**Panel 2: Reimagining International Student Mobility (ISM) Futures: ‘Wish Lists’ from Researchers, Practitioners, and Policymakers – What Would You Like to See (not) Happen? (Roundtable)**

Panel organizers: Dr Peidong Yang (NTU, Singapore), Dr Uma Pradhan (UCL)

Discussants: Professor Johanna Waters (UCL), Professor Rachel Brooks (Oxford)

Participants:

* Who is conditioning (un)certainties in international student recruitment campaign? - Dr Ying Yang (Education University of Hong Kong)
* Access to study abroad and transitions to employment Dr Sazana Jayadeva (University of Surrey)
* Time inequalities in international student mobilities - Dr Cora Xu (Durham University)
* The wellbeing turn and why international student wellbeing as an industry needs to be addressed - Prof Catherine Gomes (RMIT University, Australia)
* ISM research: A subfield in need of an identity - Dr Sylvie Lomer (Manchester University, UK)
* Navigating U.S.-China geopolitical tensions: Decision-making of Chinese international students in U.S. higher education - Dr Jing Yu (University of Wisconsin Madison, United States)
* International student mobility: The Indian perspective - Dr Diotima Chattoraj (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore)
* Southeast Asian visions for a 'Common higher education space' - Dr Miguel Lim (Manchester University, UK)
* Embracing the global without leaving home: “internationalization at home” in Chinese higher educational institutions - Zheng Zou (Peggy) (National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore)

The theme of the 2025 CGHE Annual Conference is “epistemic and infrastructural repair” and the reimagining of higher education futures. While it might be an exaggeration to say that international student mobility (ISM) is in a *broken* state, it certainly is not in great shape either.

Of late, major ISM receiving countries such as Australiai and Canadaii have unveiled drastic policy changes aimed at tightening international student inflows as a precursor/part of net immigration, sparking mixed responses varying from criticismiii to approvaliv. An industry commentator asked whether there is ‘a global turn to tougher international student rules.’v Even as the ISM receiving states grow increasingly ambivalent, ISM-hosting HEIs continue to rely on and aggressively recruit fee-paying international students while simultaneously being criticized for doing too little to be hospitable and inclusive to international students by decolonizing knowledge/curriculum and leveling the epistemic field. ISM is also widely critiqued for its socially reproductive and stratifying consequences both within and across spatial scales.

From the perspectives of the mobile students, the value proposition of studying abroad is increasingly being called into question, especially in the case of the more expensive degree mobility. In China, the world’s largest source country of ISM and hence the most important ‘clientele’ of many universities in the West, a discourse is gathering force that the employability premium of overseas study is overstated or non-existent.vi There, the social media neologism for study-abroad returnees (‘*haigui’*) has evolved from *haidai* (returnee job-seeker)vii a decade ago to currently *haifei*, or ‘overseas returning waste’.viii Yet, large numbers of students continue to be channeled towards overseas educational mobility, due in no small measure to the work of the study-abroad and shadow education industries. While these industries play an important infrastructural role, their profit-driven nature has given rise to a vast murky field where practices ranging from the ethically questionable to the downright fraudulent threaten to undermine the authenticity, integrity, and autonomy of (would-be) international students.

How do ISM researchers working in diverse regions and on diverse topics perceive the current state of ISM? Are there realities about ISM that scholars can agree upon despite the different foci of their research? Are there agendas for research, action, and policy that resonate across scholars, practitioners and policymakers? To reimagine ISM, this roundtable brings together speakers in a wide range of (overlapping) capacities – researchers, practitioners, policymakers and beyond – to share ***what really bothers them*** about ISM in its current state(s), and their ‘**wish lists**’, namely, ***what they would like to see happen and/or not happen*** regarding the futures of ISM.

**Detailed abstracts**

**Who is conditioning (un)certainties in international student recruitment campaign?**

Ying Yang, Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

This presentation sheds light on current international admission criteria deployed by different-tier universities abroad, particularly in the UK. These criteria are often seen as the crux of the matter in generating or intensifying (un)certainties in international student recruitment by both Chinese international students and education agents. It thus draws attention to the educational inequalities in access to international higher education and the need for improvement in international recruitment campaigns, such as scaffolding recruitment strategies according to the strategic functions of different programmes overseas.

