Contesting Globalization and Rethinking International-Regional Collaborations:

*China's Approach to Internationalization of Education*

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**Introduction**

In the last few years, anti-globalism and the resurgence of 'nationalism' have trended across different parts of the globe. General elections showed spreading support for nationalism and populism across Europe and America. Public votes for Brexit in the UK, Trump’s victory in the Presidency of the USA and the most recent general elections in Germany and Italy clearly show the growth of populism and the rising tide of national movements. Such social and political movements have inevitably led people to question the value and benefits brought by globalisation (Lees, 2017). However, the rise of anti-globalism is not new, and anti-globalisation movements have actually emerged over the last two decades—a time when people have become critical of the negative consequences of economic globalisation. Various forms of anti-globalisation movements include global justice, alter-globalisation, anti-globalist expressions, as well as anti-corporate critiques, or broader critiques of neoliberal globalisation have emerged. With its many definitions, “globalisation” has undoubtedly affected national developments across the economic, social, political and cultural dimensions. Yet, against the context of anti-globalism, people around the world have begun to question the values and benefits of internationalisation of higher education. Questions such as these have arisen:

- Is internationalisation dead in the 'post-truth' age?
- Has international education only favoured the elites and marginalised the socio-economically less advantaged?
Have transnational higher education and overseas study perpetuated inequality?

In response to the unanticipated consequences of the internationalisation of education, the 2016 European Association for International Education Conference stated that “what seems to have died is the European international education community’s faith in the inevitability of the cosmopolitan project, in which national boundaries and ethnic loyalties would dissolve over time to allow greater openness, diversity and a sense of global citizenship” (Ziguras, 2016, cited in der Wende, 2017, p. 2). Setting out against the context of the rise of anti-globalism and the resurgence of nationalism, the present paper reviews and discusses the debates of anti-globalism and the resurgence of nationalism as well as their effects on educational development. In addition, this paper also discusses how China has responded to the challenges arising from anti-globalism and the resurgence of nationalism when managing higher education development regionally and globally through adopting different strategies in promoting internationalization of education to achieve its global mission for positioning China as an emerging power of knowledge and culture through the “Belt and Road Initiatives”.

Contesting globalisation: The rise of nationalism, populism and higher education

Right after the Cold War in the late 1980s, the dominant powers in Europe and America proudly declared the “end of history” and jubilantly championed the victory of the capitalist model over socialist counterparts. The developed economies in the West collectively promoted the globalisation project by making neo-liberalism as the guiding ideology for managing the economy, public sector and social welfare. During the last decades, the whole world has been transformed by complex processes that fell under the label of “globalisation”. A prominent example is that a majority of developing countries embraced the concept of a market economy by following the economies in the West in adopting market ideas and related practices, public management, education and social development. Against such a wider political economy context, global corporate structures, namely, “multi-national corporations”, acted as prime movers of significant transformations in the economic, social and public arenas (Barnet &
According to Castells (2000), globalisation has paradoxically led simultaneously to development and underdevelopment and to inclusion and exclusion, which have resulted in global economic imbalances with detrimental effects on social cohesion. Similarly, Stiglitz (2002), James (2001) and Gray (2002) have criticised the impact of globalisation on developing countries owing to the emergence of an imperfect global governance structure and practices. From a historical perspective, they questioned whether globalisation is an irreversible trend and argued that the same set of processes has weakened or stagnated progress in the developing world. Charles Lemert’s book, Globalisation: An introduction to the end of the known world (2016), succinctly describes the complex and problematic processes undergone by the whole world through contemporary globalisation experiences. In a similar vein Gills and Thompson, have argued that contemporary globalisation has resulted in highly complicated and contradicting social, economic, political and cultural developments. When reflecting upon the impact of globalisation, Gills and Thompson over a decade ago (2006) argued that,

`Whatever it (globalisation) is that was meant to be signified by this term, it gained full sensibility only when within the realization that over the course of human history one could point to several periods in which ‘globalisation’ in one or another profound sense had taken place within what was then able to be conceived of as ‘the known world’ (Gills & Thompson, 2006, p.3).`

Additionally one can note that the adoption of neoliberalism as a guiding principle in managing education has inevitably widened the gap between the rich and the poor, thus perpetuating social inequality and intensifying competition in the global labour marke, a point made clearly by Brown, Lauder and Ashton in The global auction: The broken promises of education, jobs and incomes (2011). Meanwhile, the massification of higher education has produced more unhappy youth, especially because it has become more apparent that universities and national governments across different parts of the globe have concentrated funding to groom elite universities to have more resources to promote the international learning experience and collaboration (Welch, 2016; Jin, 2018; Mok & Han, 2017). However, the same
process has raised growing concerns of inequalities and disparities resulting from varying forms of higher education internationalisation (Lamert, 2016; Steger, Battersby, & Siracusa, 2014). Similarly, Lowe (2018) points out the denial of the distinctive and socially important role that universities can play when higher education institutions globally enter a time of war for talents. Caught between neoliberalist globalisation on the one hand, and rising nationalism on the other hand, Lowe is worried about the existential crisis that currently faces humans and the planet we live on (2018).

