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Another Student Revolution?

Philip G. Altbach and Thierry M. Luescher

In the past several months, massive social unrest has occurred in more than a dozen countries and regions. Among them are Algeria, Bolivia, Britain, Catalonia, Chile, Ecuador, France, Guinea, Haiti, Honduras, Hong Kong, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, and more. In many cases, these social movements have profoundly shaken the existing system, and the end result remains unclear. While the causes of each of these movements differ, as do the key actors, there do seem to be some common elements. Students have been key in many, and have participated in all of them, even when they have not been central.

Immediate and Underlying Causes

Neither the immediate nor the proximate causes of most of the many recent upheavals have been related to university-based issues such as tuition fees or other campus causes. The one exception is perhaps Chile, where longstanding demands for the implementation of free tuition promises have intermingled with broader social issues. Indeed, the Chile case is rather typical. The current protest movement was sparked by an increase in metro fares and was initially spearheaded by secondary school and university students. It then spread far beyond its student base and the fare issue, to protests concerning social inequalities (Chile is among the most unequal countries in Latin America), with more than a million people demonstrating in Santiago on October 25, 2019.

In most cases, protest movements were sparked by a specific issue, but soon grew far beyond that issue. The continuing Hong Kong protests, again involving, on several occasions, more than a million people (one-fifth of the total population), started by opposing a proposed extradition law permitting authorities to send people convicted of a crime to Mainland China. The protests soon expanded to demands for democracy, a separate Hong Kong identity, and, underlying all this, broad discontent with housing costs and general inequality. Iraqi protests, spearheaded by students but soon joined by all segments of society and spreading to major cities in the country, started with issues of corruption and lack of basic services and soon spread to discontent with Iranian influence in the country and other issues.

A common underlying element to virtually all of these protest movements is unhappiness with social inequality, the growing gulf between rich and poor, and a feeling that large segments of the population have been “left out” by neoliberal policies and the insensitivity of the “political class.” In this sense, the causes for the current wave of social unrest are not unlike the forces that contributed to the election of Donald Trump in the United States or to Brexit in the United Kingdom.

One can look back as well to the movements in North Africa and the Middle East that generated the “Arab Spring” in the early 2010s. The Arab Spring was initially consistently driven by young people, unemployed graduates, and students. It reflected a similar discontent with the established and often repressive political order. Widening social inequality and deep pessimism about future job prospects following graduation created a powerful force for activism.

Twenty-First Century Variables

Today’s protest movements have several significant characteristics. They tend to be leaderless—making it difficult for authorities to negotiate with protesters, or even for the movements themselves to present a coherent set of demands or rationales. Their very spontaneity has given them energy as well as unpredictability. They have typically started very peacefully—although small factions often engage in violence along the periphery of mass demonstrations—and at times deteriorated into street battles with police brutality becoming a factor in escalating, sustaining, or repressing protests.

Abstract

A wave of student activism is sweeping the world. Countries and regions such as Algeria, Bolivia, Britain, Catalonia, Chile, Ecuador, France, Guinea, Haiti, Honduras, Hong Kong, Iraq, Kazakhstan, and Lebanon, among others, have experienced campus activist movements, some of which have toppled governments. The reasons and results of these movements are varied, but most are related to social inequalities.

A common underlying element to virtually all of these protest movements is unhappiness with social inequality.

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And, of course, social media, an especially powerful force among young people and students, has become the key tool for creating awareness and mobilizing and organizing movements. Many of the most well-known student movements in the past decade have involved massive online campaigns. The #FeesMustFall hashtag, which started in South Africa in 2015, was so catchy that it was taken up again by student movements in India and Uganda in October and November 2019 to make similar demands. For governments, the power of social media in movements remains a challenge to harness and in many places the response has been to slow down the Internet or create social media blackouts.

The Role of Students

Students have been key initiators in several of the recent activist movements—Hong Kong and Iraq are good examples. In others, such as the “gilets jaunes” (yellow vests) in France, students played no role in the origins of the movement and have not been a key force throughout. Student involvement has not meant, however, that education-related issues are a key theme, even when students are key participants. And it is fair to say that, unlike in the activist movements of the 1960s, students have not been the central actors in all of the movements, but they have been at least supporting players in most and have been leaders in some.

The decade since the Great Recession was opened with student protests. Indeed, while 2019 has become the international year of street protests, it is students that started taking to the streets, protesting austerity policies and increasing social inequality in the years leading up to the present time. The trigger then has been attempts by governments to increasingly privatize the cost of higher education as part of austerity policies. Over the decade, in Bangladesh, Britain, Chile, Germany, India, Italy, Malaysia, Quebec, South Africa, South Korea, Uganda, and so forth—on every continent—there have been massive student protests about tuition fees. An added dimension, and perhaps a precursor of future trends, is the involvement of high school students in activist movements—and in a few cases, such as Chile and Hong Kong, in political struggles, but more importantly in growing environmental activism around the world.

What we have been witnessing in 2019 may not quite be a student revolution as it was in 1968; it may better be coined a youth (r)evolution. The important role of students as a specific group in the present social movements is however undeniable, not the least in their calls for social justice and sounding the prelude to the current wave of activism. ▲

Abstract

From October 2019, widespread protests in Chile have aired understandable frustrations and, more perplexingly, vicious violence. There are those who appreciate past compromises in fostering democracy and poverty reduction, and others who see only inequality and stagnation. Baffled academic communities have been unable to foreground consultative proposals for constructive change.

Chile's Social Outbreak: Not a Student Movement

Andrés Bernasconi and Pete Leihy

In recent months, mass protests have paralysed cities and countries around the world. Normally sedate, Chile, Latin America's leader in economic development for the past 30 years, has been wracked by protests and violence. On October 10, 2019, coordinated and simultaneous attacks struck 118 metro stations in the capital, Santiago. Twenty-five stations were burned, and seven were completely destroyed. While such massive, concentrated attacks suggest a mastermind, no evidence of such a single actor or agency has been found so far.

Following those events, protesters throughout the country have taken their anger and multiple frustrations to the streets in massive protests and marches. This time, rather

than budding politicians from universities and schools fronting protests, masked gangs run riot. For three months now, violent fringe elements with unknown political agendas have set upon damaging shopping malls, small businesses, supermarkets, and churches. Riot police are overwhelmed and law enforcement is incapable of curbing the looting. Center-right President Sebastián Piñera ordered a state of emergency at the beginning of the crisis, allowing the military to undertake public order and security, but withdrew them after seven days. With dozens of denunciations of human rights violations by the police and the military during the most acute phase of the crisis in October and November, Piñera has been wary of local and international distaste for shows of force.

A New Anger

While the initial spark of these events was secondary school students jumping metro turnstiles en masse following an announced increase in the adult fare equivalent to US\$0.40, mainstream student political involvement in an organized form has been conspicuously absent from these mobilizations.

This is unusual, given that the previous two great episodes of massive street demonstrations had been initiated and led by student organizations. In 2006, secondary school students closed down Chile's schools for several months, protesting against the quality of public education and the growing privatization and market orientation of the system. In 2011, it was the turn of college students, protesting against growing student debt, among other grievances.

The situation is different now. The scale and rage of the unrest are totally unexpected and the lack of a clear unifying cause is highly disconcerting. Three kinds of hypotheses have been advanced by political analysts and social scientists. First, this is a crisis of unmet expectations. After decades of high and steady growth, the economy has stalled and the "promise" of upward mobility under neoliberal capitalism is not being met. The massive lower-middle classes feel alienated. Second, the growing inequality of income and, therefore, of opportunity, is felt across the whole spectrum of social rights, from education to healthcare and pensions. The wealth of the few feels to many like a slap in the face. Finally, there is an insurmountable generation gap. Those who lived through, and fought, Pinochet's dictatorship, now in their fifties and older, value a democracy rebuilt over 30 years, for all its flaws and lags. Those raised a generation later in a democratic, middle-income Chile, do not identify so thankfully with the existing social compact and its roots, and would rather start anew and install a fresh vision of society. That the business-friendly 1980 constitution promulgated by Pinochet (and much adjusted since) still stands is not a new complaint, but now Chileans find themselves faced with the urgency to come up with a constructive, concrete alternative, beyond simply airing their resentment.

Campuses Called into Question

Universities, whose infrastructure has also been burned, are as dumbfounded as others. Student politics and academia used to be reliably at the vanguard of social movements in Latin America. It was a privilege to be a university student and to intellectualize new generational perspectives. But something seems to have changed, as higher education has become more common. Rather than a space for reflecting on society, higher education now appears to be a display case of inequality, mismanagement, and irrelevance. As society's institutions are called into question, universities are not exempt from contempt.

Indeed, in Chile university students feel like they betray the cause if they come to school to think and debate. No, the proper, morally legitimate arena for the student to make her point is the street, marching and chanting with the people. Students stopped coming to class after October, and it remains uncertain whether they will show up in March, when the new term begins. Moreover, the paper-and-pencil national university entrance test, twice postponed due to the outbreak, was boycotted and sabotaged by secondary school students breaking into testing halls and disrupting from outside. For the first time in history, an entire test booklet with questions and their answers was leaked through social media ahead of the exam, forcing test administrators to cancel that test for good.

Universities, whose infrastructure has also been burned, are as dumbfounded as others.

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These are hard and uncertain times for Chilean higher education and youth. Yet, amid crowd-sourced chaos, we have to remind ourselves that academic communities are still capable of fostering idealism, debate, and reflection. ▲

Abstract

On October 17, 2019, massive protests erupted in Lebanon, calling for the resignation of the country's political leaders who had dominated its political life for three decades through patronage and corruption. The agenda of the protesters included demands for an independent government and a civil state. Youth constituted the main bulk of the protesters, with students at the core. The students engaged in the rallies, called for the support of the public university, and participated actively in daily discussion groups organized in public spaces.

