consistently popular and scored highest amongst the youngest demographic.

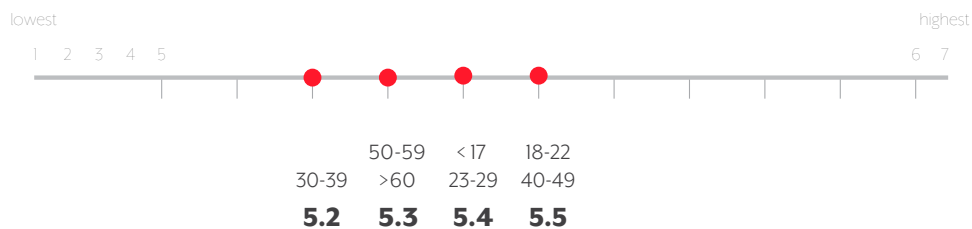
Akin to other Western jurisdictions,<sup>29</sup> newspapers and radio use has declined amongst younger cohorts. This has implications for shaping public perception in China’s closed and heavily censored media environment. In the past, the primary way to receive news in China was through TV, radio, and newspapers, which were mostly state-controlled. While the Chinese state does impose tight restrictions and censorship on social media, the dominance of social media and word-of-mouth over traditional news sources that are more directly controlled by the government may indicate the development of a more decentralized news environment driven by everyday citizens rather than major media organizations. However, with minimal access to international affairs coverage from foreign or independent sources, stories on international issues shared through social media often echo the government’s narrative.

### C. ATTITUDE TOWARDS GOVERNMENT ACTION AND THE POPULAR WILL

Does a government’s action accurately reflect the will and attitudes of its people? CCGPS 2023 directly poses this question to understand the Chinese citizenry’s views on whether there is a relationship between a foreign government’s policy and behaviour and its own citizenry’s viewpoints on the matter. This has attendant potential implications on whether the Chinese citizenry can disaggregate between government action and the citizens’ preferences.

The overall score for this question was 5.4, suggesting broad agreement within the Chinese population that a government’s action broadly reflects the citizens’ will. There was almost no deviation across age and income demographics. Virtually every income and age group indicated strong agreement – every score was above the 5.0 mark, and each group’s average rating was between 5.1 and 5.5.

**FIGURE 5C**  
Do Government Actions Represent the Popular Will? (By Age)





# FINAL WORDS

China is currently at a crossroads regarding its interactions with major Western jurisdictions. The CCGPS 2023 data suggests that the Chinese public overwhelmingly supports a China that peacefully co-exists with other global powers in the international sphere. This is demonstrable insofar as the Chinese citizenry considers global peace and security the most significant leadership role China should undertake now and in the future.

Yet, as with all jurisdictions, there are numerous strategic interests to balance that could compromise this meta-goal. China's stated objective to improve its technological and research standing is the most prevalent strategic interest that can incite further global tensions. As ambitiously laid out in the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021–2025), China aims to develop basic research and significant breakthroughs in core technologies to the extent that the nation can become a global leader in technological innovation.<sup>30</sup> Research and development investment will be increased by 7 percent annually to support this plan. The CCGPS 2023 data also indicate that the Chinese citizenry overwhelmingly supports China becoming a technology and innovation leader as a key priority. This is the second most important global role Chinese citizens want their nation to undertake.

How will China marry both goals, to be a global peace and security leader and to develop technology and innovation that ultimately challenges the current hegemony led by the United States? This is a tricky balance that the citizenry does not fully account for. However, the Chinese public does suggest that the United States is the jurisdiction primarily likely to engage in conflict with China in the next decade.

Another consistent theme throughout this report is the Chinese public's overwhelmingly favourable perception of Russia. There is a strong and widespread consensus among the Chinese citizenry, irrespective of income level or age, regarding the importance of expanding economic ties with Russia. Furthermore, Chinese citizens have highly favourable views of Russia as a destination for travel, work, and immigration. This viewpoint of Russia is perhaps most supported by Chinese social media – the most common way Chinese citizens receive information about global affairs – which paints a positive picture of Russia.

Projected further, China's coupling with Russia should not necessarily be viewed as the crystallization of a bipolar global order, with Russia and China on one end and Western jurisdictions on the other. The data from CCGPS 2023 indicates that there are points of interaction supported by the Chinese public that can serve as a means of bridging potential disputes between China and Western jurisdictions.

Finally, it is encouraging that the Chinese population does not perceive major divergence in cultural values as a significant driver of discontent between China and Western jurisdictions. This suggests that there is common ground at an ideational level, which, if appropriately leveraged, could facilitate greater consensus regarding common global policy goals.

