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The Market Development of Chinese Enterprises in the European Union: Past, Present and Future

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After investigating the economic landscape of Chinese enterprises entering the European market across three distinct phases: pre-COVID-19 (2016-2019), during the pandemic (2020-2022), and the post-pandemic era (2023 onwards), the study analyzes the investment trends of China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment (OFDI) into the European Union (EU). It focuses on the total investment volume, regional distribution, and industrial allocation. By delving into industry reports and case studies of Huawei and BYD's market development in the EU, the authors highlight the challenges posed by the pandemic and geopolitical tensions on Chinese enterprises' development efforts, as well as the opportunities arising in the post-pandemic period. Meanwhile, the analysis of statistics and media discourses reveals the specific impacts on Chinese enterprises' globalization efforts and the new opportunities and challenges faced by both China and the EU. The findings offer constructive recommendations for Chinese enterprises to navigate the post-pandemic landscape and seize market opportunities in the EU, while also providing insights for policymakers in both the EU and China to promote win-win cooperation between China and Europe.

Keywords: *Market development, Chinese enterprises, European Union, OFDI, going global*

Introduction

Globalization, an unstoppable, sustainable force, has been reshaping the world landscape (Olivié and Gracia 2020, Papanikos 2024). For one thing, the pace of global economic integration is accelerating with the improvement of production technology as well as the emergence of a large proportion of multinational capital (Coulibaly and Mekongcho 2018). For another, due to the prevalence of international trade frictions and trade barriers, the world is experiencing the "slowbalisation" (Della Posta 2023, Gong et al. 2022), which is a slowing down of the pace of global integration. In view of this, "going global" acts as an essential consideration for enterprises to align with the evolving demands of the contemporary era, thus coping with the intricacies of global competition. Therefore, it is imperative for Chinese enterprises to go out (Howell et al. 2020). As a priority for Chinese

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companies, the European Union (EU) features beneficial resources such as a mature economic system, legal support and strong purchasing power. Specifically, the year of 2020 sees a stable Sino-EU trade relationship. Table 1 illustrates China replaced the United States as the EU's largest trading partner for the first time in the COVID-19 context, which fully demonstrates the strong resilience of Sino-EU economic and trade cooperation. China's economic status exerts a positive influence on the European economy, especially in the context of subdued prices for energy, agricultural produce, and raw materials[1]. Furthermore, there is a marked complementarity between China and Europe regarding their industrial structures, levels of technological advancement, and market demands. The deepening practical cooperation across a spectrum of domains has yielded substantial mutual benefits, underscoring the significant allure that Chinese enterprises hold within the European market[2].The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on March 11, 2020 and "no longer a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC)" on May 5, 2023 (World Health Organization: WHO, 2020; 2023). Given the circumstances, this research explores the economic landscape for Chinese enterprises expanding into the European market across three phases: prior to the pandemic (2016-2019), during the pandemic (2020-2022), and in the post-pandemic period (2023 onwards). Studying the ramifications of the pandemic on the European expansion efforts of Chinese firms and scrutinizing its effects on their international ventures as well as the implications for business operations abroad would be significant for all international enterprises across the world to consider how to adapt to these changes and capitalize on emerging opportunities in the post-pandemic era.

Table 1. *Top 10 Countries for EU International Trade in 2020*

Ranking	Partners	Imports in million of ECU/EURO
1	China except Hong Kong	384,970.2
2	United States	201,100.5
3	United Kingdom	169,091.5
4	Switzerland	108,911.4
5	Russia	94,777.5
6	Türkiye	62,465.1
7	Japan	54,955.5
8	Norway	42,481.6
9	South Korea	44,213.4
10	Vietnam	34,541.9

Source: Eurostat.

Based on the insightful examination of Chinese enterprises' journey into the European market across three unique phases: pre-COVID-19 (2016-2019), during the pandemic (2020-2022), and the post-pandemic era (2023 onwards), as they navigate China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment (OFDI) trends within the EU,

[1] https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0376-the-impact-of-china-s-economic-situation-on-europe

[2] https://china-cee.eu/2024/08/03/china-eu-economic-trade-and-investment-cooperation-status-quo-issues-and-prospects/

the authors wish to extend their analysis on investment volume, regional presence, and industry allocation so as to provide insights on economic resilience and sustainability for both Chinese enterprises and European market. In addition, the case studies of Chinese enterprises in the European market are presented to provide insights for other private firms. This study is dedicated to addressing the following two research questions: 1) What are the principal challenges that Chinese enterprises encounter in their development within the European Union market, and have these challenges varied between the pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic periods? Furthermore, how have these enterprises strategized to address these challenges across these different stages? 2) In the post-pandemic era, how have Chinese enterprises adapted to and capitalized on emerging market opportunities within their globalization efforts in the European Union?

Literature Review

Extensive research has been conducted on Chinese enterprises from a multitude of perspectives, yielding a rich and diverse academic literature. Scholars have delved into various topics concerning Chinese enterprises, including overseas mergers and acquisitions, globalization strategies, Chinese corporate culture, and the internationalization of enterprises (Zhang et al. 2020, Wei et al. 2023, Zhao and Xu 2024, Yang et al. 2022). These studies have primarily been conducted within the research areas of business economics (Peng et al. 2020, Wang et al. 2024), international relations (Marcoux and Sylvestre-Fleury 2022, Mazé and Chailan 2020), and public administrition (Peng et al. 2023), offering a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies of Chinese enterprises.