Youth Protests in Lebanon: "All of Them Means All of Them"

Adnan El Amine

For three decades, from 1990 to 2019, six elected leaders controlled the economic and political system of Lebanon. Many of them are civil war-era (1975–1990) warlords, whose power allowed them to avoid accountability. Apply game theory, and you can understand how this situation came to be. Each of the main players pretends that he is defending the rights of his sectarian community through power sharing, with the implicit threat that he could mobilize "his" people against the others. In fact, these same leaders used to form governments under the banner of "national unity" to legitimize their despotic leadership within each community.

The "power sharing" of the Lebanese political system meant mutual acceptance by these leaders of political interference in all public institutions, at all layers of the public administration, from the executive leadership down to ground-level bureaucrats, and in all kinds of public deals. This patronage and partisanship has facilitated corruption on a large scale, contributing to a continuous deterioration of all public services and leading to a severe economic crisis.

The Eruption of Protests

No one could have imagined, on October 16, 2019, that these strong leaders would soon face chants of the slogan "All of them means all of them. Out!" This slogan animated massive protests across the country, a new development in the country's recent history.

Late in the afternoon of Thursday, October 17th, the government took the decision to impose a new tax on Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) calls, such as those made on FaceTime, Facebook, and WhatsApp. Within half an hour, the streets were occupied by protesters. By 11pm the same day, the prime minister announced the tax's cancellation, but the protests have continued for months since.

In taxing VoIP calls, the government seemed to be attacking the country's youth. Services like WhatsApp are a free means of communication, to exchange messages, photos, songs, news, jokes, etc., where peers have fun, socialize, date, organize social events, and communicate with their relatives—as every Lebanese family has at least one member abroad.

The first to take to the streets were those who had been left behind: marginalized youth, the unemployed, and school dropouts. In other words, those who, on the afternoon of October 17th, were likely to be found socializing in the street or at a popular café. (Ironically, it so happens that the official who suggested the tax, the minister of communication, is one of the tycoons of the Lebanese business class and has recently

been accused by mass media of engaging in corrupt practices with one of the country's two telecommunications companies.)

The protesters who followed next included youth from a range of social backgrounds—students and university graduates, men and women, from across the country. In Lebanon, youth between 15 and 30, no longer children but not yet in charge of a family, constitute a considerable fraction of the total population (30 percent). Beside their indignation at the whole political system, these youths have a high unemployment rate (17.3 percent in 2018), making emigration the only option for many in order to obtain acceptable employment. This fact was reflected in the demonstrators' slogans, which included, "We want to stop dreaming of getting visas" and "You can't force us to emigrate." Most analysts agree that Lebanon spends a lot of money on education (almost 13 percent of the GDP) and sends its educated human capital to other countries. During the protests, many flights were bringing youth back just to participate in rallies, and youth in the diaspora staged supportive demonstrations in many cities around the world. Among them, women have an additional grievance: they are not allowed to pass their Lebanese nationality to their children when they marry non-Lebanese men.

Student Protests

Due to their dire material conditions, rebellious character, use of social media, and dynamism, among other factors, youth constituted the engine of the October 17th uprising in Lebanon. Other segments of the population also played an important role during the uprising, including men and women with their children, doctors, lawyers, and university staff. All categories of participants share a common political vision, condemning the incumbent political class and calling for an "independent" government and a "civil state."

Students were the core group among the youth. University and high school students walked out of, or skipped, classes to join massive rallies around the country. They were joining what could be called "protest schools": dozens of tents were set up in public spaces in the main cities, where economic, political, cultural, legal, and higher education issues were discussed among students, professors, journalists, and activists on a daily basis. "Here we learn citizenship by practice, not lies disseminated in textbooks," they said, as well as "here we learn real history, not that of corrupt leaders."

The students chanted the national anthem, raised the national flag, and expressed their collective indignation at the political class. They called for employment based on merit, autonomy from political interference for the Lebanese University, and payment of fees in Lebanese pounds, not in US dollars, at private institutions. More significantly, students were organized through independent groups beyond and against formal committees and student unions, which are dominated by youth members of the governing political parties. Some of this activism took place at specific universities, but much of it was organized across universities, mainly the American University of Beirut, Saint-Joseph University, and the Lebanese University.

Counter-Protests

A Mothers' March took place on November 27, 2019. It was dedicated to condemning the incursion of youth partisans of two Muslim political leaders into a Christian neighborhood during the previous evening. For the mothers, who hailed from both Muslim and Christian neighborhoods, this incident brought to mind the civil war and they wanted to prevent a return of this type of violence on sectarian lines.

Such risk of "horizontal" or sectarian conflict shows up every time "outsiders" suddenly attack peaceful protesters—or even security forces, which keep neutral most of the time. The November 26th incident was one of several street manifestations of the political leaders' game, to divert youth protests or put pressure on one another. Yet, though political leaders continue playing their long-established game, all signs show that there is currently little room for them to mobilize their sectarian communities for outright violent conflict.

The uprising has not yet achieved its central demands. However, things are not the same as they were on October 16th. A process of social change was set in motion on October 17th. The protests left no one in the ruling political class unscathed, even within their own camps. But the future of the whole political system is still to be written. ▲

University and high school students walked out of, or skipped, classes to join massive rallies around the country.

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Why Are Indian Students So Angry?

Abstract

A recent wave of student resistance is spreading across Indian campuses, as universities, with their liberal orientation, and the priorities of the Modi government, with its majoritarian and neoliberal agenda, clash against each other. The reaction of the government to university unrest is a cause for serious concern.

Indian universities and colleges have been witnessing vehement protests in recent months, extending across the country from major cities like Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai, to many smaller towns. Students, youth, and academics turned to the streets in unprecedented numbers. In many places, marches and demonstrations turned violent when police used brute force to quell the protests. Many institutions were temporarily closed and examinations had to be rescheduled. In towns like Aligarh, where Aligarh Muslim University, one of the oldest public universities in the country, is located, Internet services were suspended ahead of student protests.

Protests triggered by student and social issues amplified students' messages far beyond campuses. The specific locus of a recent protest that attracted national and international attention was the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi. But students in campuses that are considered quiet and apolitical, like the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay, IIT Madras, or the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore, also organized gatherings and marches in support of the issues raised by students at JNU and other campuses. This was probably the first time that students from these campuses demonstrated in such large numbers against the state.

Compounding Challenges

To a great extent, these protests are based on the discontent of Indian students regarding many issues compounded over recent years. They are just the tip of the iceberg of a deeper crisis that Indian society and its institutions have been undergoing, and the worst phase since independence.

In December 2019, the Delhi police force, which is under the jurisdiction of the central government of prime minister Modi, beat up students protesting at Jamia Millia Islamia University (JMI), a public institution in Delhi. JMI students were protesting against the government's controversial Citizenship Amendment Act. This act offers citizenship to immigrants belonging to Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Parsi, and Sikh communities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, but does not include Muslims. It is a clear violation of the right to equality enshrined in the Indian constitution and the secular foundations of the country.

This episode was followed by violence unleashed by masked miscreants, allegedly associated with the student organization affiliated with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at JNU. Armed with sticks, the mob attacked students and faculty in January 2020. The stand taken by the JNU administration and the police after this attack provoked sharp criticism and demonstrations across the country.

These events at JNU could be viewed as an example of the contradiction between the traditionally liberal orientation of universities and the rapid changes currently taking place under Modi's Hindu nationalist administration. Student politics at JNU have been known mainly for their orientation on national and international politics. However, the ongoing agitation is mainly the result of an administrative decision to increase fees and introduce new utility charges, making it harder for students from marginalized backgrounds to access higher education. Students also opposed new hostel rules including a dress code for students and the implementation of curfew schedules.

Penetration of Intolerant Majoritarianism

To understand these violent, country-wide developments, one must look into several issues related to the growth and influence of right-wing politics over the past six years. During Prime Minister Modi's first tenure (2014–2019), government interfered in prominent academic institutions such as the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), where, in 2015, students went on an indefinite strike after the government appointed

These events at JNU could be viewed as an example of the contradiction between the traditionally liberal orientation of universities and the rapid changes currently taking place under Modi's Hindu nationalist administration.

television actor-turned-politician Gajendra Chauhan as chairman of the institute. In 2016, the president of the JNU Students' Union was arrested on sedition charges, a politically motivated move. That same year, the suicide of Rohith Vemula, a research scholar at the University of Hyderabad, triggered protests in that city and in other parts of the country. Vemula committed suicide as a result of caste discrimination on campus, and there were allegations that university officials were under pressure to act against students, including him.

During the same period, prominent intellectuals, scholars, and journalists (such as Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare, M.M. Kalburgi, and Gauri Lankesh) were murdered by right-wing terrorists in Maharashtra and Karnataka. The government's decision to impose Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules on faculty at central universities provoked heavy criticism. These rules restrict academic freedom, promote politically motivated historiography and chauvinistic claims about ancient India's scientific and technological contributions, and dilute the credibility of national statistical organizations.

The return of Modi as prime minister with a colossal majority in 2019 has further emboldened rightist elements in Indian politics and society. The policies of many top university officials, often beneficiaries of political appointments, are inspired by these politics. As a result, many institutions, especially those under the central government and state institutions under BJP-ruled states (such as Uttar Pradesh) are notorious in suppressing dissent, which has resulted in an undeclared state of emergency across many campuses and cities.

In December 2019, it was reported that the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, a prominent public university in Mumbai, issued a directive to its students and faculty prohibiting them from joining "any form of protest" while on duty. Similarly, the dean of students at IIT Bombay recently issued a directive warning students against taking part in antigovernment protests. Other Indian universities also introduced restrictive policies. Violations of academic freedom have become widespread.

Silencing of Dissent in the Age of Neoliberalism

Government policies favoring religious majoritarianism, combined with the implementation of a neoliberal economic agenda, are at the root of the ongoing crisis. Unlike student movements in the recent past, which mainly focussed on student issues and were led by students, current protests are also focussing on broader, national issues concerning the existence of democratic institutions and constitutional values.