*“The Chinese population does not perceive major divergence in cultural values as a significant driver of discontent between China and Western jurisdictions.”*

# METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS



This report is based on the 2023 Chinese Citizens' Global Perception Survey (CCGPS). CCGPS is a national online and telephone survey that examined citizens' perspectives on China's current relations with global actors, including Australia, Canada, the EU, France, Germany, India, Japan, Russia, the UK, and the US.

The survey posed questions geared towards mainland Chinese citizens' attitudes on (1) foreign relations, (2) global peace and security leadership, (3) international trade and investments, (4) preferences on education, emigration, and tourism, (5) global social and economic governance, and (6) research and technological collaboration.

The survey included 29 questions and involved 7-point Likert scale questions. Individual demographic information gathered by the study included: age, gender, urban/rural status, marital status, and Communist Party membership. The Socio-economic information collected included education level, functional language abilities, occupation, and individual/household income.

In partnership with the authors and a survey firm in mainland China, the CCGPS collected responses across urban and rural mainland China in the first quarter of 2023. It utilized a stratified, random sampling approach. It elicited 2,009 valid responses and achieved a distribution of responses that generally mirrors China's 2020 national census demographics regarding gender, age, education, income, and residential location type (see Table MC1 and Figure MC1). Response validity was determined based on completeness, meaning invalid surveys left one or more required questions incomplete and were thus excluded. We acknowledge that this standard survey administration practice has the small potential to add bias to the results.