Chinese enterprises' going global can be traced back to the late 1970s, when China embarked on its reform and opening-up policies (Zhang 2021). Since then, Chinese enterprises have expanded their production and business operations to the global market, effectively integrating domestic and international markets and resources. This has led to the gradual formation of a globalized operation system, characterized by significant progress in various aspects such as product and service quality, technology, capital, operation, business models, and branding (Luo and Hou 2024). The academic community has responded to this trend by conducting numerous studies on Chinese enterprises' going global, with a particular focus on FDIs (Foreign Direct Investments) and globalization strategies. Zhang et al. (2020), for instance, have explored the considerations of Chinese enterprises in their globalization endeavors. Additionally, control rights and property rights in the context of Chinese enterprises' going global have been thoroughly examined by scholars such as Luo (2020) and Liu & Xiong (2024).

As for the studies of Chinese enterprises' going global to the EU, the existing studies on this topic primarily explore FDIs and the central and eastern European countries. Liu (2024), for example, has analyzed the new changes in the European economic situation and the path of Chinese enterprises' going global in Europe. Xu et al. (2024) have concentrated on the current situation, development environment, and policy suggestions for Chinese enterprises in the European Union. Li (2018) has discussed the new characteristics and promotion strategies of economic and trade cooperation between China and the European Union. Furthermore, KPMG China (2024) has highlighted the forging ahead of Chinese new-energy vehicles in Europe.

On the challenges Chinese companies expanding into the EU, previous studies focus on three aspects: the EU's regulatory hurdles, cultural diversities, and competitive pressures in the EU market.

Specifically, the European marketplace, especially within the EU, is distinguished by its stringent regulatory requirements that are uniformly enforced across all member nations, as noted by Ruohonen (2022). To navigate the stringent EU regulatory landscape, which includes compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and many other rules varying by member state, these companies often invest in local regulatory expertise and build robust compliance infrastructures, thereby adapting to the evolving regulatory environment (Goddard 2017).

Additionally, cultural differences pose significant barriers to Chinese companies in the EU (Ranta 2018). These companies should adapt to different consumer tastes and business practices in varied contexts. To address these issues, Xu and Shi (2020) companies invest in local regulatory expertise and build compliance infrastructure, in order to adapt to the evolving regulatory environment.

Europe's affluent consumer market, coupled with its advanced infrastructure and technological prowess, positions it as an ideal hub for high-value, innovation-led enterprises, as highlighted by Blanchard, Leandro, and Zettelmeyer (2021). These attributes not only attract foreign investment but also foster an environment ripe for innovation and business growth.

Given a considerable amount of research on Chinese enterprises, Chinese enterprises' going global, and Chinese enterprises' going global to the EU, there is a relative scarcity of studies specifically focusing on the latter. However, given the growing economic and trade cooperation between China and the EU, it is anticipated that more and more studies will emerge in this field in the future, further enriching our understanding of Chinese enterprises and their globalization endeavors.

Above all, future research should delve deeper into how these companies strategically address these challenges in practice, considering the dynamics of the challenges and the need for adaptive strategies, which will further the understanding of their international expansion endeavors. Therefore, in this study, the authors will analyze the challenges and opportunities of Chinese companies going out to the EU, along with case studies to provide insights of overcoming the problems.

Data and Research Methods

Data

The primary sources of secondary data include official statistics from international organizations such as the European Commission, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the World Bank, as well as reports from industry associations, market research firms, and academic journals. Official statistics are a crucial component of the data used in this study. They are composed of the following three parts, bilateral trade data, FDI data, and Economic Indicators.

To be specific, we summarize the selections of official statistics used in this study in Table 2.

Table 2. *Selections of Official Statistics*

Data Source	Type of Data	Description
European Commission & Chinese Customs	Bilateral Trade Data	Volume and trends of trade between China and the EU
OECD & Eurostat	FDI Data	Number, value, and success rate of Chinese FDI projects in the EU
European Commission & National Statistical Offices	Economic Indicators	GDP growth, inflation rates, and unemployment figures

Industry reports and market research provide valuable insights into the market entry strategies and performance evaluations of Chinese companies in the EU. These reports are sourced from consulting firms such as McKinsey, Deloitte, and PwC, as well as industry associations and research organizations. The reports cover a range of sectors, including energy, finance, manufacturing, and advanced technology. While specific industry reports and market research data are not presented in this section, they are integrated into the analysis and discussion throughout the study.

Academic journals and conference proceedings are another important source of data in this study. Peer-reviewed articles and conference papers on Chinese enterprises' going global, with a focus on the EU market, provide valuable insights and issues for understanding the opportunities and challenges faced by Chinese enterprises. Moreover, reports from the UNCTAD, the Chinese government's National Bureau of Statistics, and Eurostat are used specifically for analyzing the trends of China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment (OFDI) into the EU. This analysis includes the total investment volume, regional distribution, and industrial allocation, with a focus on the profound shifts observed in recent years. The selected academic journals and conference proceedings used in this analysis are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. *Selected Academic Journals and Conference Proceedings*

Data Source	Type of Data	Description
Peer-reviewed articles & conference papers	Academic Journals & Conference Proceedings	Insights and theoretical frameworks on Chinese enterprises' going global, with a focus on the EU market
UNCTAD, National Bureau of Statistics, & Eurostat	OFDI Reports	Trends in China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment (OFDI) into the EU, including total investment volume, regional distribution, and industrial allocation

Overall, the data used in this study is comprehensive and diverse, providing a robust foundation for analyzing the opportunities and challenges faced by Chinese enterprises expanding into the EU.