Most public institutions are affected by a lack of resources. The nondisbursal of full salaries to staff of prestigious institutions, such as at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in 2019, is a telling example. In addition, in an attempt to make them more self-sufficient, the government promotes income diversification among public institutions—the JNU administration's decision to increase fees and introduce new charges to students is an example. This is compounded by the worst slowdown faced by the Indian economy in recent decades, coupled with rising unemployment.

Students and faculty are the most affected by these policies, especially by fund cuts and attacks against science and public institutions. All these developments are leading to a crackdown on dissent in higher education institutions and an increase of state control through various means. The response of government and university officials is a cause for serious concern. What is at stake is not only the existence of India's public higher education system, but also the very idea of educational institutions as spaces to generate creativity and critical thinking. ▲

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Universities in Crisis and Recovery: The Case of Hong Kong, China

Gerard A. Postiglione

Abstract

Universities moved to the center of the Hong Kong protest movement, while Hong Kong moved into the front line of the US-China trade war. Like other world cities with top-tier universities, Hong Kong has reason to expect that its universities will make a full recovery.

The Hong Kong protest movement of 2019 included eight globally ranked universities, three in the top 100.

Universities have played an important role in social movements around the world. Some became bastions of reform. Some led uprisings. Others were drawn into uprisings that devastated the cities where they were located. Some cities and their universities have come out of it stronger; others lost some vibrancy. Among the earliest were the University of Paris Uprising of 1229 (not to mention the more recent, dramatic unrest of May 1968) and the Beijing May 4th Movement of 1919 led by Peking University and other universities. The University of California at Berkeley's Free Speech Movement in 1964 affected nearby San Francisco, while the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York City pulled in New York University. These flagship universities and their cities remain globally prominent. The Hong Kong protest movement of 2019 included eight globally ranked universities, three in the top 100. Can Hong Kong and its universities recover?

The Confrontation

In 1997, Hong Kong reunited with China after 155 years of British colonial rule and became a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China in a "one-country, two-systems" arrangement with a high degree of autonomy for 50 years until 2047. The HKSAR has its own constitution, including freedom of speech and assembly. Its universities have a higher degree of autonomy and academic freedom than its neighbors do.

Tension came to a head on March 29, 2019, when Hong Kong's chief executive published a bill in the legislature that could potentially extradite a person from Hong Kong to stand trial in the Chinese mainland. This brought a million of Hong Kong's seven million people to the street in a peaceful protest. When the chief executive refused to withdraw the bill, two million joined a peaceful protest on June 17. The government stood firm and the anger boiled over. Violent protests, vandalism, and clashes with police engulfed the city. On October 23, the extradition bill was finally withdrawn. By then, the protest movement was in full swing, demanding the resignation of the chief executive, an independent commission of inquiry into alleged police brutality, retraction of the classification of protesters as rioters, an amnesty for arrested protesters, and universal suffrage for the election of the chief executive and the full legislature.

One of the safest cities in the world to study verged on collapse. Most protesters were under 30 years old and concerned about post 2047. The movement had no designated leaders and relied upon social media. Protesters split into 10 or 20 groups and closed highways, mass transit stations, airport check-in counters, and universities. They vandalized hundreds of bank branches, restaurants, supermarkets, shops, and businesses owned by supporters of the government. Despite a million people living below the poverty line, there was no looting. People displayed patience with the disruptions and office workers joined the protests on their lunch breaks. Some decried the vandalism and marched in support of the police.

University campuses became sites of violent confrontation. On one campus, police in body armor fired 1,500 rounds of tear gas and 1,200 rounds of rubber bullets at student and nonstudent protesters. On another campus, thousands of petrol bombs were recovered before being used against police. As universities turned into battlefields, nine university presidents issued a statement calling for the government to resolve the political deadlock, saying that: "... Any demand that the universities can simply fix the problem is disconnected from reality. These complicated and challenging situations neither originate from the universities, nor can they be resolved through university disciplinary processes." University classes were suspended.

The turmoil continued for almost six months, until district council elections on November 24. Over 70 percent of the electorate voted in the biggest landslide in Hong Kong history. Prodemocratic parties won almost 90 percent of 452 seats. The government has yet to address the remaining demands of the protesters.

What Are the Prospects?

The “one-country, two-systems” framework was a stroke of genius, but the future hinges on how it can satisfy the people of Hong Kong and the rest of the country at the same time. The central government views democracy without firm guardrails as a threat to stability. Since 1978, over 5 million Chinese have studied in Western democracies. During that time, China lifted 800 million out of poverty. The leadership weighs Hong Kong’s 7 million against the 1.4 billion in the Mainland and concludes that the greater good means greater control.

While not always receiving an accurate and balanced picture of the views of the Hong Kong citizenry, the Beijing government is aware of the dissatisfaction of students in schools and universities. They attribute the dissatisfaction to a lack of national education as well as unaffordable home prices in a highly unequal society. They criticize Hong Kong’s property tycoons for putting their prosperity above the common good. They believe that the new Greater Bay Area Initiative, which links Hong Kong’s economy and university talent more closely to South China, will attract young Hong Kongers into the nation’s development. (Most students have not shown interest in the initiative or in efforts to introduce a national education curriculum.)

Governance of Hong Kong has become more complex for the world’s second largest economy, especially in the midst of a trade war with the United States. The government asserts that “foreign forces” support the protest movement. Some student protesters carried American flags to their marches and the US Congress enacted the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act on October 15, 2019.

Yet, there are several reasons to expect Hong Kong’s universities to retain their resilience. There is no indication that the government will restrict the freedom of scientists, scholars, and lecturers in Hong Kong’s universities to do their own research, writings, and teaching. The professoriate would be resistant to a loss of academic freedom and the universities’ global rankings would rapidly decline. University senior management has displayed a commitment to dialogue with students. The law ensures that universities have a high degree of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. There is a tradition of reaching out to attract talented students, scientists, and scholars from around the world. The central government is keenly aware of the special character of Hong Kong and its universities—their global outreach and international engagement. It would not want to close that window as it tries to open its own window wider with the Belt and Road Initiative.

Hong Kong and its universities recovered from the uprising of 1967, which left 51 dead and hundreds injured. As New York City’s universities recovered from the anti-war protests that engulfed the city in 1968, Hong Kong universities have the optimism to follow a similar road to resilience and recovery. ▲

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Involvement of the University Community in Catalonia's Pro-Independence Political Process

Josep M. Duarte, Albert Sánchez-Gelabert, and Josep M. Vilalta

Abstract

This article analyses the effects of the pro-independence protests in Catalonia (2017–2019) on Catalan universities and their students. The demonstrations had a moderate impact on the Catalan university system. Large numbers of students took part in the protests. Some universities offered students the chance to pass courses with a single final examination, since they had missed some classes.

Political events in Catalonia, particularly those that occurred between 2015 and 2019, also had an impact on universities, in terms of numerous student and faculty uprisings and protests and institutional responses by the universities, as they waded through these unrelenting mobilizations. Some of the first actions to spark these mobilizations took place in the days leading up to the referendum on self-determination of October 1, 2017—which was driven and supported by the government of Catalonia—as a result of police investigations and arrests that sought to squander the vote. The referendum ushered in a period of repression, beginning with police measures on the day of the referendum and the arrest and incarceration of pro-independence activists and government of Catalonia leaders, which would set the process down a judicial path (another group of leaders, including the president, opted to seek asylum in Belgium, Scotland, and Switzerland). The unrest peaked two years later, kindled by the verdict passed by the Spanish supreme court on October 14, 2019, which found the majority of the defendants guilty of sedition and sentenced them to anywhere from nine to 13 years in prison. This ruling triggered a new wave of mass mobilizations, in which Catalan universities and part of their student bodies were involved.

University Involvement

Catalonia boasts some of the most highly ranked universities in terms of academics in all of Southern Europe. The Catalan university system, which comprises roughly 240,000 students and over 18,000 faculty, participated in the activist movements and protests from the very beginning, both at the institutional level and through students and faculty. In October 2012, the Catalan Association of Public Universities (ACUP), formed by the eight public universities in Catalonia and representing 87.5 percent of university students in the region, declared its intention to join the National Pact for the Right to Decide, which backed the popular consultation held on November 9, 2014. On October 3, 2017, two days after the referendum, the universities joined the highly successful general strike called by Catalonia's main trade unions with the support of the universities' student unions. The day the supreme court passed its verdict two years later, ACUP issued a statement signed by all university presidents, in which it reasserted the views that it had expressed on March 24, 2018, including "the profound dismay it felt toward the incarceration of several Catalan leaders and political figures," its "outrage toward the situation in Catalonia," and its "concern for the well-being of those affected by the verdict." The statement issued by ACUP called upon "all political stakeholders to pool their efforts in order to find a solution to the current political conflict; a solution agreed upon a wide majority of Catalan society and to be implemented as quickly as possible." Thus, Catalan universities took an institutional stance in favor of human and individual rights, in line with their multifaceted identity and leveraging their position as moral and academic, rather than political, authorities.

Student Involvement

Despite the universities' institutional stance, they ended up clashing with their student bodies numerous times following the guilty verdict passed on October 14, 2019. In the wake of the ruling, students called a 72-hour strike that would lead to a period of protests, starting with the mass occupation of Barcelona–El Prat Josep Tarradellas Airport,

a protest organized by Tsunami Democràtic. This protest opened the floodgates to a wave of mobilizations, including protests in the streets of Barcelona, a general strike held on October 18, 2019, a barricade at Catalonia's border with France, and a camp set up by students in Barcelona's Plaça Universitat.

Catalan youth and university students played a leading role in these protests and actively participated in the mobilizations orchestrated by various organizations via social media. Several student councils and unions put pressure on the universities' presidents and deans to ease up on student assessment during the period of mobilizations and protests against the ruling, so as not to penalize students for participating. In response to these requests, many universities and university centres acknowledged the exceptional nature of the times and approved measures to ease up on students during the first semester of the 2019–2020 academic year. Nonetheless, only a mere 2,000 students opted to benefit from these measures. At the Autonomous University of Barcelona, for instance, only 1,300 out of 26,000 students chose to take a single final exam at the end of the semester. The impact of these exceptional measures was even weaker at the other universities.

