

Internationalisation of Chinese Higher Education: Is it Westernisation?

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Outline

- Defining internationalisation
- The identity crisis of internationalisation
- Internationalisation of Chinese higher education
- International student mobility
- Research design and data collection
- Report of findings
- Discussion and conclusion

Land Acknowledgement

- The University of Calgary, located in the heart of Southern Alberta, both acknowledges and pays tribute to the traditional territories of the peoples of Treaty 7, which include the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprised of the Siksika, the Piikani, and the Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta (**Districts 5 and 6**).

Defining Internationalisation

- Despite an increased use of internationalisation in describing the international dimension of higher education, there has been a great deal of confusion about what it really means.
- The term can mean different things to different people.
- For some people, it means academic mobility of students and faculty, international linkages and partnerships, and new international academic programmes and research initiatives.
- For others it means the delivery of education to other countries through satellite programmes.

Defining Internationalisation

De Wit et al. (2015) define internationalisation as:

- the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society. (p. 29)

Defining Internationalisation

- This definition recognises internationalisation at the national as well as the institutional level.
- It acknowledges the relationship between and among nations, cultures, or countries.
- It conveys that internationalisation is an ongoing and continuing effort.
- The three concepts – purpose, function, and delivery – are carefully chosen to describe the overall role and objectives; teaching, research and scholarly activities, and service; and provision of education course and programmes.

The Identity Crisis of Internationalisation

- One identity crisis related to the fundamental values underpinning internationalisation pertains to the economic approach as a principle driving force of internationalisation.
- Two major discourses:
 - market-driven: related to fostering economic performance and competitiveness, and
 - ethically-driven: related to charitable concerns for enhancing the quality of life of disadvantaged students

The Identity Crisis of Internationalisation

- Second, critical scholars question internationalisation as the dominant global imaginary and its colonial myth of Western ontological and epistemological supremacy (Ng, 2012; Stein & Andreotti, 2016).
- The dominant global imaginary of Western supremacy is produced and reproduced not only by and in the West, but also by many across the globe (Stein & Andreotti, 2016).
- Duplicating Western policies without consideration of the local context in many universities in Asia raises the question of “whether internationalization becomes recolonization in the postmodern era” (Ng, 2012, p. 451).

Social Imaginary

- This research draws from philosopher Charles Taylor’s concept of a “social imaginary” (2002, 2004, 2007).
- By definition a social imaginary is a “common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy” (Taylor, 2004, p. 23).
- A social imaginary is normative, meaning that those who operate under its regime are active in their “ability to identify what would constitute a foul” (p. 172).

Social Imaginary

- A social imaginary can emerge in myriad forms.
- This study aligns with what Stein and Andreotti (2015) call the “modern/colonial global imaginary.”
- A social imaginary naturalises the dominant order and, by extension, delegitimises derelict or incongruent orders that might otherwise compete for attention.
- Supremacy is produced and “reproduced not only by and in the West, but also by many across the globe” (Stein & Andreotti, 2015).

Internationalisation of Chinese Higher Education

Three stages of internationalisation of Chinese higher education:

- In 1985 China resumed its limited international contacts with the globalised world.
- Post 1985: provincial governments and local institutions gained more autonomy in internationalisation activities.
- Since the 1990s, China has gradually established a comprehensive programme of internationalisation in higher education.

Internationalisation of Chinese Higher Education

China's strategies of internationalisation:

- China's internationalisation has been most strikingly featured in its vigorous engagement with the outside world, particularly with Western societies.
- Second, the hard sciences usually attain higher levels of internationalisation than the 'soft'.
- Third, China's internationalisation faces various dilemmas, such as educational sovereignty, ambiguity about the legal status of foreign higher education activity.
- Fourth, both uniformities and disparities are substantial in the purposes of and strategies for internationalisation.