Research Methods

Data Analysis Tools and Techniques

In this study, extensive research on Chinese enterprises has been conducted from a multitude of perspectives, which yields a rich and diverse dataset. To analyze this data, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is employed. Descriptive statistics are used to summarize trends in bilateral trade, FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) flows, and economic indicators across three distinct phases: pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the changes and patterns that have emerged over time.

Case Studies

Case studies of Chinese enterprises in the EU, such as Huawei and BYD, are also conducted in this study. The top two representative Chinese enterprises going global are Huawei and BYD (He et al. 2019, Liu 2021). The overall performance of Huawei and BYD in the EU is steady and positive. Both have achieved significant results in the European market with their respective technical strengths and marketing strategies, and have made positive contributions to the EU economy and social development.

These case studies provide a detailed examination of the key factors that contribute to the success or failure of Chinese investments in the EU. The case studies focus on a range of factors, including market entry strategies, cultural differences, regulatory challenges, and competitive dynamics. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence the market performances of Chinese enterprises in the EU, providing valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners.

The research methods employed in this study are rigorous and comprehensive. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, along with the use of specialized software tools and a mixed-methods approach, ensures that the analysis is robust, reliable, and provides valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges faced by Chinese enterprises expanding into the EU.

Analysis and Discussion on Chinese Enterprises' Going Global to the EU

An accurate measurement of China's OFDI presents a formidable challenge due to the diverse methodologies employed in recording and disseminating such information across public and private sectors in China, Europe, and other regions. The analysis is unfolded from a holistic perspective of total investment volume, regional distribution, and industrial allocation, focusing on the pre-pandemic and pandemic periods. It is noted that relevant data for 2023 and 2024 have not been released publicly as of the completion date of this paper, October 16, 2024. The profound investing shifts observed in recent years are analyzed. Then, case studies of representative Chinese enterprises such as Huawei and BYD and their performance in the European market are explored. On account of the analyses, the authors offer recommendations and considerations for Chinese enterprises in the post-pandemic era, aiming to navigate the new landscape of China's investment and EU economic development.

Past Trends of Chinese Enterprises' Going Global to the EU

Prior to the Pandemic (2016-2019)

Prior to the pandemic, there was significant fluctuation in China's direct investment outflow into the EU from 2016 to 2019, with a slight decline in 2018 (see Table 4). Although the development of Chinese investment in Europe was unstable during this period, Chinese enterprises were still injecting vitality into the development of EU countries with investments that were efficient and well-aligned with Europe's development direction. This can be observed from the following two dimensions: key export hubs and industrial distributions in the following sections.

Table 4. *China's FDI Outflows into EU Countries, 2016-2022 (Millions of USD)*

Year	China's FDI Outflows into EU Countries *(Millions of USD)*
2016	100
2017	103
2018	89
2019	107
2020	101
2021	79
2022	69

Source: China's OFDI (Outward Foreign Direct Investment) from 2016-2022

In the following Table 5, the diversity of main investment destinations shows that Chinese companies' investment strategies in the EU involve different countries. In addition, we can observe that the following six countries are pivotal for Chinese companies to go overseas in the EU between 2016 and 2019: Germany, the Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and France. Specifically, Germany emerges as a consistent top destination for Chinese OFDI over the period, indicating a sustained interest and potentially a strategic fit within China's outward investment portfolio. The United Kingdom's presence in 2016 and its absence in subsequent years may reflect the impact of Brexit-related uncertainties on investment flows. Besides, Sweden and France on the list as emerging investment destinations could indicate a strategic investment opportunity during that year.

Table 5. *Ranking of the Top Three Countries of China's OFDI into the EU, 2016-2022*

Country \ Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Germany	1	1	2	3	3	1	2
Luxembourg	2	3	1			3	1
France	3						
The United Kingdom		2					
Sweden			3	2	2		3
The Netherlands				1	1	2	

Source: China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment.
(Note: The empty spaces in this table indicate that the country did not rank in the top three for that particular year.)

In terms of the industrial distributions, the following Table 6 presents a snapshot of the sectors attracting Chinese enterprises' investments in the EU, indicating a multifaceted approach to capital allocation to tapping into various segments of the EU economy. Concretely speaking, the manufacturing sector appears to be a significant recipient of Chinese investment, which may reflect the EU's strong industrial base and the potential for technological exchange and market access. What's more, wholesale and retail trade, along with leasing and business services, are consistently highlighted, indicating the importance of these sectors in facilitating Chinese enterprises' market entry and expansion in the EU. Information transmission/ software and information technology services are noted, which may suggest an emphasis on high-value-added sectors and the integration of innovative technologies within Chinese investments. The production and supply of electricity/heat/gas and water are mentioned, revealing potential investments in critical infrastructure, which are vital for long-term economic development. Scientific research and technical services were reported on the list suggesting that Chinese investments are not only market-driven but also oriented towards knowledge acquisition, R&D, and technological advancement. Moreover, the attention paid by Chinese enterprises to resident services, repairs, and other services shows a broad spectrum of investments that extend beyond the primary industries for producing raw materials and into consumer-oriented services.

Table 6. *Ranking of the Top Five Industries of China's OFDI in the EU, 2016-2022*

Industry / Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Manufacturing	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Leasing and Business Services	3	2	2	2	5	4	
Information Transmission/Software and Information Technology Services		4		3	3	3	
Scientific Research and Technical Services	4			4			4
Wholesale and Retail Trade	2	3	3	5	4		3
Mining					2		
Finance	5	5	4			2	2
Production and Supply of Electricity/Heat/Gas and Water			5				5
Resident Services,Repairs and Other Services						5	

Source: China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment.
(Note: The empty spaces in this table indicate that the industry did not rank in the top five for that particular year.)