The government of Catalonia's secretariat for universities and research made a few public statements on October 31, 2019, in which it voiced its opinion that "what is exceptional is the political situation, not the protests" held by students, which it saw as a natural part of any process of an activist nature. It also urged university presidents to ensure that quality and academic rigor were being upheld. The mobilizations continued throughout the month of October, garnering a greater or lesser impact at each university.

Impact on the University System

From 2015 to 2019, the university community took a stance either in favor or against Catalonia's self-determination process. However, except for the two critical periods mentioned above (the period around the referendum of October 1, 2017 and the second half of October 2019 in the wake of the supreme court verdict), Catalan universities never ceased to provide normal academic services.

Generally speaking, Catalan universities welcome a significant number of international students, both from Europe and from further abroad. For instance, they welcomed a total of 12,544 foreign students during the 2017–2018 academic year. To date, there is no evidence of any drop in the number of international students or in the total number of students enrolling at Catalan universities. This also applies to the number of congresses and conferences held in Catalonia, and to research performance in terms of participation in competitive research projects and academic publications. Therefore, we can neither confirm nor disprove whether the political process had a relevant impact on the Catalan university system. We can, however, confirm that both at the institutional level and on the part of students and faculty, there has been clear support of individual and collective rights, as one can only expect from academic institutions. Students and faculty have understandably shown different levels of involvement. In the face of a complex political situation, Catalan universities have striven to position themselves as academic and moral authorities, encouraging free thought and leveraging their institutional position to foster a commitment to negotiation as the best means for finding a solution to the Catalan conflict. ▲

Catalan universities have striven to position themselves as academic and moral authorities.

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Rethinking the Relevance of International Branch Campuses

Philip G. Altbach and Hans de Wit

Abstract

International branch campuses are a small but relevant niche in the higher education environment, but it is surprising to see how much more research attention is focused on them than on other cross-border education projects, which are less visible but have a bigger impact and more uncertainty. In the current global environment, there is cause to worry about the future of IBCs.

After almost a half-century, international branch campuses (IBCs) are now a small but established part of the global higher education landscape. Some (“[Branch campuses can widen access to higher education](#),” *University World News*, December 14, 2019) posit that they have a bright future and can play a significant role. We are highly skeptical, and argue that IBCs are, and will continue to be, a tiny part of the postsecondary landscape—and that many are probably not sustainable.

In 2017, there were 263 IBCs in 77 countries, having more than doubled in less than two decades. China overtook the United Arab Emirates to be the number one host of IBCs. The United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom are the largest “home” countries sponsoring IBCs, with Russia and France as additional key players. Perhaps as many as 225,000 students study at IBCs worldwide. This means 1 percent of the over 20,000 universities in the world, 5 percent of the globally mobile students, and 0.1 percent of the total student body. IBCs are a small but relevant niche in the higher education environment, but it is surprising to see how much more research attention is focused on them than on other cross-border education projects, such as franchises, articulation programs, and others, which are less visible but have a bigger impact and more uncertainty.

IBC Instability

International branch campuses depend on several potentially unstable forces for their survival. The host country has primary control over branch campuses within their territory—and changes in political or economic circumstances or policies, decisions by various higher education authorities including quality assurance agencies, changing student interests or markets can all quickly affect IBCs. Failure to meet student enrollment goals may rapidly create problems. The example of Japan in the 1980s is illustrative. More than 21 branch campuses, largely of little known American universities, were established in Japan, mainly at the invitation of municipal and prefecture governments. They quickly ran into regulatory problems with Japanese authorities and for this and other reasons were unable to meet their enrollment goals. All but three disappeared. The Singapore government, which welcomed branch campuses, has over time closed down several for a variety of reasons, while others in the region were closed by host institutions or other authorities due to financial, enrollment, and internal political constraints. Many IBCs fail to even start, such as the 2018 plan of the Dutch University of Groningen in China.

Who Pays?

While there is little, if any, research on the details of the financing of IBCs, several things are reasonably clear. The first is that few home universities have paid for the campuses or facilities that they occupy in the host countries. In some cases, such as New York University in Abu Dhabi, the campus was built by the Abu Dhabi government. In some other cases, local property developers provide buildings in an effort to lure an IBC to a development. The Qatar government built its Education City to attract the nine IBCs located there. Many IBCs are expected by both home and host sponsors to earn a profit or at least to break even on the provision of educational programs. Some others are heavily subsidized by host authorities. A more recent phenomenon are IBCs related to home countries with a promotional and soft-power mission. It is unlikely that many IBCs would survive if they were fully responsible for all of their costs. And those who are trying to do so, or receive too little support from host or home countries, tend to fail and become bankrupt.

Why Do IBCs Exist?

The motivations for establishing and maintaining IBCs are complex and vary for home and host (see [Rumbley and Wilkins on a revised definition for branch campuses in IHE #93](#)). For hosts, branch campuses can bring the prestige of a foreign university, provide student access where there is a shortage of places, keep students at home who might otherwise go overseas for study, bring new ideas about curriculum, governance, teaching, or other innovations, and especially in the case of private enterprises, earn money. Several locales—Dubai, Qatar, and South Korea for example—see themselves as “education hubs” and have attempted, with varying success, to attract foreign universities to set up branches to serve local or regional markets. Especially in the Middle East, IBCs provide to women, who may be less able to travel overseas, an opportunity to study at a “foreign” university.

Home universities also have a range of goals. In some cases, they see their branches as a means of recruiting students to study at the home campus and to build their brand image. Many are focused on earning income. Some countries see their IBCs as part of “soft power” initiatives. Some universities see their branches as part of an international strategy for the university and as a means of internationalization, especially when students from the home campus study at the branch. New York University has been particularly successful in providing study opportunities for home students in its branches in Abu Dhabi and Shanghai. Invitations from potential hosts, especially when combined with significant investments, are also attractive. In some cases, for example branch campuses of Indian universities in Dubai and the Caribbean, branches are intended to serve expatriate communities. Xiamen University’s branch campus in Malaysia, funded mainly by the local Chinese community to serve Malaysian Chinese students, is another model.

This very partial list of motivations on all sides of the IBC equation indicates the complex, and sometimes conflicting, goals of the many elements involved.

Are IBCs Innovative, And What Do They Contribute?

There is little evidence that international branch campuses have contributed much to the reform of the higher education systems in which they operate. They seem to operate in their own context and reflect the educational programs, and to some extent the teaching and learning approaches, of the sponsoring university. As Jason E. Lane and Hans Pohl state in this issue of *International Higher Education*, IBC contributions to research are with some exceptions quite limited. There is little or no evidence that they contribute to the improvement of higher education in the host countries. On the contrary, there are frequent tensions concerning academic freedom and ideological requirements of the host countries’ governments, as recent examples in China have demonstrated.

There is little evidence that international branch campuses have contributed much to the reform of the higher education systems in which they operate.

Do IBCs Replicate Their Home Universities?

A basic underpinning of the IBC idea is that the branch should as much as possible replicate the curriculum, faculty, and ethos of the home campus. There is little evidence one way or the other on this key topic. In a few cases, such as New York University’s branches in Shanghai and Abu Dhabi, and Yale’s campus in Singapore, the home university has tried to maintain its academic standards and ethos—at considerable cost. The US universities in Qatar’s Academic City, again with substantial funding from the host sponsors, also seek to replicate the home university. Many branches, especially those that focus on earning a profit for the home university, offer the home campus degree but use mainly locally hired faculty, and have rather basic facilities. There are serious questions to be asked about the match in academic standards and quality of education at IBCs, compared to the home institution.

An Uncertain Future

IBCs will likely continue to exist as a small niche element in the broader sphere of global academic internationalization. When they provide quality education and have appropriate links with academic institutions in the host countries, they are useful. When they bring nontraditional educational ideas, such as liberal education, and important academic norms such as academic freedom, they can be significant additions to a host country.

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In the current global environment, there is cause to worry about the future of IBCs. As countries build sufficient capacity and quality in their own academic systems, it is not clear that IBCs will be either useful or attract students. In countries such as China, where academic freedom and autonomy face increasing restrictions, IBCs may find it difficult to operate. Also, the agendas behind IBCs might start to differ between host countries and home institutions. And there is an increasing variety in models, funding schemes, national regulations, and quality of institutions, making it difficult to address IBCs as one category. ▲

Marginal Revolution: The Impact of Transnational Education on Higher Education in China

Xiaojiang Ding

Abstract

Transnational education (TNE) in China has been closely related to the concept of capacity building. However, its relative academic weakness and the way it operates impede knowledge transfer and organizational learning. After 30 years of development, TNE is still at the periphery of the Chinese higher education system, with only a marginal impact on capacity building.

Since the 1980s, transnational education (TNE) has proliferated in China with the support of the government. It unfolds mainly in two forms: transnational institutions and transnational programs. A transnational institution offers at least three transnational programs. According to the ministry of education (MoE) website, in March 2016, there were 73 transnational institutions and 1,100 transnational programs offering undergraduate and postgraduate education in 28 of the country's 34 provinces. The Chinese government allows overseas higher education institutions (HEIs) to provide TNE only in collaboration with Chinese HEIs: 1,173 transnational institutions and programs were provided by 611 overseas HEIs from 35 countries and regions, in collaboration with 414 Chinese HEIs.

In China, TNE has been closely related to the concept of capacity building. In the late 1970s, when China experienced sweeping economic and social reforms, the nation's higher education system proved obsolete and malfunctioning. TNE emerged as a nascent power and was expected to help to fundamentally transform the system. The Chinese government has attached greater importance to transnational institutions than to transnational programs. Whereas transnational programs are located in, and administered by, a local faculty (in the sense of "school"), transnational institutions operate side by side with local faculties and are therefore expected to import administrative practices as well as teaching resources from their overseas partners. In 2013, the MoE began to evaluate TNE in 23 provinces. One of the evaluation indicators was "internal benefit in terms of teaching, research, and academic strength to domestic faculties that participate in TNE."