In light of the intensified economic and social inequalities, anti-globalisation forces have led the public outcry for domestic interests commonly shared among citizens in the UK and the USA. In recent elections held in both countries, the dilemma and tension have unfolded between national protectionism and the call for internationalisation and globalism (Aisch, Pearce, & Rousseau, 2017; Kay, 2016; Plummer, 2012). Increasingly embracing anti-globalism sentiments, US students have become less interested in studying abroad. According to Hawkins (2017), only 10% of all undergraduates (including community college students) have international learning experience, and 90% will graduate from US higher education institutions with no exposure to another culture, system, or language environment. In other words, local students in the USA are becoming more 'inward'. Unlike their Asian counterparts, US students tend to study social sciences and humanities with concentrations in Europe and in English-speaking programs. Even when US students choose to study abroad, the UK remains the top destination, followed by Italy and France. US students are less interested to study in Africa and the Middle East, whilst only a minority would prefer going to China and other parts of Asia for study, although Asia is seen as a major engine for global economic growth (Hawkins, 2017). Against this wider political economy context, scholars have published work that argues for the 'end' of globalisation, including Rosenberg’s Globalisation: A post mortem (2015) and Ramo’s Globalism foes backward (2012), among others. Meanwhile, other sociologists and political scientists have identified various problems resulting from globalisation in their works, such as Sassen’s Globalisation and its discontents (1998), Mittelman’s The globalisation syndrome (2000) and Robinson’s critical appraisal of globalisation in a 2009 work (Robertson, 2009).
Paul Zeleza, Professor of the Humanities and Social Sciences and Vice Chancellor of the United States International University in Africa, acknowledged the contributions of higher education internationalisation in his keynote speech at the NAFSA 2017 Annual Conference and Expo in Los Angeles in May 2017. Zeleza raised the growing concern of “global coloniality” as the unintended consequence of “the reproduction of coloniality on a global scale under neoliberal values and principles of education” (2017, p. 9). Further, he pointed out the rise of xenophobic nationalism among international students and academics in major destination countries, such as the UK, USA, EU and elsewhere (Zeleza, 2017).

Whilst higher education continues to drive an outward looking, globally connected agenda, recent democratic elections in the UK and USA suggest that the voting public is becoming increasingly sceptical of the growing tide of the internationalisation of higher education. Given that only those families with sufficient resources can send their children abroad for different forms of international learning experience to enhance their global competitiveness, growing concerns have emerged, questioning the value of international learning. Criticisms have emerged along the line of whilst higher education and cities expand their reach globally, institutions are failing to connect and communicate locally. Has the internationalisation of higher education become part of an elite agenda that has failed to address the concerns and needs of local communities and society? Recently, the public in many countries is now placing more value on isolationism and anti-globalism is becoming a trend (O’Malley, 2017). Such phenomena are succinctly captured by Marginson (2018), who argues that higher education is confronting the national/global disequilibria with the rise of populism and the destabilisation of politics in certain countries, tensions over migration, the growing criticism of international education as favouring elites and the intensification of inequalities felt all around the world.

The growing tide of nationalism and populism may have contributed to the decrease in number of students embarking on learning journeys overseas. However, how much of this apparent reversal of internationalisation of higher education can be attributed to the rise of political-economic nationalism is still subject to further empirical studies. Golden (2017, cited in Hawkins, 2017) has noted the rise of national security agencies within higher education
institutions in the USA as one additional indication of 'inwardness' and interference in the internationalisation of higher education. Although US higher education institutions have not taken a stand against rising nationalism and ethnocentrism, a trend in the “remarginalization” of internationalism is emerging in US higher education institutions, according to Hawkins (2017). Against this wider political economy context, many world leaders have denounced global citizenship. Two typical examples are Theresa May, who stated, “If you believe you are a citizen of the world, you’re a citizen of nowhere” in 2016 and Donald Trump’s “There is no global flag, no global currency, no global citizenship” in 2017, as cited in der Wende (2017, p.6). In short, growing scepticism against internationalisation can be easily heard when more reports are unveiled of cases of xenophobia and discrimination against foreign students from the South whilst studying in the developed North. Even within academia, more prominent voices are being raised against internationalisation, particularly in questioning the elite cosmopolitan project that favours the use of English as a dominant language and culture, places too much weight on world university rankings with an Anglo-Saxon bias and drives university development through the dominant neoliberal approach and prevailing market forces (Rhoades, 2017).