During the Pandemic (2020-2022)

In 2020, due to the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, international investment exchanges decreased and the world economy shrank by 3.3%[3]. Chinese companies going overseas are unable to withstand the negative impact of COVID-19. It should be noted in Table 4, the year 2020 marked a pivotal moment with an OFDI value of 100 units, reflecting a downturn from the previous year's 107 units. This decline could be attributed to the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted global economic activities and imposed unprecedented constraints on international investment flows. As the world grappled with the pandemic's ramifications in 2021, Chinese OFDI to the EU slightly rebounded to 101 units, suggesting a degree of resilience and adaptation among Chinese enterprises to the new investment climate. However, this modest recovery was short-lived, as the OFDI value retreated to 89 units in 2022. This reduction may be indicative of a complex interplay of factors, including the lingering effects of the pandemic, evolving geopolitical tensions, and an increasingly stringent investment screening process within the EU.

In respect of the popular export countries, as the largest economy within the European Union[4], Germany is likely to continue getting Chinese investors according to Table 5. Despite the uncertainties brought about by the pandemic, the market size and mature industrial base of Germany are on the list of Chinese investments. The Brexit of the United Kingdom may have had an impact on the flow of

[3]http://finance.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0522/c1004-31718764.html
[4]https://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202211/01/WS63610417a310817f312f40ba.html

investments within the EU (Portes 2022). Investments that have originally been directed to the UK could have been redirected to other EU member states, such as Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands (Donnelly 2022).

As to the trending industries in 2020-2022, the manufacturing sector continues to be a defining area for Chinese investment, underscoring the EU's robust industrial foundation and the mutual benefits of technological synergy and market penetration. Leasing and business services sectors are consistently emphasized, reflecting the demand for flexible business models and the pursuit of operational efficiency. Investments in the production and supply of electricity/ heat/gas and water are noted, indicating a strategic engagement with critical infrastructure sectors that are essential for sustainable economic growth.

It's evident that the shift from the first phase to the second phase illustrates the evolving strategies and priorities of Chinese enterprises in the face of global crises, which underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted factors that influence international investment flows. It highlights the importance of agility and adaptability in strategic investment planning and the continuous evaluation of the geopolitical and economic contexts within which these investments are made, typically from three perspectives: total investment volume, regional distribution as well as industrial allocation.

The shifts of Chinese enterprises in the EU during the pre-pandemic and pandemic phases have been shaped by a complex interplay of political, economic, and cultural factors, each exerting unique influences on the direction and magnitude of China's OFDI. Politically, the fluctuating landscape has been marked by regulatory shifts and heightened scrutiny of foreign investments within the EU[5], particularly in sectors deemed critical to national security and public order. The EU has been introducing the *European Economic Security Strategy*[6] in an attempt to progressively expand and instrumentalize the concept of "de-risking"[7]. This approach has led to an increasing number of member states interpreting the concept of "de-risking" from a negative perspective (Alayrac and Thyrard 2024), perceiving Chinese-funded enterprises as a common security threat (Babic and Linsi 2024). Furthermore, geopolitical tensions, such as the US-China trade frictions, have also steered Chinese enterprises to seek more stable and predictable investment climates within the EU[8]. Additionally, the Brexit has cast a shadow of uncertainty over the UK's investment appeal, potentially redirecting capital flows towards other EU member states[9].

Such a shift can be further elaborated from economic and cultural perspectives. Economically, the COVID-19-induced recession has compelled Chinese investors to reassess risk profiles and financial viability, leading to a more circumspect approach to capital deployment (Liu 2020). The pandemic has also accelerated digital transformation across industries, prompting increased investments in high-

[5]http://ies.cass.cn/cn/work/comment/202307/t20230727_5670830.shtml
[6] https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2dab2b60-149c-11ee-806b-01aa75ed71a1/language-en
[7]https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_23617214
[8]https://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202306/09/WS6482d059a310dbde06d22aef.html
[9]http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0130/c1002-30597630.html

tech sectors[10], biotechnology, and digital infrastructure. Moreover, the surge in demand for healthcare (Tommaso et al. 2020), e-commerce, and online education has created new market opportunities that agile Chinese enterprises have been quick to exploit. Culturally, the pandemic has catalyzed a shift towards remote work and digital solutions, fostering a culture of innovation that resonates with Chinese enterprises. The emphasis on research and development within the EU has also attracted Chinese investments in the scientific research and technical services sectors (Ramasamy and Yeung 2020), reflecting a mutual appreciation for innovation and technological advancement.

Beyond these factors, the pandemic has underscored the vulnerabilities in global supply chains, prompting a strategic reevaluation of supply chain configurations by Chinese enterprises. The rapid pace of technological progress has opened new avenues for investment in areas such as 5G, artificial intelligence, and big data, while the adaptive management practices adopted in response to the pandemic have enabled Chinese enterprises to face the intricate surroundings.

Huawei and BYD in the EU Market

In the following, the market development of Huawei and BYD is analyzed respectively in three periods: prior to the pandemic (2016-2019), during the pandemic (2020-2022), and in the post-pandemic era (2023-onwards).

Market Development of Huawei in Europe

According to the revenue statistics from annual reports of Huawei Investment Holding Company Limited, although the specific annual revenue for Huawei in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa has been generally going down slightly for the three periods from 27% to 21.3% to 20.6%, the annual revenue for Huawei in Europe, Middle East, Africa region is developing comparing with the revenue proportion of 20.3% in 2020, with some changes within different periods as follows (see Table 7).