The "Academic Weakness" of TNE Teachers

Contrary to government expectations, TNE fails to serve as an incubator for organizational and sectoral changes. In the article "[Lost in Internationalised Space: The Challenge of Sustaining Academics Teaching Offshore](#)," Shelda Debowski tells a story in which teachers at the business school of an Australian university who participated in a transnational program were considered "lesser researchers" because they spent considerable time teaching overseas and consequently published fewer papers than their counterparts in other business schools. The same happens with Chinese teachers participating in TNE.

Transnational institutions/programs mainly focus on teaching, whereas local faculties/programs put top priority on research. A criterion for the recruitment of TNE teachers is their willingness and ability to teach, whereas applicants compete for a position

Transnational institutions/programs mainly focus on teaching, whereas local faculties/programs put top priority on research.

in local faculties/programs based on their research profiles. TNE's recruitment criterion for research is looser than that of local faculties/programs, and transnational institutions/programs employ teachers who might be turned down by local faculties/programs on grounds of "academic weakness."

Teaching in a foreign language adds an additional workload for local teachers. Many TNE teachers have international exchange experience and/or earned degrees at foreign universities. However, preparing teaching content, designing examinations, and evaluating students' coursework in a foreign language still consumes a large portion of their time, which could have been spent on research. TNE teachers often complain that producing academic output is a luxury for them because of their otherwise heavy teaching workload. As a result, TNE teachers are considered academically weak and subordinate to their colleagues in local faculties/programs.

The "Academic Weakness" of TNE

TNE itself is regarded as being academically weak, despite the fact that some transnational institutions/programs are cooperatively offered with top universities. Many transnational institutions, mainly taking care of daily administration, rely heavily on part-time teachers from local faculties to provide courses. Thus, they run the risk of becoming "hollowed out," since their expertise is not "endogenous," but "borrowed" from local faculties. Lacking independent academic strength, transnational institutions are generally not named according to their scholarly expertise (such as "Faculty of Engineering") but according to the international collaboration on which they are based (such as "Sino-British College" or "China Europe International School"). Sometimes, social sciences and humanities programs and science and engineering programs are affiliated to the same institution if foreign partner HEIs are located in the same sending country/region (for instance, one transnational institution cooperates with several French universities in economics, advertising, and computer science programs).

Nevertheless, transnational institutions have become popular in recent years. Compared with transnational programs scattered among different faculties, transnational institutions are able to take advantage of a scale effect to attract attention. This makes them appealing to international students and allows relevant HEIs to present themselves as "reformers."

Transnational programs are similar to transnational institutions. Affiliated with local faculties and relatively small in scale, they collaborate closely with local faculties for educational and service delivery. Consequently, transnational programs face the same risk as transnational institutions of becoming "hollowed out."

Limited Impact of Alternative Practices

Most transnational institutions and programs employ a considerable number of teachers from local programs on a part-time basis, who are expected to apply and transfer good transnational teaching practices to local teaching. However, this is far from happening. In reality, teachers simply "muddle through" transnational teaching and have no interest in disseminating alternative practices.

Moreover, some transnational institutions/programs respond mainly to market demand and function as a springboard for students going abroad for their third and/or fourth year of study at a foreign partner HEI. Teachers from Chinese partner HEIs and their foreign colleagues teach the same transnational institution/program, but to separate groups of students: local teachers cater to first- and second-year students, who mainly stay in China and study foundation courses, while foreign teachers provide teaching to third- and fourth-year students, who often go abroad and/or study core/advanced courses. Although local teachers have many opportunities to participate in TNE, they are rarely exposed to foreign practices.

A Marginal Revolution

TNE's status and impact on higher education in China can be characterized as a "marginal revolution." Proposed by Ronald Harry Coase and Ning Wang, the term "marginal revolution" describes a process of dramatic change in the Chinese economy in the past 30 years. The change is triggered on the edges of the economy, with the regeneration

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of nonpublic sectors operating outside the constraints of existing institutional frameworks. These marginal forces finally enter the economic mainstream and fundamentally transform the nation's economic system.

Like nonpublic sectors at the onset of the economic reform, TNE operates outside the regular institutional framework of higher education. However, it has failed to achieve a similarly broad and deep transformation. Due to the "academic weakness" of TNE and its teachers, transnational institutions/programs often find themselves at the bottom of HEIs' regular performance evaluations, which place great emphasis on research. TNE has become marginalized in the Chinese higher education landscape, unable to provide models to local HEIs. For a variety of reasons, imported foreign expertise seldom reaches local faculties. Ultimately, after 30 years of rapid growth in quantitative terms, TNE remains at the periphery of the higher education system and exerts only a marginal impact. ▲

International Branch Campuses: The New Platonic Academy

Lan He and Stephen Wilkins

Abstract

International branch campuses (IBCs) may be compared to the ancient Platonic Academy. In recent years, IBCs have evolved from their initial role as an instrument and medium for education aid or revenue generation, to becoming hubs of knowledge transfer and knowledge diplomacy. In the future, this new role may bring about win-win outcomes for source countries, host countries, institutions, and knowledge recipients.

Founded around 387 BC, the Platonic Academy is recognized as one of the sources of civilization and culture of our contemporary world. It began as a society of intellectuals in Athens who studied philosophy, mathematics, and astronomy, and later it became a hub of knowledge dissemination. It took thousands of years for the brilliant ideas and thoughts of the ancient philosophers to permeate every aspect of modern life.

As a new and ground-breaking trend in higher education, international branch campuses (IBCs) may greatly accelerate this process of knowledge sharing, particularly in lower-middle income economies, and promote knowledge diplomacy among nations—similar to what the Platonic Academy achieved over centuries.

Paradigm Shift

Knowledge diplomacy is a concept that is gaining popularity and is seen as an alternative to soft power. Knowledge diplomacy may involve the use of transnational education, research, and innovation to strengthen relationships between countries. Jane Knight's knowledge diplomacy framework highlights the values of diplomacy as understanding, compromise, mutuality, and reciprocity. In contrast, soft power approaches are adopted principally for self-interest—to achieve influence and dominance (see [Knight on knowledge diplomacy in IHE #100](#)).

Traditionally, the propagation of knowledge, technology, and innovation through IBCs has been flowing almost uniformly in one direction, from the more prosperous and advanced global North to the global South. Similar to international aid, traditional IBCs were regarded as a type of education aid for countries in urgent need of new knowledge and higher education capacity. The United States, the United Kingdom, and other Western European countries remain top sending countries of IBCs, while the top host countries are scattered throughout East Asia, South East Asia, and the Middle East. US institutions have established over 80 IBCs worldwide, while UK institutions have over 40 IBCs. By contrast, China and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) host nearly a quarter of all IBCs globally.

However, there is an interesting change taking place in the current landscape of IBCs. Once a major host country, China is now ranked among the top 10 sending countries of IBCs. India, Malaysia, and Russia are also catching up. An increasing number of emerging economies that once closed their doors to foreign IBCs have now opened their arms to welcome them. In addition, high-income countries—including Canada, France, and the United Kingdom—are now listed among the top 10 host countries.

Media for Knowledge Diplomacy

Connected by the Internet, the world is undoubtedly getting “flatter,” with rapid exchanges happening every day between different countries and cultures. In this context, IBCs have evolved from their initial role as instrument and medium for education aid—or revenue generation—to becoming hubs of knowledge transfer and knowledge diplomacy. Knowledge diplomacy has the potential to help source countries, host countries, institutions, and knowledge recipients achieve win-win outcomes.

The world today is full of conflicts and complex scenarios, a result of increasing contact between cultures. Misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and misbeliefs are all confounding our perceptions of each other. Unfortunately, these conflicts cannot be easily resolved by “track-one diplomacy” alone. It is more effective to bring people together on the same grounds and enhance mutual trust. Knowledge and education, two of the greatest legacies of mankind, could be the best approach to enhance mutual understanding and improve international relations. In this regard, IBCs have a major role to play.

Although IBCs have often been under the scrutiny of policy makers, decision groups, academia, and mass media, their crucial function as a vehicle for knowledge diplomacy should not be downplayed. In this role, IBCs promote the exchange of students, faculty, knowledge, culture, and expertise. Students who are now developing international and intercultural competencies may help guarantee world peace in the future.

Higher education has become an important tool, utilized by nations to build and maintain favorable political, social, and economic relationships. An ex-Soviet state like Armenia has no hesitation in offering land free of charge to a Russian university, the Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, to build a campus that will deliver mutual benefits. There are often no economic incentives for institutions to establish campuses in Africa, and yet an increasing number of institutions are deciding to do so.

Knowledge Economy and Future Prospects

Already, there is evidence that IBCs can help nations to build a knowledge economy. This is evidenced by research output, patent registrations, and entrepreneurship activities. A study conducted by Pohl and Lane in 2017 found that IBCs in Qatar had accounted for as much as 38 percent of Qatar’s total scholarly publications. Amity University, an Indian university with 13 branches worldwide, has filed over 800 patents.

IBC may bring expertise, research, and innovation to a host country to address local, regional, and global issues. Several countries have been particularly keen to attract medical schools, such as Weill Cornell Medicine Qatar and Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia. From its launch in 2012, the Technical University of Berlin El Gouna was planned and built to become a hub for research, innovation, and international cooperation in Egypt. To satisfy local needs, the campus specializes in teaching and research in energy and water engineering and urban development.

Although some journalists are still suggesting that IBCs are withering or dying off, the evidence suggests instead that many IBCs are strong, successful, and growing. For example, three of the existing IBCs in Dubai (Heriot-Watt University, Rochester Institute of Technology, and the University of Wollongong) are currently constructing new, larger, purpose-built campuses. These institutions clearly expect to be thriving for many years to come.

So, is it fanciful to compare IBCs with the Platonic Academy? Only time will tell, but unlike the Platonic Academy, their positive contributions may be recognized much earlier. ▲

Although IBCs have often been under the scrutiny of policy makers, decision groups, academia, and mass media, their crucial function as a vehicle for knowledge diplomacy should not be downplayed.