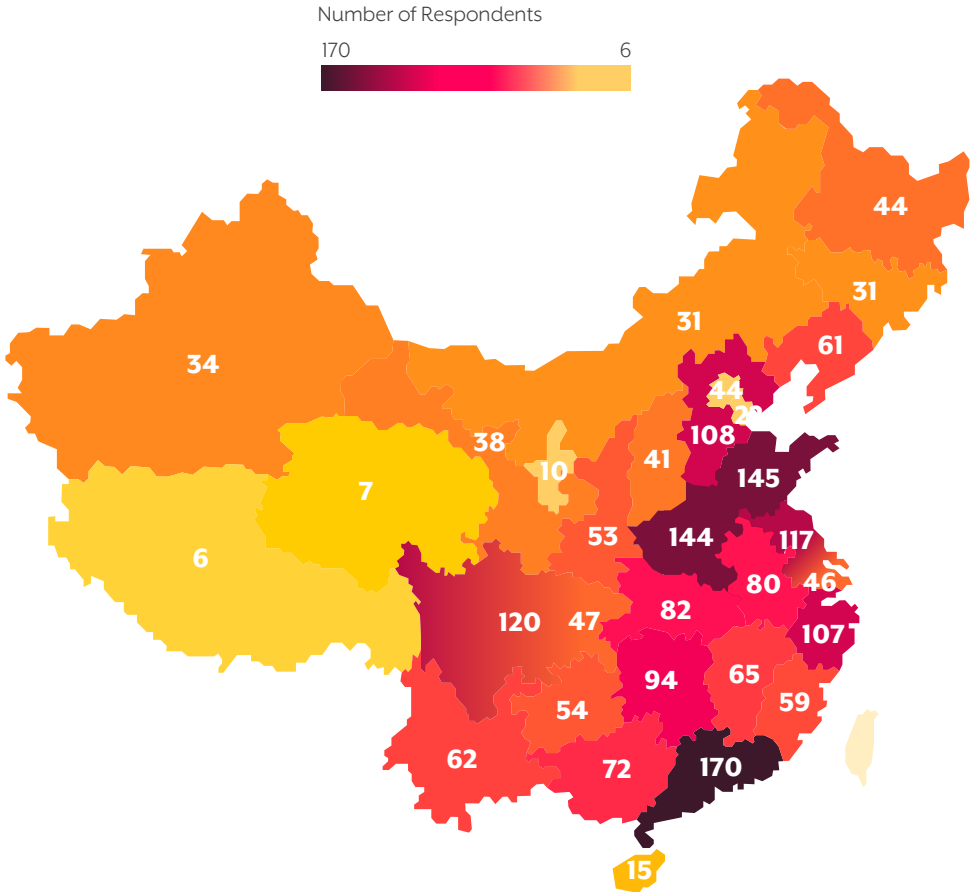
**TABLE MCI**

Demographic Variables

|   | <b>Freq.</b> | <b>Percent</b> |                                       | <b>Freq.</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|---|--------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                           |              |                | <b>Education Level</b>                |              |                |
| Male                                    | <b>1031</b>  | <b>51.3</b>    | Junior High or below                  | <b>421</b>   | <b>21.0</b>    |
| Female                                  | <b>978</b>   | <b>48.7</b>    | Senior High                           | <b>686</b>   | <b>34.2</b>    |
| <b>Age</b>                              |              |                | College 3-year                        | <b>334</b>   | <b>16.6</b>    |
| <=17                                    | <b>101</b>   | <b>5.0</b>     | Bachelor                              | <b>508</b>   | <b>25.3</b>    |
| 18-22                                   | <b>235</b>   | <b>11.7</b>    | Postgraduate or above                 | <b>60</b>    | <b>3.0</b>     |
| 23-29                                   | <b>256</b>   | <b>12.7</b>    | <b>Marital Status</b>                 |              |                |
| 30-39                                   | <b>479</b>   | <b>23.8</b>    | Single                                | <b>479</b>   | <b>23.8</b>    |
| 40-49                                   | <b>402</b>   | <b>20.0</b>    | Married                               | <b>1313</b>  | <b>65.4</b>    |
| 50-59                                   | <b>284</b>   | <b>14.1</b>    | In Relationship                       | <b>163</b>   | <b>8.1</b>     |
| >=60                                    | <b>252</b>   | <b>12.5</b>    | Divorced                              | <b>54</b>    | <b>2.7</b>     |
| <b>Residential Location</b>             |              |                | <b>Number of Children</b>             |              |                |
| Rural Level                             | <b>258</b>   | <b>12.8</b>    | 0                                     | <b>700</b>   | <b>34.8</b>    |
| Town Level                              | <b>361</b>   | <b>18.0</b>    | 1                                     | <b>723</b>   | <b>36.0</b>    |
| County Level                            | <b>560</b>   | <b>27.9</b>    | 2                                     | <b>503</b>   | <b>25.0</b>    |
| Medium-Sized City                       | <b>353</b>   | <b>17.6</b>    | 3 or more                             | <b>83</b>    | <b>4.1</b>     |
| Large-Sized City                        | <b>477</b>   | <b>23.7</b>    | <b>Studied in Foreign Nation</b>      |              |                |
| <b>Communist Party of China Member</b>  |              |                | Yes                                   | <b>66</b>    | <b>3.3</b>     |
| Yes                                     | <b>328</b>   | <b>16.3</b>    | No                                    | <b>1943</b>  | <b>96.7</b>    |
| No                                      | <b>1681</b>  | <b>83.7</b>    | <b>Employment Type</b>                |              |                |
| <b>Employment Status</b>                |              |                | State-Owned Company                   | <b>180</b>   | <b>15.5</b>    |
| Full-Time                               | <b>975</b>   | <b>48.5</b>    | Government                            | <b>63</b>    | <b>5.4</b>     |
| Part-Time                               | <b>185</b>   | <b>9.2</b>     | Private Company                       | <b>564</b>   | <b>48.6</b>    |
| Unemployed                              | <b>224</b>   | <b>11.2</b>    | Foreign Company                       | <b>55</b>    | <b>4.7</b>     |
| Student                                 | <b>321</b>   | <b>16.0</b>    | Social Organization                   | <b>107</b>   | <b>9.2</b>     |
| Retired                                 | <b>304</b>   | <b>15.1</b>    | Self-Employed                         | <b>191</b>   | <b>16.5</b>    |
| <b>Monthly Personal Income (in RMB)</b> |              |                | <b>Monthly Family Income (in RMB)</b> |              |                |
| 0-4999                                  | <b>1061</b>  | <b>52.8</b>    | 0-4999                                | <b>256</b>   | <b>12.7</b>    |
| 5000-9999                               | <b>652</b>   | <b>32.5</b>    | 5000-9999                             | <b>530</b>   | <b>26.4</b>    |
| 10000-14999                             | <b>204</b>   | <b>10.2</b>    | 10000-14999                           | <b>629</b>   | <b>31.3</b>    |
| 15000-19999                             | <b>55</b>    | <b>2.7</b>     | 15000-19999                           | <b>280</b>   | <b>13.9</b>    |
| Above 20000                             | <b>37</b>    | <b>1.8</b>     | Above 20000                           | <b>314</b>   | <b>15.6</b>    |



FIGURE MCI  
Geographical Distribution



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## ABOUT THE CHINA INSTITUTE

The China Institute at the University of Alberta (CIUA) was established in 2005 with an endowment fund of CAD 37 million from the Government of Alberta. The endowment matched the appraised value of The Mactaggart Art Collection, donated to the University of Alberta Museums by Edmonton philanthropists Sandy and Cécile Mactaggart to create the China Institute, dedicated to enhancing understanding between Canada and China.

The China Institute is Canada's only established, multi-disciplinary think tank and research centre focusing solely on China studies. The Institute strives to generate and disseminate knowledge that supports an in-depth understanding of today's China and encourages policy development in response to China's evolving role in the world. CIUA has emerged as a voice of authority in Canada and beyond on political and economic developments inside China, its foreign policy, and its international economic ties, especially in relation to Canada.

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