Table 7. *Huawei's Annual Revenue in Europe, the Middle East and Africa Region and in Total (in RMB million)*

Year	Revenue of Europe, Middle East and Africa	Total Revenue	Proportion
2016	156,509	521,574	30.0%
2017	163,854	603,621	27.1%
2018	204,536	721,202	28.4%
2019	206,007	858,833	24.0%
2020	180,849	891,368	20.3%
2021	131,467	636,807	20.6%
2022	149,206	642,338	23.2%
2023	145,343	704,174	20.6%

Source: Annual Reports of Huawei Investment Holding Company Limited, 2016-2023.

[10] https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2023/03/21/how-pandemic-accelerated-digital-transformation-in-advanced-economies

Market performance, R&D investment, and market entry are analyzed in the pre-pandemic Era (2016-2019) in brief. Firstly, during this period, Huawei emerged as a pivotal player in the European telecommunications landscape. Its strategic partnerships with numerous European telecom operators facilitated its robust market penetration. Notably, according to EU statistics, Huawei's market share in European telecommunications equipment consistently increased, showcasing its technological prowess and high customer satisfaction rates. Secondly, Huawei's commitment to research and development was highlighted by its sixth-place ranking in the EU Commission's 2017 Industrial R&D Investment Scoreboard, which evaluated the R&D spending of 2,500 large global companies in 2016, with Huawei advancing two places from the previous year, surpassing Apple (ranked seventh with 9.5 billion euros), and notably being the only Chinese company in the "Top 50 Global Companies for R&D Investment in 2017", while its overall ranking rose over 200 places between 2004 and 2017[11]. This investment underscored Huawei's dedication to technological innovation and advancement. Finally, Huawei effectively positioned itself in the European market by offering tailored solutions to meet specific customer needs and actively participating in industry expos and forums. These measurements significantly enhanced the company's brand recognition and established its presence in the EU region.

The market response and adaptability of Huawei in the EU during the pandemic era (2020-2022) remained positive and productive. On the one hand, amidst the pandemic, Huawei maintained its market position amidst the shifting economic landscape. The surge in remote work and online learning fueled demand for its networking equipment and smartphones, ensuring stable market demand. On the other hand, the company exhibited remarkable adaptability by swiftly adjusting its marketing and service strategies. Huawei ensured uninterrupted support for its European clients and contributed to local COVID-19 relief efforts, thereby solidifying its reputation and customer loyalty.

Nevertheless, Huawei consistently maintained a high level of R&D investment in both the EU and globally before and during the COVID-19 pandemic period, and it ranked among the top in global corporate R&D investment in EU market, demonstrating its strong strength in technological innovation. Currently, Huawei also has extensive market applications in the fields of communication equipment and smart terminals in the EU. Its cutting-edge technologies such as 5G, cloud computing, and artificial intelligence are favored by European customers. Huawei convened its prestigious annual event in Paris, HUAWEI CONNECT 2024, to delve into the pivotal role of digital and intelligent technologies in catalyzing Europe's transition towards a greener and more digital future[12]. At the same time, Huawei actively participates in the construction of digital infrastructure in Europe, driving local digital transformation. Its business operations in the EU have created a large number of job opportunities and made positive contributions to economic growth. In the post-pandemic era (2023-onwards), Huawei's market expansion and collaboration as well as competition have been growing dramatically. Given the pandemic receding, Huawei has intensified its efforts to diversify its portfolio.

[11]http://www.360doc.com/content/17/1217/19/224530_713890167.shtml

[12]https://e.huawei.com/eu/news/2024/eu/working-together-for-a-greener-and-more-intelligent-future

The company has ventured into smart automotive solutions, cloud computing, and other emerging sectors in the EU market, demonstrating its ability to adapt to changing market demands. Meanwhile, in navigating intense competition from global players, Huawei has fostered strategic partnerships and differentiated itself through product innovation and customer-centric services. This approach has allowed the company to maintain its competitive edge and expand its market presence.

Market Development of BYD in Europe

Since the inception of BYD Europe in 1998, as the first overseas subsidiary of the BYD company, BYD has grown from a relatively unknown brand in Europe to a compelling new energy vehicle industry leader within over 20 years of development. According to its annual reports, BYD has been developing rapidly on the way of going global with its overseas revenue proportion of the total revenue (see Table 8), which shows BYD's continuous and grand development of its European market.

Based on the annual reports of BYD together with related industrial reports and studies, the overall growth of the European market is summarized in the following table (Table 8), which shows that BYD has been continuously establishing and developing its presence in the European market with its European market turnover increasing annually.

Table 8. *BYD's Annual Revenue in Europe and in Total (in RMB million)*

Year	Annual Revenue in Europe	Total Revenue	Proportion
2016	1,430	100,208	1.40%
2017	2,191	102,606	2.10%
2018	3,123	130,055	2.40%
2019	3,654	127,739	2.90%
2020	7,204	156,598	4.60%
2021	11,023	216,142	5.10%
2022	22,410	424,061	5.30%
2023	28,911	602,315	4.80%

Source: Annual Reports of BYD Company Limited, 2016-2023.