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Research Productivity of International Branch Campuses

Jason E. Lane and Hans Pohl

Abstract

Using scientometric data, this article explores the research productivity of international branch campuses. The data reveals that one-third of IBCs engage in at least minimum levels of research productivity, with the most productive exceeding 400 publications annually. While research production is minimal across the majority of IBCs, the data evidences how some IBCs are significant contributors to the internationalization of research and to the overall research productivity of their host nations.

International branch campuses (IBCs) have often been viewed as primarily teaching institutions and criticized for only being shallow replications of their home campuses. It is true that IBCs have largely focused on teaching, with varying levels of quality, in part because, as start-up organizations, they have had to develop and deliver their academic curriculum as well as recruit faculty and students in order to develop revenue streams. Similar to private higher education, a vast majority overall will likely continue to focus on teaching.

That said, now that we are more than 20 years into the global scale-up of IBCs, our data suggests that a third of such institutions have begun to engage in some research, and a subset thereof are beginning to develop their own research culture. While there remain large differences between IBCs in terms of educational quality and research productivity, we examine trends of the approximately one-third engaged in research, as measured by scholarly publications in Scopus.

To conduct this analysis, we searched for publication records between 1996 and 2016 for the 250 IBCs identified by the Cross-Border Education Team at the time. Of those, 149 had at least one publication during that period of time; and approximately one-third (N=93) produced 10 or more articles during the same time frame.

While we have documented IBCs to be in existence for nearly a century, it was the mid- to late-1990s when IBCs began to proliferate globally. In 1996, the first year in our study, there was no record of IBC-based scholarly publications. In 2000, when there were 82 IBCs, many of which had recently been established, data shows that the worldwide research productivity of IBCs was fewer than 50 publications that year. By 2009, the number of annual IBC research publications topped 500, before increasing rapidly to more than 3,500 IBC publications annually in 2016. In that year, the total accumulated publications of IBCs reached nearly 20,000.

Global Trends

IBCs are scattered across 82 countries. Some countries may have only one IBC, while others host dozens. Four countries were home to at least 10 IBCs producing 10 or more publications: China (14), United Arab Emirates (13), Malaysia (10), and Qatar (10). These numbers, though, mask important national differences. While Malaysia and Qatar have the lowest number in this group, they represent nearly all of the IBCs within those nations. In the case of Qatar, IBCs contributed between 25 percent and 40 percent of the nation's overall annual publication productivity between 2006 and 2016. China, which hosts the largest number of IBCs and produces the largest count of IBC-based publications, looks very different. IBCs in China have produced 5,000 publications during the period under review. However, these publications represent approximately 1 percent of China's overall research productivity.

When we examine the citation impact of the publications, the contributions of IBCs become more clear. For each of the four countries mentioned above, their field-weighted citation impact (FWCI) fluctuates, but has generally been increasing over the past decade. When we break down the FWCI based on IBC publications and native publications, we see that the citation impact of IBC-based publications exceeds that of the native institutions, often at significant levels, though whether this is a function of publication quality or the spillover effect of academic capital from the home country needs further exploration.

IBCs in China have produced 5,000 publications during the period under review.

Institutional Productivity

Publication counts per IBC vary markedly. As we noted, two-thirds of IBCs have fewer than 10 publications across their entire existence. On the other hand, the top five producing IBCs all have more than 1,000 cumulative publications, and the top three have more than 2,500 publications each. Those five, starting from the top, are Monash University (Malaysia); Texas A&M Qatar; The University of Nottingham, Malaysia Campus; Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University (China); and Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar. Those numbers are likely to continue to increase as annual output for each of the top 10 IBCs exceeds 100 publications—with the top three exceeding 400 publications annually as of 2016.

Internationalizing Research

One of the findings of our study is that IBCs can be useful mechanisms for internationalizing research, for both the importing country as well as the home institution.

When we looked at the four countries mentioned above, the percentage of IBC publications that included an international coauthor exceeds that of the publications from native institutions. In Qatar, approximately 85 percent of IBC publications in 2016 included an international coauthor. The number was lower for native institutions in Qatar, though only slightly. In China, however, the proportion of IBC publications with international coauthors drops to about 68 percent; but that is nearly 40 points higher than those from Chinese institutions.

When we shift to looking at data for the top five most research-productive IBCs, we find a similar trend. The percentage of IBC publications coauthored with an international collaborator exceeded that of the IBC's home campus in each dyad examined. Texas A&M in Qatar led the pack with upward of 90 percent of the publications being part of international collaborations, while the home campus was only about 40 percent.

When we conducted a network analysis of collaboration, two interesting findings emerged. First, the most common set of international collaborations was between the branch campus and the home campus, indicating that IBCs have a direct effect on the internationalization of the research efforts of the home campuses. Second, there was little overlap between the set of institutional collaborations used by IBCs versus the home campus. This suggests that IBCs are opening new collaborations, often including more institutions that are in regional proximity.

Moving Forward

The data suggests that the population of IBCs may be moving toward differentiation, similar to what we see in private higher education overall. While a vast majority of institutions remain focused on providing alternative educational experiences from native institutions or absorbing growing demand for higher education, a proportion do seem focused on advancing a strong research culture more in line with semi-elite institutions.

The reason for such growth in research is likely multifold and somewhat idiosyncratic between institutions and host countries. Reasons may include maturation of the academic culture, hiring of more highly qualified academics, and better reporting of the data (e.g., author identification being associated with the IBC). Additional study is needed to determine what is contributing to the growth of research in the one-third of IBCs, and what is inhibiting such in the remaining two-thirds. Moreover, more needs to be known about the impact of the research culture at an IBC on the curriculum, students, and overall academic culture, particularly in relation to those without it.

What is clear, though, is that some IBCs are both capable of, and actively engaged in, producing scholarly publications. Whether this is broadly a function of individual entrepreneurship or strategic foci of institutions remains unclear. ▲

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The “China Reset” for International Undergraduate Enrollment

Rahul Choudaha

Abstract

Chinese undergraduate students were an economic bonanza for American universities in times of shrinking college-age population and dwindling budgets. Recent trends indicate a stagnation and even a decline in Chinese undergraduate student enrollment at many universities. This “China reset” will pose severe challenges for universities and press them to reinvest in the diversification of their student body and supporting student success.

Inside Higher Ed noted in October 2019, “After an unprecedented boom in Chinese undergraduate enrollments, universities see declines.” This narrative contrasts with the November 2011 report of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*: “The explosion of interest among Chinese students continued unabated.” How did we reach here, and what are the implications for American universities?

Riding the Growth Wave of Chinese Students

It is well established that many American universities in parts of the country are facing demographic shifts, which is resulting in smaller college-going cohorts. At the same time, public funding for higher education has been shrinking. This pressure of declining enrollment and budgets has prompted many American higher education institutions to find ways to increase international student enrollment as a new source of cash flow to fund operations and fill the budget deficits.

In this context, the growth in demand from Chinese undergraduate students could not have been better timed to help meet enrollment goals while earning up to two to three times the rate of resident tuition fees. The aspirations of the expanding upper-middle class in China fueled much of the growth in demand for US education and perfectly aligned with the institutional need to grow undergraduate enrollment.

As a result, Chinese undergraduate enrollment increased by 132,143 between 2007–2008 and 2017–2018—an increase of 800 percent over 10 years. Contrast this growth of Chinese undergraduate students with a decline of 132,996 non-Hispanic and white high school graduates in the same period, according to *Knocking at the College Door*, a report by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE).

In the last decade, the economic impact of the growth of Chinese undergraduate students has been substantial. My estimates based on the NAFSA report on the *Economic Value of International Students* suggest that the contribution of Chinese undergraduate students increased from US\$410 million in 2007–2008 to US\$5.3 billion in 2017–2018.

The Land-Grant Benefit

Some universities, such as land-grant universities, benefited more from Chinese undergraduate enrollment than others. While there is no national data on Chinese students by institutions, *Foreign Policy* analyzed the F-1 visas issued from 2014 until March 2015 and identified that most of the universities among the top 25 receiving Chinese students are large public institutions, with a few exceptions such as Columbia University and Boston University.

More specifically, public land-grant universities benefited from China’s demand for US undergraduate education due to a combination of factors, including ranking and a relatively lower cost of living and tuition. For example, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), which ranks among the top-50 in the world according to *THE World University Rankings*, was also identified by *Foreign Policy* as the leading recipient of Chinese students with F-1 visas. The enrollment numbers of Chinese undergraduates at UIUC increased from 96 in 2007–2008 to 3,202 by 2017–2018.

Over the decade, land-grant universities such as UIUC were able to increase nonresident tuition fees, and yet Chinese student demand remained robust. For example, out-of-state average tuition for full-time undergraduates at UIUC increased from US\$22,526 to US\$31,681 between 2007–2008 and 2017–2018—an increase of nearly 41 percent. The

Some universities, such as land-grant universities, benefited more from Chinese undergraduate enrollment than others.

estimated revenue from international undergraduate students at UIUC increased from US\$2.2 million in 2007–2008 to US\$101.4 million in 2017–2018.

Given this context of economic impact of Chinese undergraduate students, it is unsurprising that in 2017, UIUC signed a US\$60 million insurance policy to protect against a sudden loss in tuition revenue due to a decline in Chinese students. However, drawing out an insurance policy is reflective of a short-term risk management approach and not a long-term investment approach.

The Impact of the “China Reset”

In my article “Mobility of Chinese and Indian Undergraduate Students” published seven years ago in *IHE*, I projected that Chinese undergraduate enrollment was expected to decline due to demographic shifts, local education reforms, and capacity concerns at campuses. However, headwinds related to geopolitical tensions and economic slowdown were not in the picture at that time, and so not considered in the projection.

The “China reset” is likely to hurt many land-grant universities first. These universities have not only high tuition pricing but also virtually no scholarships. At the same time, tightening postgraduation work options for international students, coupled with increasing competition from new destinations in Europe and Asia, will make it more challenging to grow enrollment from price-sensitive countries such as India, Nepal, Nigeria, and Vietnam.