International Student Mobility

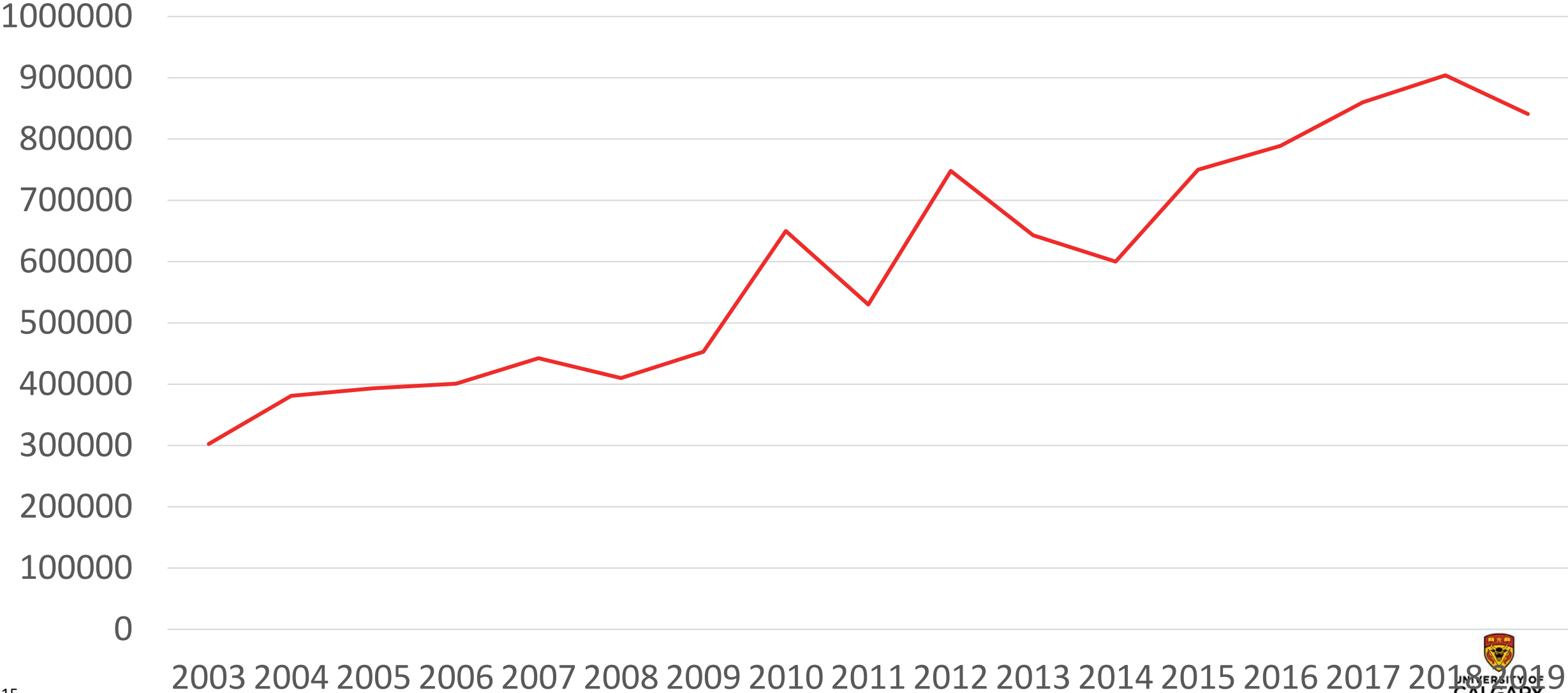
- Student mobility between China and the globalised world has reached an unprecedented level since the advent of the “open door” policy in 1978.
- In the earlier phases, movements toward the international in education primarily followed the inward-oriented internationalization approach focusing on the practice of selecting and sending students abroad mainly to the US and UK. Studying abroad was almost entirely induced by government policy in deciding the purpose and where to send the students .
- Starting from 2000, we see a trend of privatisation of student motivation for studying abroad.

International Student Mobility

Characteristics of Chinese Students Studying Abroad

- Two categories – the intellectual elite and the wealthy elite.
- Diversified choice of specialty from science and engineering to businesses.
- Diversified distribution of target countries: US, Europe, Japan, Russia, now more than 100 countries worldwide.
- China has become the largest source country of international students to many countries in the world.

Number of Chinese Students in OECD, 2003-2019



Tensions and Paradoxes

- The seemingly successful Chinese experience is full of tensions and paradoxical movements.
- One such tension relates to the Western dominance in China's approaches to internationalising its higher education.
- Yang (2016) points out that China's strategies of internationalisation have been most strikingly featured by its vigorous engagement with the Western societies with the embrace of English as its dominant business language.

Focus of the Study

- This study focuses on the interpretations and experiences of internationalisation by Chinese students at China North University (CNU) in China.
 - What does internationalisation mean to Chinese students?
 - How do Chinese students view their experiences of internationalisation?