Prior to the pandemic (2016-2019), BYD strategically ventured into the European market by launching electric buses that garnered significant attention owing to their eco-friendliness and impressive performance metrics. For instance, BYD's electric buses in Europe were reported to have reduced CO2 emissions by substantial margins compared to traditional diesel buses. This initial success paved the way for the subsequent introduction of passenger electric vehicles (EVs) in the region. During this period, BYD prioritized localization strategies, establishing a comprehensive sales network across key European markets and enhancing after-sales services to align with the expectations of European consumers. Specifically, BYD invested in training programs for local dealerships and service centers to ensure high-quality customer support.

Despite the disruptions caused by the pandemic (2020-2022), BYD's EV sales in Europe experienced a notable surge. It is reported that by November 2022, BYD's monthly overseas sales surpassed the 10,000 units, reaching 12,318 units, with the sales having continued to exceed 10,000 units in December, totaling 11,320[13]. Notably, the European market for BYD achieved a remarkable 400% growth, driven by favorable government policies promoting green vehicles and increasing consumer awareness of environmental issues. The company capitalized on this trend by highlighting its advanced technology and commitment to sustainability, further enhancing its brand reputation in the region.

Notably in recent years, BYD has accelerated its market expansion in the EU, continuously enhancing its brand influence and market share in Europe by establishing production bases, increasing sales and service outlets, etc. Its electric vehicle products have been recognized and favored by more and more European consumers. It possesses leading technical strength in the field of battery energy storage, and its products have high competitiveness in the EU market. BYD holds a significant share of the EU's battery energy storage market, demonstrating its strong strength in this field. Although having faced some market challenges such as tariffs and quality concerns in the past, BYD actively responds to these challenges by continuously improving product quality and optimizing pricing strategies. Meanwhile, with the increasing demand for sustainable energy and electric vehicles in Europe, BYD still has broad development prospects in the EU market.

In the post-pandemic era (2023-onwards), BYD has unveiled ambitious investment and production plans in Europe. The company has announced a significant investment of several billion euros, which includes the establishment of a state-of-the-art factory in Hungary. Additionally, BYD plans to expand its distribution network and marketing efforts, aiming to increase its market share in Europe. To further consolidate its position in the region, BYD intends to introduce more models tailored to the European market, leveraging its extensive experience in electric vehicle technology and battery innovation. For example, BYD is reportedly developing new EV models with advanced battery technology that offers improved range and faster charging capabilities, specifically designed to meet the demands of European consumers. According to its plan, BYD's overseas exports are expected to be in the range of 250,000 to 300,000 units in 2023, and the export volume may reach 1 million units in 2024[14].

Lessons Learnt from Huawei and BYD's Investment in Europe

Huawei, a leading global provider of information and communications technology (ICT) solutions, has made significant strides in the telecom industry. Its success

[13]https://www.yoojia.com/ask/12-11666360792115658782.html
[14]https://www.qi-che.com/guoneicheshi/15480.htm

can be attributed to several key factors. Advanced technologies and strong R&D capabilities have been instrumental in positioning Huawei as a technological leader. The company's continuous investment in research and development has enabled it to develop cutting-edge technologies such as 5G and AI, which have attracted customers and partners in the European market. Additionally, Huawei's adaptive market strategies have allowed it to navigate changing market conditions effectively. For instance, during the pandemic, the company swiftly adjusted its approach to ensure uninterrupted support for clients while also contributing to local COVID-19 relief efforts. Deep industry ties with telecom operators, research institutions, and government bodies across Europe have facilitated collaboration and partnerships, enhancing Huawei's market presence and credibility. Lastly, Huawei's customer-centric approach, which prioritizes understanding and addressing customer needs, has helped build loyalty and trust among European customers.

Despite its success, Huawei has faced several challenges in the EU market. Geopolitical tensions, particularly in relation to concerns over national security and data privacy, have led to trade restrictions and bans on Huawei equipment in some European countries. These tensions have impacted Huawei's operations and competitiveness. Furthermore, the imposition of tariffs and other trade restrictions by some European countries has increased Huawei's operational costs. Negative media coverage and misconceptions about Huawei's business practices have also affected its reputation in some quarters. Addressing these issues through transparency and engagement with stakeholders is crucial for Huawei's continued success in Europe.

As for BYD, a pioneering Chinese electric vehicle (EV) manufacturer, it has achieved remarkable success in the global automotive market. Its technological leadership in EVs has been a significant factor in attracting European customers. BYD offers high-performance and environmentally friendly vehicles, which align with the growing consumer awareness of environmental issues and government incentives for green vehicles in Europe. The company's timely market entry has allowed it to capitalize on the growing demand for sustainable mobility solutions. BYD has also prioritized localization, establishing sales networks and enhancing after-sales services to cater to the specific needs of European consumers. This approach has helped BYD build a strong presence in the region. Lastly, BYD's commitment to environmental sustainability resonates well with European consumers, further enhancing its brand image and market appeal.

While BYD has achieved significant success, it faces several challenges in the European market. Tariffs and regulatory barriers in some European countries can increase its operational costs and limit its market penetration. Additionally, BYD competes with well-established European and global automakers in the electric vehicle market. This intense competition requires BYD to continuously innovate and differentiate its products to maintain its market position. Global supply chain disruptions can also impact BYD's ability to meet demand in Europe, potentially leading to stockouts or delays in delivery. Managing these risks effectively is crucial for BYD's continued success in the region.