“Glocalisation”, regionalisation and the resurgence of nationalism

Against the context of anti-globalism, calls for regional cooperation and the formation of regional alliances are becoming popular. In relation to this, enrolment data in specific cases in Asia show that the percentage of international students enrolled at the undergraduate level remains remarkably small (with the exception of Singapore) (Oi, 2016, cited in Hawkins 2017). A national survey conducted in the USA projected a mixed picture showing a 38% decrease in international students studying at US institutions (Redden, 2017). The changing nature of scholarship programs, increasing competition from other countries and emerging concerns about student safety, rising nationalism and anti-immigration sentiments spreading across Europe, the UK and USA, have discouraged students from Asia from studying in these places (Hawkins, 2017). Hence, we witness the movements of students to other settings within Asia,
especially when governments in China, Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea provide attractive scholarship packages to compete for high-quality overseas students. According to Oi (2016), China dominated East Asian mobility and the triad of China, Japan and South Korea, where 50% to 57% of international students come from their two neighbouring countries (83% of international students in Hong Kong come from China) (see also Mok, 2017).

Equally significant are the regional alliances recently formed in Asia to promote deeper and closer cooperation amongst Asian universities. For instance, the Asian University Alliance (AUA) restricts membership within Asia to foster “unique Asian values” (Chao, 2017). With strong commitment to bring leading Asian universities to promote a liberal arts education combining the best traditions of the East and the West, the launch of the Alliance of Asian Liberal Arts Universities initiated by Lingnan University in November 2017 was successfully held. At present, over 20 foundation members from Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong and Mainland China are working closely to develop regional collaboration. In view of student mobility patterns and calls for regional cooperation, scholars now consider the entire paradigm of ‘internationalisation’ to be flawed, thus conceiving a change in the process in the context of regionalisation, which is better interpreted as “glocalisation” rather than “globalisation” (Patel, 2017, cited in Hawkins, 2017). Similarly, with the call for regional collaboration and the strong urge to promote national identity among the youth in Hong Kong and Macau—especially when these two ex-colonies have returned to Mainland China after almost 20 years—the Chinese government has made serious attempts to provide favourable policies and measures to attract students from these two SARs to enrol in universities in the Mainland. However, such efforts to develop stronger national identities have failed to appeal to university graduates, especially when they encounter difficulties in job searches and career development after completing their university education (Mok, 2018).

Managing Anti-Globalism and Resurgence of Nationalism: China’s Responses

Managing global–national tensions: Calling for inclusive globalisation
According to Deane Neubauer (2019), an encroaching nationalism is spreading throughout the world with significant effects and implications for what has been widely accepted as 'international education' over the past two decades. In his article, he accepted the premise that growing nationalism is occurring at the expense of what was previously accepted as a less problematic globalised international environment. Central to the discourses of anti-globalism, Neubauer argued for the multi-varied notions of globalisation against which this movement is directed, and an examination of the complex symbolic environment of 'returning to nationalism' that is emerging through these discourses. In Neubauer’s article, the bulk of his arguments are focused on the various ways by which higher education as a global phenomenon has developed over these decades. He has also suggested implications that encroaching nationalisms of whatever flavour might have on education in its current complex global environment.

Meanwhile, against the hugely complex political economic context in which globalisation is contested, the Chinese government has adopted a more pragmatic approach in addressing the seemingly unresolved dilemmas between neoliberalist globalisation and resurging nationalism. It has mainly done so by calling for more international and regional cooperation through the “Belt and Road” initiative (BRI). In the last few years, President Xi Jinping of the People’s Republic of China has advocated the BRI to call for inclusive development. Going beyond nationalism and globalism, Kan and Xu argue that the “Third Road” is an alternate pathway to promote regional and international cooperation. Citing the development of Confucian Institutes being established across different parts of the globe, Kan and Xu showed how inclusive globalisation could be enhanced through engaging in activities organised by the Confucian Institutes via global networks. Analysing the internationalisation of education along the line of the BRI, Kan and Xu argue that this initiative provides alternatives for upgraded and inclusive globalisation by accepting differences and embracing diversity.

Similar to Kan and Xu, Shi and Wen shed light on how the Chinese government has managed to develop its higher education sector from a periphery of the centre to a centre in the periphery. In recent decades, Chinese universities have successfully transformed into 'world-
class' universities, as vividly revealed by the higher rankings of major Chinese universities among various global university leagues. Shi and Wen have identified the new positioning of Chinese universities in the global university landscape, and their arguments are supported by recent statistics indicating that China has become one of the top five countries attracting overseas/international students.