Need to Reinvest in Student Success and Access

One of the most significant implications for American universities is that they cannot rest on their past laurels. They must identify ways of reinvesting in the diversification of their student body through proactive outreach and financial assistance. They should recognize the importance of access and affordability for international students and support their success during their studies.

In the last decade, much of the enrollment growth was demand-led. In other words, the rapid increase in demand from Chinese undergraduate students was passively absorbed by universities. To sustain future growth in enrollment and ensure diversity of the student body, universities must become proactive and international in their approach. The past decade of student enrollment in the United States has also exposed a lack of readiness at many campuses in engaging and supporting international students. At many universities, support services for international students are mostly limited to immigration and visa compliance. By continuing to increase tuition and fees for international students without a proportionate reinvestment in their success, some institutions are on the slippery slope of treating international students as cash cows.

American higher education commands a strong reputation for excellence and quality among international students. Institutions that are only considering the revenue side of the equation without corresponding investment in campus readiness and student experience are not only threatening the appeal of the United States as a destination, but are also pursuing an unsustainable way of expanding international enrollment.

In sum, the “China reset” is a challenge for many universities, as they face budget squeeze and enrollment cuts. However, it also creates an opportunity to reassess their approaches for international enrollment and to reinvest in student access and success. ▲

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International Student Recruitment in a Post-China World

Anna Esaki-Smith

Abstract

Growth in Chinese student flows to the major English-language study destinations has slowed considerably since 2016. A number of factors are contributing to this trend, including an aging demographic, slower economic expansion in China, and the emergence of less expensive overseas study options. What will international student recruitment look like, as universities adjust to a “post-China” world?

... the ability to efficiently recruit large numbers of students has resulted in an institutional overreliance on a single country as a source for tuition revenue.

What will international student recruitment look like in a “post-China” world? Admittedly, for most university administrators, that is a hard-to-imagine scenario. It would be almost an understatement to say that Chinese students studying overseas has been the single most influential factor shaping the direction of international education since the beginning of this century. Indeed, the number of Chinese students studying abroad has grown nearly by 1,600 percent since 2000, with over 660,000 studying overseas in 2018. While the study destinations that these students select vary, the vast majority of them have ventured to the United States, with smaller but still significant numbers going to other major English language markets such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada.

However, the ability to efficiently recruit large numbers of students has resulted in an institutional overreliance on a single country as a source for tuition revenue. The economic transformation of the most populated country in the world—resulting in a middle class wealthy enough to afford an overseas education—has earmarked China as a gift that keeps on giving, at least from the perspective of recruitment directors at universities across the globe.

That is, until now. In *Rethink China: The End of the Affair*, the inaugural report from research consultancy Education Rethink, my colleague Jeremy Chan and I examined the long-awaited slowdown in numbers of Chinese outbound students, and its impact on major English-language study destinations. While the flow continues to grow, the pace has slowed significantly due to an aging demographic, a slower economy, and improved domestic provision. Interestingly, as this is occurring, we now see a divergence in the overall strategies of these host countries, with the United States and the United Kingdom continuing to depend heavily on Chinese students while Canada and Australia take concrete steps toward diversification. We believe these differences may place the former two countries in an increasingly vulnerable position in what is becoming a very crowded and competitive space.

Hooked on China

It is fair to say there will never be another China, meaning a market with an ample youth population wielding the financial resources needed to pursue overseas study. So, weaning oneself off such an abundant source of students is challenging, as that means turning deliberately away from one country and approaching the many others that may have largely been ignored, in terms of a university’s resources and attention. Without the steer of a united national strategy, this is a daunting task for individual institutions.

This becomes apparent in our examination of host countries in the wake of slowing numbers of outbound Chinese students. If gauged in terms of cohesive policies regarding higher education, the four major English-language study destinations appear at various ends of the spectrum, with Canada as the most coordinated and the United States as the most decentralized. A variety of variables contribute to those differences—for example, there are far fewer universities in Canada compared with the United States, so implementing a policy among a smaller group of higher education institutions is vastly easier. In addition, how education is aligned with industry needs, work rights, and pathways to citizenship can also influence a country’s ability to nimbly pivot and focus on diversifying international student populations, as is the case largely with Canada as well.

In addition, because the mild but continued growth in numbers of outbound Chinese students is not necessarily reflected in equally increasing numbers headed to these four

host countries, one can conclude that more Chinese students are opting for less expensive, nontraditional study destinations such as Japan, perceived to be more welcoming and safer, as well as closer to their home. In fact, international students as a whole are becoming more interested in gaining a tangible return on their tuition investment, which can often be measured in their ability to secure employment after graduation. Achieving that goal might not necessarily entail paying high university tuition in a Western country.

India and “The Rest of the World”

Of course, India is a market of great interest to all four English-language host destinations due to its size—in fact, the country’s population is forecast by the United Nations to exceed China’s by 2027. However, India will not be the next China: its middle class is not as developed and the market is more fragmented, with young people in the south perceived as interested in STEM-related fields, while those in the more northern regions opt more for business programs. Universities interested in recruiting Indian students need to develop tailored strategies for different regions in India, rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all approach. So even as more attention turns to this South Asian country, converting growing interest into enrollments may take a while.

There is, too, what is broadly labelled as “the rest of the world,” meaning countries that are neither China nor India. These do not promise the scale that China does, and the strategies would need to be even more tailored than for India. Generally, for students from some East Asian and European countries, credit transfer can be a challenge, and students from countries in Latin America can struggle with English and cost. Africa as a region holds great promise due to its tremendous youth population, but government corruption and lack of financial resources are formidable obstacles to recruiting students from there.

Sustainability amid Geopolitical Volatility

So where does this leave international higher education in a post-China world? Well, just as we are considering this prospect, the landscape has become destabilized due to geopolitical volatility, and the unpredictability of these forces have the potential to override the keenest and most well-planned of strategies. Will international students, regardless of origin, opt out of a post-Brexit United Kingdom, or will they still be drawn by poststudy work rights? How will political and social unrest in Hong Kong influence outbound student mobility there? How will the upcoming presidential election impact the lure of coming to the United States? And, after recent fires in Australia, could climate change become a weighty factor when students select where to study?

In short, yes, in a post-China world, diversification is the key to sustainability, whether it be an individual university’s recruitment strategy or the broader policy of a host country. However, considering the number of factors that the market is currently contemplating, it is hard to say that *that* will be the sole focal point. In today’s complex and nuanced environment, the only certainty is that students are looking for value and return on their tuition investment. If we focus on these young people and our ability to enable them to achieve their goals, that is undeniably a strategy that will pay off, for the long-term, for everyone. ▲

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Chinese Students Wary of Studying in the United States

Xiaofeng Wan

Abstract

In a recent survey, 87 percent of high school college counselors in China said that their students and parents are now reconsidering plans for studying in the United States. Eighty-five percent among them attributed this new trend to Trump's hostile rhetoric and unpredictable policies toward Chinese students. This has pushed Chinese students to look elsewhere for alternatives, directly benefiting competitor countries. Despite the pessimistic outlook, the United States still remains a prime destination for many Chinese students, particularly its top-tier institutions.

At a seminar with a group of Chinese high school principals organized by Amherst College and Williams College in Shanghai last summer, one of the principals raised concerns about whether the United States still welcomes Chinese students. We reassured him that higher education institutions in the United States still welcome all international students. The principal, however, did not seem completely convinced, and sadly, we knew where his hesitation came from.

Throughout the two-week trip, we repeatedly heard concerns from parents and students about studying in the United States, including difficulties getting a student visa, frequent gun violence and mass shootings, deportations of Chinese students at the airport, the skyrocketing cost of US college education, OPT (optional practical training) authorization delays, and unclear H-1B visa reform. The constant anti-immigrant rhetoric of the Trump administration, talks of banning student visas for all Chinese students, and suggestions that “almost every [Chinese] student that comes over to this country is a spy” do not resonate well with people on the other side of the globe.

In a recent survey designed by the international admission team at Amherst College and directed at 54 school-based college counselors in China, 85 percent of the respondents indicated that the biggest concern of Chinese parents is Trump's unpredictable policies toward Chinese students; 78 percent pointed to safety; 65 percent to the uncertainty of remaining in the United States for a work experience after graduation; and another 65 percent indicated fear of visa denial or deportation after arrival.

Considering Alternative Destinations

As a result, a whopping 87 percent of the counselors said that Chinese students and their parents are now reconsidering their plans for studying in the United States and diversifying their options of college destinations. One counselor said, “Our students have planned to go to college in the US for years. However, a significant number of them are now looking at other countries, such as the UK, Canada, and Australia.” This is bad news for the United States.

At the same time that international students are discouraged by the hostile rhetoric of the Trump administration, competitor countries have increased their efforts to recruit Chinese students, with significant progress in the last few years. From 2017 to 2018, Canada saw a 33 percent increase in the number of students from China. Chinese students now account for one-third of all international students there, injecting five billion Canadian dollars into the economy annually. UCAS, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, a UK-based organization that coordinates the application process for British universities, recently reported a 33 percent increase in Chinese applications with acceptances up by 28 percent since 2018. One counselor illustrated this trend by saying, “I've been at international schools in China and Switzerland for almost 10 years, and I've never had as many visiting university reps from the UK as we've had in the last three weeks.”

A few counselors also cited the rising cost of US higher education as a source of concern. With the ongoing trade war, China's currency has plunged to the lowest valuation in 11 years. This has made an American college education less affordable. It costs international students only half as much, or less, for a college education in Canada or the United Kingdom. The reintroduced Post Study Work (PSW) rule in the United Kingdom will now allow international students to stay in the country for two years after graduation to work, starting with the class graduating in 2021. The change in ruling coincided with an announcement of the world's largest genetics research project aimed at fighting deadly diseases. When asked whether the new PSW option in the United Kingdom

As a result, a whopping 87 percent of the counselors said that Chinese students and their parents are now reconsidering their plans for studying in the United States and diversifying their options of college destinations.

would influence Chinese students considering US colleges, 78 percent of the counselors surveyed replied yes.