Future Investment Trends for China in the EU

In 2023, global trade is confronted with multiple pressures and persistently sluggish market demand. Both the total value of imports and exports between China and the EU have experienced a decline compared to the same period last year, yet it has still demonstrated a certain degree of resilience. China remains the EU's second-largest trading partner, the largest source of imports, and the third-largest export market; conversely, the EU is China's second-largest trading partner, the second-largest source of imports, and the second-largest export market[15]. Exchanges between China and the EU in this period at various leadership levels have been continuously strengthened, yielding positive outcomes. High-level interactions have provided direction for the cooperative development between the two sides, continuously deepening collaboration in green, digital, as well as economic and trade fields[16], which can be flawed windows for Chinese enterprises into the EU market.

The EU's commitment to a green economy and sustainable development has opened avenues for Chinese enterprises in renewable energy and energy-saving and environmental protection sectors. *The European Green Deal* and other policies provide incentives and funding support, aligning with China's competitive edge in technologies such as wind and solar energy, and electric vehicles.

The accelerated trend of digital transformation during the pandemic has catalyzed a surge in market demand for information transmission, software, and information technology services. Chinese firms specializing in these areas are well-positioned to tap into the expansive opportunities presented by the EU's drive towards digitalization, bolstered by policy support such as the *Digital Europe Programme*[17] and the proliferation of cross-industry integrations.

Despite pandemic-induced challenges, the resilience and potential of Sino-EU trade are evident, with the progression of trade agreements like the China-EU Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) facilitating reduced trade barriers and enhanced market access (Casarini and Otero-Iglesias 2021, Yan 2022). The reconfiguration of global supply chains post-pandemic offers Chinese enterprises the opportunity to integrate and optimize their operations to better serve the EU market.

In the post-pandemic era, Chinese enterprises expanding into the EU are confronted with a variety of challenges that demand strategic adaptability[18]. Firstly, the enhanced investment scrutiny by the EU and its member states[19], particularly for investments in critical infrastructure and sensitive technologies, introduces a more complex approval process for Chinese investors. Additionally, market access barriers have become more stringent, with the EU's high standards for technical, environmental, and labor regulations necessitating significant adjustments to Chinese products and services. Furthermore, geopolitical risks pose uncertainties

[15]https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ext_st_eu27_2020sitc__
[16]http://eu.mofcom.gov.cn/article/gchf/202312/20231203458927.shtml
[17]https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/programmes/digital
[18]https://www.21jingji.com/article/20240227/bfd281c680c8ff6a70addd56d9893a42.html
[19]https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications?ref=SR-2023-27

due to fluctuations in diplomatic relations and trade policies, which can impact the stability of Chinese investments and operations in the EU[20]. In addition, multiple cultural issues also cause great challenges for Chinese companies. The EU comprises multiple member states, each with its unique culture, resulting in significant differences in consumption values and preferences among people from different countries. While facing economic and political risks, Chinese enterprises often overlook cultural differences, which can be fatal. Enterprises are inevitably influenced and constrained by the sociocultural environment in various activities. Therefore, enterprises should understand and analyze the local cultural environment and make corresponding decisions based on local conditions.

Moreover, the supply chain restructuring required by the pandemic's exposure of global vulnerabilities compels Chinese companies to reassess their supply chain configurations within the EU, focusing on enhancing resilience and agility. Concurrently, the intensified competition as the global economy rebounds means Chinese firms must compete on multiple fronts[21], including innovation, quality, and brand reputation. Additionally, regulatory compliance within the EU's comprehensive legal framework is crucial to avoid legal repercussions and reputational damage.

As far as the EU trade surrounding is concerned, it is not optimistic in recent years. The EU has formulated a protectionist policy toolbox to increase the difficulty for foreign companies to invest, acquire and participate in public procurement in the EU, and launched anti-subsidy investigations without sufficient evidence, interfering with the industrial chain and supply chain cooperation of companies inside and outside the EU, resulting in restrictions on the normal production and operation activities of many companies in Europe. The survey from Academy of China Council for the Promotion of International Trade[22] shows that 60.74% of the surveyed companies believe that the EU business environment is average, 34.07% believe it is good, and 5.19% believe it is poor.

Under *the Regulation <EU> 2022/2560 of the European Parliament and of the Council on Foreign*[23], foreign-invested enterprises are required to fulfill more compliance obligations than domestic enterprises, and will be placed in a disadvantageous competitive position[24]. Since the scope of subsidies involved in the Regulation is relatively wide, it means that after the Regulation is formally implemented, it will have a significant negative impact on Chinese enterprises participating in mergers and acquisitions and public procurement in the EU.

Considerations for Chinese Enterprises Going to the EU Market

In the post-pandemic epoch, Chinese enterprises navigating the EU market must adopt an integrated framework that addresses political, economic, cultural,

[20]https://www.spglobal.com/en/research-insights/market-insights/geopolitical-risk
[21] https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/06/why-china-is-making-innovation-the-new-engine-of-growth/
[22]http://www.ccpit-academy.org/Content-151-1158.html
[23]https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022R2560
[24] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/11/28/council%EF%BF%BEgives-final-approval-to-tackling-distortive-foreign-subsidies-on-the-internal-market/%E3% 80%82/

and policy dimensions. Politically, active engagement with government initiatives is paramount, as it provides a foundation for leveraging trade agreements, investment promotion, and diplomatic support to enhance international business capabilities. Economically, the uncertainties of the post-pandemic market necessitate a robust investment risk management approach, involving comprehensive assessments and proactive strategies to mitigate legal, financial, and political risks, ensuring sustainable growth. Culturally, the implementation of "localisation" is essential for Chinese enterprises to resonate with the EU market, requiring the adaptation of products and services to local preferences and compliance with EU regulations, thereby building local workforces and fostering market acceptance.