Data Collection

- Policy analyses of public documents related to internationalisation in China and at CNU
- Individual interviews with 11 Chinese undergraduate students

Demographic Information						
No.	Name	Gender	Age	Exchange	Major	Year
1	Cathy	F	17-20	U.K.	Education	3
2	Diandian	F	20-29	NA	Chemistry	4
3	Echo	F	20-29	U.S.	Education	4
4	Gousheng	M	20-29	U.S.	Chemistry	4
5	Janice	F	20-29	Taiwan	Education	4
6	Jennifer	F	20-29	Taiwan	Education	4
7	Chen	F	17-20	NA	Education	3
8	Terry	M	20-29	NA	Chemistry	M1
9	Vivi	F	20-29	NA	Education	3
10	Xiao	F	20-29	U.S.	Chemistry	4
11	Zijin	M	17-20	U.S.	Education	2

Internationalisation Policy in China

- Internationalisation in China's higher education sector is not a new phenomenon.
- The MOE's (2010) *Outline of China's Medium and Long-Term Plan for Education Reform and Development 2010-2020* ("The Outline") reaffirmed what had already become a mission for many top Chinese universities — the pursuit of "world-class" status (Mohrman, 2008).
- It set aggressive aims for internationalisation using the language of "opening up education" to the world.
- As Liu and Liu (2016) point out, reversing a decades-long and "serious 'deficit' in transnational education" (p. 97) is a necessary step if China is to be considered world-class in the sphere of education.

Internationalisation Policy at China North University

- Internationalisation has risen in importance over the past ten years.
- Cooperation and exchange activities with 30 countries and regions and close to 300 universities through the world.
- Recruiting Chinese scholars with foreign PhDs into faculty positions pushes faculty to make international connections, signs myriad MOUs with foreign universities, establishes cooperative programmes and joint degrees, recruits internationally renowned scholars, and establishes a significant number of English-medium instruction degree programmes.
- Domestic students also travel abroad and take part in activities such as study abroad programmes and international conferences.
- English-medium courses are part of degree programmes for domestic students.

Findings

- Internationalisation equals Westernisation
- Internationalisation equals Englishisation
- Internationalisation equals elitisation

Internationalisation Equals Westernisation

- Actually, it's more accurate to substitute “Westernisation” for “internationalisation.” If we look at our internationalisation, where do we go? We all go to those developed countries such as the US and the UK. Beside these countries there are also Africa, the Philippines, and such underdeveloped countries in Southeast Asia. If you said “internationalisation,” we should also do exchange with these countries. But we don't. Our internationalisation is only one-way. If we look at this uneven distribution, it shouldn't be called internationalisation. It should be called “developed countryization” (fada guojiahua 发达国家化) (Zijin, Education, Chinese student, CNU)



Internationalisation Equals Westernisation

- This student pointed out the inequality of internationalisation. He stated for many Chinese students, internationalisation means to study in the developed countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada.
- Many participants shared a similar view. When we asked them their countries of desire for study abroad, most students chose the developed countries mentioned above.

Internationalisation Equals Westernisation

The dominant global imaginary

- As alluded to earlier, Charles Taylor (2002, p. 106) uses the term “social imaginary” to refer to “common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.”
- Western national imaginaries have been articulated against their “global” Others since their beginning (Stein & Andreotti, 2015).

Internationalisation Equals Westernisation

- More recently, the dominant global imaginary was rearticulated as “globalization” (Stein & Andreotti, 2015).
- In this process, globalisation and Westernisation of internationalisation have created a West-East binary, viewing Western epistemology as universal and superior and all others as particular and inferior (Spivak, 1990).
- This leads to devaluation of Chinese epistemology.

Internationalisation Equals Westernisation

Devaluation of Chinese Knowledge

- Regarding education, we always trace back to Confucius. He was the first great education philosopher, creating knowledge, passing on knowledge and cultivating character. But in practice, the subject of education now is based on the Western system, which is considered scientific. So, the education courses we are learning are inevitably based on the Western system...[and] we neglect local knowledge, which is replaced by mainstream voices. The so-called mainstream is based on Western norms. Western norms are perceived as essential or more valuable. (Zijin, Education, Chinese student, CNU)

Internationalisation Equals Westernisation

Students Internalised the Superiority of Western Knowledge

- I have to admit that when I was searching for the literature in the library, I thought the books are more valuable if the authors are from the US, the UK or France. If the books were written by Chinese authors, I assumed they are not of high quality.
(Zijin, Education, Chinese student, CNU)