**Access to study abroad and transitions to employment**

Sazana Jayadeva, University of Surrey, United Kingdom

I’d like to see more research on: (i) the opportunities and risks that student-created migration infrastructures on social media open up for prospective international students; (ii) how such infrastructures mediate transitions to employment, and with what implications; and (iii) how disability/chronic illness impacts motivations and access to study abroad and outcomes from such mobility.

**Time inequalities in international student mobilities**

Cora Lingling Xu, Durham University, United Kingdom

This short presentation will draw on latest research to discuss the importance to attend to time inequalities in researching international student mobilities. In particular, this presentation will introduce a novel theoretical framework that enables researchers to conduct research on relevant topics.

**The wellbeing turn and why International student wellbeing as an industry needs to be addressed**

Catherine Gomes, RMIT University, Australia

International student mobility has resulted in the development of a growing industry dedicated to their wellbeing with the idea of the vulnerable international student now becoming a business model. In this talk I will be describing the international student wellbeing industry in Australia and why ‘for profit’ wellbeing service providers need to be regulated.

**ISM research: a subfield in need of an identity**

Sylvie Lomer, University of Manchester, United Kingdom

The subfield of ISM research intersects multiple disciplines and rationales for internationalisation. What it lacks is often critical perspectives on issues of power, history and intersectionality that shape contemporary ISM. Concepts such as ‘flow’, ‘choice’, ‘integration’, and ‘markets’ are used unproblematically. I would like to see future ISM research interrogate these concepts and seek to understand ISM as fundamentally messy, unpredictable, and unequal.

**Navigating U.S.-China Geopolitical Tensions: Decision-Making of Chinese International Students in U.S. Higher Education**

Dr Jing Yu, University of Wisconsin Madison, United States

The number of Chinese international students in U.S. higher education has rebounded rapidly, almost returning to pre-COVID-19 levels. However, the election of Donald Trump as U.S. president and the worsening U.S.-China relations have brought renewed attention to Chinese international student mobility, making it a critical issue for higher education institutions and policymakers. In this panel, I aim to explore the mechanisms and processes through which U.S.-China geopolitical tensions influence the decision-making of Chinese international students. I will also share some coping strategies that Chinese international students adopt when political and economic situations are uncertain.

**International Student Migration to India: Navigating their experiences of Inclusion and Integration**

Diotima Chattoraj, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

The paper examines the stream of international students’ migration from western countries like North America and Europe, to India and analyses their experiences of Inclusion and Integration in India. Data was collected in between April 2024 till August 2024 from 35 foreign students including 15 Germans, 11 from Australia, three from Portugal. two from Italy, and one each from New Zealand, France, Czech Republic and Denmark. Most respondents were short-term visitors participating in academic exchange programs or research visits, and all had returned to their home countries by the time of the survey, capturing their retrospective experiences. This paper shows that international students in India generally report positive experiences marked by cultural respect and social integration. Their experiences are influenced by their racial, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds. However, there are some who encounter occasional discrimination, often due to cultural misunderstandings.

**Southeast Asian Visions for a 'Common Higher Education Space'**

Miguel Lim, University of Manchester, United Kingdom

I gather and share some of the 'wishes' of different stakeholders in relation to building a common higher education space in Southeast Asia. My wish list for ISM research and practice is a greater sensitivity to the complex needs and contexts of global majority countries and also to carefully consider both the ethical and strategic issues involved in ISM within, from, and to HEIs in Southeast Asia. Ultimately, my wish is that SEA emerges as a hub that has its own distinct identity and features which enrich the way that students understand the ISM experience.

**Embracing the global without leaving home: “internationalization at home” in Chinese higher educational institutions**

Zheng Zou (Peggy), National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the traditional approach of International Student Mobility (ISM) – where students physically travel abroad for educational experiences – has faced scrutiny for its exclusivity, high cost, and limited accessibility. In response, ‘Internationalization at Home’ has emerged as a complementary and, in some cases, an alternative to ISM. This approach is particularly relevant for Chinese higher education institutions seeking to expand global engagement without requiring students to leave their home campuses. Especially during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic era, as well as in today's context of geopolitical challenges, its importance has become even more prominent. My contribution seeks to highlight the trajectory and future directions for the development of IaH in China, including areas deserving special attention.