Strengthening capacity cooperation aligns with China's going global, facilitating deeper economic engagement through collaborative opportunities in manufacturing, technology, and infrastructure development within the EU. Technologically, the focus on collaboration and innovation is imperative, as it accelerates the adoption of cutting-edge technologies, thereby driving business growth and enhancing the competitiveness of Chinese enterprises in the digital age.

Expanded Scope of Subsidy Identification: The EU considers certain state-owned equity investment institutions' equity investments as subsidies, increasing the likelihood of higher anti-dumping duties being imposed on Chinese enterprises investing in the EU. Thus, Chinese enterprises should notice that the EU has strengthened its trade remedy tools, making it easier for Chinese enterprises to be identified as dumping and receiving subsidies. For example, the EU has introduced the concept of "significant market distortions," continued to use the "surrogate country" approach, partially abandoned the "lesser duty" principle, and set a minimum target profit margin (Du, 2022).

Industry Access Restrictions: In certain sectors, such as communications, the EU sets market access barriers through legislative and administrative means, limiting the development of Chinese enterprises in Europe. European enterprises emphasize that, overall, unclear regulations and China's unpredictable legislative environment are the main regulatory challenges they face. Moreover, embracing sustainable and responsible business practices is crucial for aligning with the EU environmental and social standards, encompassing the adoption of green technologies, ethical supply chain management, and contributions to local communities, which in turn enhances the enterprise's reputation and market acceptance.

However, for the EU side, there are also two important considerations. First, it is recommended that the EU maintain a free market for international trade. Specifically, the EU should adhere to the concept of openness and free trade that it has always upheld, be a good advocate and practitioner of multilateralism, support and strengthen the multilateral trading system with the WTO at its core, and promote the establishment of a fair, reasonable and transparent international economic and trade rules system. Based on the common rules established by the WTO and *the 2024 Annual Single Market and Competitiveness Report*[25], the EU should abide by and fulfill the commitments made in the negotiations and implement trade liberalization in a regular manner. Secondly, in the face of Sino-

[25]https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=COM:2024:77:FIN

EU trade relations, the EU should adhere to strategic autonomy and independent and fair judgment, avoid ideological confrontation on economic and trade issues with China, focus on mutual benefit and win-win, abandon the "zero-sum game" mentality, and do not restrict Sino-EU business trade cooperation. In addition, the EU should stop promoting various policies to contain Chinese companies under the "de-risking" framework, try to eliminate the negative impact of "de-risking" and other measures on Sino-EU economic and trade fields, and maintain the orderly, smooth and efficient connection of Sino-EU industries. It is recommended that the EU actively build a fair, non-discriminatory and predictable market[26], stop discriminatory law enforcement against Chinese companies in Europe, and avoid undermining the enthusiasm of Chinese companies to invest and do business in Europe.

The investment framework for Chinese enterprises in the EU is underpinned by a multidimensional approach that integrates political support, economic prudence, cultural adaptation, policy utilization, technological advancement, and sustainable practices. This holistic strategy is vital for not only withstanding the challenges of the post-pandemic era but also for achieving long-term success and sustainable growth in the EU market.

Conclusion

This study examines the market expansion of Chinese enterprises in the EU across three distinct periods: pre-COVID-19 (2016-2019), the pandemic era (2020-2022), and the post-pandemic period (2023-onwards). It analyzes trends in China's OFDI into the EU, with a focus on investment volume, regional distribution, and industrial allocation. The research provides insights into the growing presence of Chinese firms in the EU market, supported by case studies of Huawei and BYD. The study also identifies challenges arising from the pandemic and geopolitical tensions that have affected Chinese enterprises' development in the EU. Despite these impediments, the post-pandemic era offers new opportunities for Chinese companies to adapt to the evolving market and capitalize on EU opportunities. Drawing on statistical data and media discourses, the research presents strategic recommendations for China's OFDI and Chinese enterprises to address these challenges and foster win-win cooperation with the EU. These recommendations are essential for policymakers and investors aiming to enhance sustainable and mutually advantageous economic relations between China and the EU.

In addition, the authors offer five strategic solutions for Chinese enterprises to mitigate risks associated with overseas investments: 1) Enterprises should conduct comprehensive research into the policies, legal frameworks, and regulations of the target market. Engaging in active dialogue and cooperation with local authorities and institutions is crucial. Establishing adaptable operational and investment models can help manage policy and legal risks. 2) To mitigate risks associated with reliance on a single market, Chinese firms should consider a diversified investment strategy across multiple countries and regions. This approach helps in spreading risks and enhancing

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[26]https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjdt_674879/fyrbt_674889/202309/t20230925_11149568.shtml

the resilience of the investment portfolio. 3) Forming strategic alliances with local partners in various regions is essential. These partnerships can leverage local expertise, resources, and networks, thereby reducing operational risks and enhancing market penetration. 4) It is imperative to establish robust mechanisms for market research and information gathering. This enables prompt analysis of market trends, competitive dynamics, and the flexible adjustment of investment strategies to address market and competitive risks. 5) Enterprises should seek support from both domestic and host governments. This support can come in the form of tax incentives, financial subsidies, and preferential credit facilities, which can significantly reduce the risks associated with overseas investments. Additionally, improving the overseas investment insurance system can provide enterprises with risk-sharing mechanisms.

In conclusion, addressing the complexities of overseas investments, especially during periods of global uncertainty such as pandemics, requires a collaborative approach involving enterprises, governments, and other stakeholders. Through these measures, Chinese enterprises can navigate the challenges of OFDI in the EU more effectively.

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