Internationalisation Equals Englishisation

English as a Gate-keeper for Internationalisation

- During the interview, English proficiency was crucial. Although the committee members were all Chinese professors, they asked us questions in English. (Zijin, Education, Chinese student, CNU)
- I got 7.5 in IELTS and will retake it in order to get 8. I got 103 in TOEFL and will retake it in order to get 110. (Echo, Education, Chinese student, CNU)

Internationalisation Equals Englishisation

Internationalisation Promotes the Hegemony of English

- In my view, internationalisation equates to Westernisation. All languages used in internationalisation are Western languages, particularly English. That is why English is so important. (Zijin, Education, Chinese student, CNU)

Internationalisation Equals Englishisation

Academic Discourse Dominated by English

- The academic discourse is mainly dominated by foreign countries... especially in the field of social sciences and natural sciences ... in some leading disciplines. (Zijin, Education, Chinese student, CNU)

Internationalisation Equals Englishisation

Students were Critical about the Use of English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI)

- With respect to students, for the courses taught completely in English, probably most of our classmates couldn't keep up because of our low English proficiency. After the course was complete, the main things we could remember were of the style of the course rather than the content. We found the format interesting but forgot what we had learned in the course. (Janice, Education, Chinese student, CNU)

Internationalisation Equals Englishisation

Students were Critical about the Use of English as the Medium of Instruction

- With respect to courses offered in English, even though I was sitting there and listening, unfortunately I couldn't understand them. Therefore I found them boring. (Xiao, Chemistry, Chinese student, CNU)

Internationalisation Equals Englishisation

- Students' account of linguistic barriers to participating in learning activities in EMI.
- Global social imaginary: indexing English medium as the symbol of “quality education” (Phyak & Sah, 2022), and as the symbol of world-class universities.
- Marginson (2006, p. 25) argues that the English-language universities “exercise a special power, expressed as cultural colonisation” and the displacement of the intellectual traditions other language support.

Internationalisation Equals Elitisation

- Not all the students have equal access to internationalisation.
 - Academic elites
 - Economic elites
- To be able to study abroad... you are either from a wealthy family or you are academically outstanding. (Diandian, Chemistry, Chinese student, CNU)

Internationalisation Equals Elitisation

Academic Elites

- Most students who had a study abroad experience were top students.
- We were selected through a competition across the university. Anyone who met the criteria could apply... We went through face-to-face interviews and our applications were evaluated. Actually, it was mainly based on the grades... the top 10% students. .. My GPA was 4/5, or over 90/100. (Jennifer, Education, Chinese student, CNU)

Internationalisation Equals Elitisation

Economic Elites: Exclusion of Marginalised Rural Students

- My classmates who can get support from family, if they want to enjoy more of this kind of internationalisation, they can travel to any country. But for us, it's not possible...as kids from rural villages ... we are limited by objective conditions, so in this respect I'm biased. (Zijin, Education, Chinese student, CNU)

Conclusion

- This study interrogates the inequality of internationalization, namely, internationalisation as Westernisation, Englishisation, and elitisation.
- In the context of China, the internalisation of the superiority of Western sources of knowledge has become a crucial element of a hidden curriculum.
- In this process, the domination of English is closely associated with the superiority of Western knowledge.

Conclusion

- The use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) promotes the hegemony of English as a global language in China (Guo & Beckett, 2007).
- As such, the need to internationalise the university is interpreted to mean to “Englishise” the university and their programmes (Rose & McKinley, 2018).
- Hence, the “Englishisation-equals-internationalisation ideology” is pervasive in the Chinese education policy, curricula, and use of EMI.

Conclusion

- This study is also concerned that not all students have equal access to internationalisation.
- Only the economic elite (e.g., mostly self-funded students) and the academic elite (e.g., students funded by scholarships) have access to international mobility.
- The stratification indicates the ways in which it is reflective of and implicated in the production of inequality in contemporary Chinese society.

Conclusion

- In light of the findings, we call for an approach to de-Westernise the ideological underpinnings of colonial relations of rule and Eurocentric tendencies influencing the current ideological moorings of internationalisations and practices of Chinese higher education.
- Internationalisation should not be merely “following the American or Anglo-Saxon standards and practices” (Mok, 2007, p. 438).
- The findings also have important implications for valuing Chinese epistemology and language and for internationalisation policy in higher education.
- It is time to shift from “a knowledge-receiving culture to a knowledge producing one” (Sinlarat, 2005, p. 268).

Reference

- Guo, Y., Guo, S., Yochim, L., & Liu, X. (2022). Internationalization of Chinese higher education: Is it Westernization? *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 26(4), 436–453.
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Thank you!



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