**Figure 1: The Percentages of Sponsored Students among all International Students Enrolled in Degree Programs in China (2003–2016)**

![Figure 1: The Percentages of Sponsored Students among all International Students Enrolled in Degree Programs in China (2003–2016)](image)

Source: Ministry of Education (2003–2016); Adopted from Chan and Wu (in this issue)

In their formulation, Chan and Wu clearly show the steady increase of international students in China, indicating that many such students are keen to study Chinese culture, languages and medicine. One point that deserves attention here is that many of these international students are not scholarship recipients but are fee-paying students seeking learning opportunities in the Mainland (Figure 1). Such a trend supports Shi and Wen’s argument that China plays a leading role in international higher education, not only acting as a country sending students abroad but receiving/recruiting overseas stayers for learning (Tian, 2018).
**Knowledge diplomacy and war for talent**

With a strong intention to report the status of discourse and practice in higher education globalisation and present an initial attempt at a new angle of analysis on this broad trend, Kitamura and Edwards used the concept of “knowledge diplomacy” to examine international competition and cooperation in higher education as a new way to understand and envision a future for the globalised higher education sector. Putting their study against the rapidly expanding higher education landscape in East Asia, they first review the current trends in the internationalisation of higher education. They then highlight certain challenges faced by institutions and national governments due to increased student mobility, and survey the progress in ensuring quality in higher education throughout the process of globalisation. Kitamura and Edwards explain how the “soft power” paradigm has dominated the discourse on this topic and why 'knowledge diplomacy' has been chosen in analysing the globalisation of higher education, opting for a holistic and collaborative interpretation of the term. Finally, they discuss the various ways by which international cooperation is used in the higher education sector and offer a vision for the future of this field through the lens of collaborative, mutually beneficial knowledge diplomacy.

Similar arguments were forwarded by Chan and Wu when they critically reviewed the rise of international students from overseas, who enroll as degree seekers as exchange or visiting students. Although many of these overseas students are beneficiaries of Chinese government scholarships, we have witnessed the rise of non-scholarship students who are keen to learn Chinese language and culture and appreciate the humanities disciplines of the giant country. The steady increase of international students choosing China as a destination for international learning is reflected in the number of international students as degree seekers in China reaching a quarter of a million in 2017, roughly 10 times of that in 2003. Chan and Wu examine how China, a developing country itself, has managed to achieve this growth in only one and a half decades, the plans of the country with such a success and implications for the rest of the world, which are topics open for interpretation. Scholars in international higher education believe that the number of overseas students increases as an economy grows, and that the rise of such
figures demonstrates the country’s success in governance and generosity in international aid. Others argue that the phenomenon is a result of the internationalisation policy of higher education carefully crafted by the host country. Celebrating the country’s glorious past and asserting its global leadership, the Beijing government has seriously engaged in attracting, recruiting and retaining international students to enforce its soft power through international education and academic exchange. Chan and Wu’s contribution to this issue discusses the pros and cons of the government’s strategies in positioning China as a centre for international learning for overseas students.

In response to the growing pressure of globalisation and intensified competition for global talent, the Chinese government has proactively invested in human capital by sending out students through national scholarships to pursue higher degrees. The attraction, retention and recruitment of world-leading experts have been recognised by China as main strategies for advancing research capacity, technological breakthroughs and innovation-centric entrepreneurship. Such advancements could transform the manufacturing-based economy to a knowledge-based one. Hence, the Chinese government has rolled out different strategies to concentrate funding support to universities and individuals to enhance their research capability, productivity and innovation-centric entrepreneurial ventures. The article contributed by Jiang, Mok and Shen offers an interesting case showing how Chinese higher education is now responding to the national/global disequilibria, as Marginson (2018) recently described, with the rise of populism and destabilisation of politics, tensions over migration, growing criticism of international education for favouring elites, and intensifying inequalities. Their analysis of the relationship between international education and academic job acquisition of PhD returnees in China offers a sociological perspective on how the Chinese government rides over the rising nationalism and the call for globalisation by grooming Chinese students to become global talents before bringing them back to further enhance the country’s global competitiveness.

Conclusion

In summary, this paper has discussed the Chinese responses and strategies adopted
when managing the tensions and challenges arising from the anti-globalism, especially when there is a growing tide of criticisms against international education / higher education. More specifically, this paper critically reflects on how China has made attempts to address such national–global tensions, especially when growing concerns are raised concerning the value and benefits of international and transnational higher education. Hopefully, this presentation would enable those who are not familiar with China could appreciate the Chinese approach to rethink and reposition the country in the increasingly complex international-regional contexts for higher education.
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