The United Kingdom's openness to international students is in stark contrast to its former colony. In June 2018, the Trump administration rolled back an Obama-era policy on issuing five-year visas to Chinese students, thereby limiting the length of stay for those in high-tech fields such as robotics, aviation, and high-tech manufacturing to one year. This shift in US policy comes while these fields are priorities in Beijing's Made in China 2025 Plan, intended to make China a manufacturing superpower. As a result, Chinese students already studying these high-tech fields on US campuses have become increasingly concerned about traveling to China during their program, for fear of not being allowed to return.

More Chinese Students Preparing for Undergraduate Study Abroad

According to a Beijing-based research firm on international education, there were more than 820 international schools in China in 2018, with a total student population of over 480,000. Most, if not all, of these students will pursue higher education abroad. When Chinese students opt for an international curriculum in high school, they have essentially forfeited the option of taking the college entrance exam for admission to Chinese universities. With no path to attend colleges at home, they have bet on admission to a college abroad.

The United States has taken notice. Caroline Casagrande, deputy assistant secretary for academic programs in the US Department of State's Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs, posted a video on the US Embassy's official WeChat account. In it, she affirmed that "The vast majority of student visas are granted. In fact, every year, for the last five years, the number of student visa rejections have gone down in China. I am here ... to make sure we continue to have the best and brightest Chinese students in our American classrooms." The video garnered over 48,000 views during the first two weeks after it was posted.

When asked to predict the growth trend of numbers of Chinese students in the next couple of years, 43 percent of counselors in the survey predicted it would go down, while 38 percent predicted it would be consistent with current numbers. Only one counselor out of 54 who responded said that it would go up.

It Is Not All Gloom and Doom

In our survey, 70 percent of counselors shared that if their students were admitted to comparable colleges in the United States and other countries, most would still choose the United States. One counselor added that this is particularly so when students apply to highly selective colleges.

When asked what the most attractive characteristics of US higher education are, counselors listed the "melting pot" nature of society and the diversity of the student body; rich academic and research resources; flexibility in choosing and changing majors; the liberal arts education; academic freedom; high-quality education with world-class professors, as well as a competitive edge in the job market and strong networking opportunities. These qualities have always been what make US higher education desirable. ▲

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Qualifications Recognition Going Global: An International Convention under UNESCO's Auspices

Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić

Abstract

In November 2019, UNESCO's General Conference adopted a Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications. The convention is the result of preparatory work by experts, amendments put forward by governments, and consensus reached on the text over the period of eight years. This article presents its origins, the innovations that the convention brings to international mobility and migration, and the next steps in its implementation.

On November 25, 2019, in Paris, government representatives of UNESCO's 193 member states adopted the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education. The fact that consensus could be reached between countries as diverse as UNESCO's member states about what is primarily a national prerogative such as qualifications recognition and quality assurance in higher education should not be underestimated.

The main value of the Convention, however, lies in its basic principles. It underscores the greater rights of applicants to have their qualifications assessed for the purpose of further study or employment. Recognition should be nondiscriminatory and done in a fair, transparent, and timely manner. Recognition can be withheld *only* if the competent authorities of the receiving country provide evidence of substantial differences between the higher education systems of the sending and receiving countries.

The new elements introduced by the convention are reliability, consistency, and complementarity between qualifications recognition, quality assurance, and qualifications frameworks. It addresses nontraditional learning modes, puts forward learning outcomes, and introduces validation of prior learning. The greatest focus is on transparent information and networking, thus launching an international community of recognition practitioners and inviting them to cooperate closely with international quality assurance practitioners (who are more advanced in terms of international networking). While in the 1990s, recognition and quality assurance operated on parallel tracks, in the present process, mutual confidence and trust between the two are basic parameters for success.

Despite being an international treaty—the only existing one for higher education, the stipulations of this legal instrument are not supranational, as often feared. For most of its articles, the text that was adopted underlines that the stipulations should be based on existing national laws and includes the reassuring caveat for implementation “to the extent possible.” The convention itself offers a much-needed global framework for qualifications recognition, with a right for states parties to appeal.

Greater Equity for the Most Vulnerable

As an important equity issue, the convention addresses the needs of a vulnerable segment of the population, refugees and displaced persons, by offering them opportunities to continue their studies in the countries that will accept them. (According to UNESCO, there were 70.8 million forcibly displaced people in the world in 2018, with only 3 percent of eligible refugees having equitable access to higher education studies.) The convention comes with a concrete instrument, the UNESCO Qualifications Passport for Refugees and Vulnerable Migrants (UQP), based on the methodology of the existing European Qualifications Passport initiative promoted by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT).

UNESCO successfully ran the first pilot of the UQP in September 2019, in Zambia, in cooperation with the Zambia Qualifications Authority, NOKUT, and UNHCR. Thirty potential passport holders were tested and 12 were selected to receive the UQP. The UQP does not replace a missing qualification, but has a validity of five years, which offers holders the opportunity to adapt to their new environment.

... the convention addresses the needs of a vulnerable segment of the population, refugees and displaced persons, by offering them opportunities to continue their studies in the countries that will accept them.

Next Steps

The next steps for the Global Convention will consist in distributing certified copies of the convention to member states and beginning the ratification process and its entry into force, once the 20th ratification instrument is deposited at UNESCO. Major receiving countries of international students such as Australia and Canada and a large number of European countries, among which Norway is the most vocal, have expressed great enthusiasm about the convention and are likely to speed up the ratification process. The Asia-Pacific region (especially China, Japan, and South Korea) has been most supportive, as well as most African countries. It is regrettable that the United States, no longer a member of UNESCO, will not be part of the implementation of this treaty.

Toward a Better World?

Why was a global convention adopted at a time when higher education internationalization is changing as a result of populism and xenophobia and a general decrease of trust in public institutions? One of the reasons is a sense of ownership. The Global Convention will be implemented in close cooperation with the Council of Europe/UNESCO 1997 Lisbon Recognition Convention and the recently revised regional conventions (2011 Tokyo Convention for Asia-Pacific; the 2014 Addis Ababa Convention for Africa; the 2019 Buenos Aires Convention for Latin America and the Caribbean, replacing the regional conventions of the 1970s). Another is the need to acknowledge the unbundling of higher education and its digitization, including new credentialing, through a global framework for recognition. A third reason is ever-increasing migrations. According to the International Migration Report, in 2017 there was an estimated 258 million people living in a country other than their country of birth, an increase of 49 percent since 2000. Finally, the convention fulfills UNESCO's objective for universality of higher education diploma recognition and crowns its long-standing activities for equivalence of degrees, which go back to the foundation of its higher education program in 1947.

Although by no means perfect, and with uncertainties as to its effectiveness and impact, the adoption of this particular convention brings hope. At a time when multilateralism is under threat, in a world marked by greater inequalities and societies closing themselves off, it opens the door to a better world for mobile students, researchers, and faculty. Its success will depend on the will of states parties to engage, but, even more, on the readiness of practitioners to share practices across borders. ▲

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Assessment and Recognition of Refugee Credentials

Beatrice Kohlenberg and Bryce Loo

Among the millions of refugees worldwide are many who either hold postsecondary degrees or are eligible to access higher education. In North America, Europe, and elsewhere, higher education institutions, professional associations, governments, and others have tried to figure out how to reduce or eliminate the barriers that these refugees face in accessing higher education and finding employment that makes use of qualifications that they already hold. Among these barriers are evaluation and recognition of refugees' academic credentials when they are unable to access complete, official documentation. This article examines efforts to address this barrier in Canada and the United States, as well as by UNESCO.

Abstract

The current worldwide refugee crisis has provoked the examination of access and integration of refugees into higher education in host countries. The issues of access to, and assessment and recognition of, educational credentials are crucial for such access. Professional employment for those with higher education credentials is similarly challenging. Some initiatives are showing promise, particularly as UNESCO and the United Nations system in general begin to tackle the challenge on a global scale.

The Challenge for Refugee Students and Professionals

For myriad reasons, refugees, asylum seekers, and people displaced by natural disasters are likely to encounter difficulties meeting the requirements for standard evaluation of academic credentials. For instance, they may not be able to take all their documents with them when forced to flee. Obtaining official documents from the issuing institution may be impossible due to the educational system’s incapacity to manage archives and respond to graduates’ requests.

For these individuals, the lack of proof of academic attainment is a challenge that must be overcome, as they seek to build new lives in a new country. Without proof, finding commensurate employment or obtaining the further education they need to build meaningful careers is often impossible. Many become stuck in jobs that do not fully utilize their education, skills, and experience.

The Lisbon Recognition Convention

North American and European efforts to address the credentials barrier for displaced migrants stem in large part from a 1997 international agreement called the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, more commonly known as the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC). Section 7 of the LRC commits signatories to develop “procedures designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher education programs or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence.”

The LRC also helped to codify a series of national information centers for international education qualifications, known collectively as the ENIC–NARIC Networks. Under the LRC, each signatory country must have one national information center that is part of this network. It is within these organizations that much of the recent innovation surrounding assessment and recognition of qualifications for those lacking full official documentation has happened. For example, the ENIC–NARIC Networks across Europe collaborated to develop the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR), an alternative assessment procedure for assessing qualifications using available documentation and interviews of applicants.

Canadian Responses to the Assessment and Recognition Challenge

Since the beginning of large-scale resettlement of Syrian refugees in late 2015, Canada has taken strides to improve the recognition of credentials held by refugees. Canada formally ratified the LRC in 2018. The ratification obligates Canada to develop methods of assessing refugee qualifications, even in the absence of full official documentation.

Ahead of Canada’s ratification of the LRC, Canada’s ENIC–NARIC Network member organization, the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC), led high-level discussions with major stakeholders from across Canada on the topic of assessing refugee credentials. The Assessing the Qualifications of Refugees initiative led by CICIC sought to develop best assessment practices within a Canadian context and was funded by the federal government.

One major Canadian initiative to identify and implement such practices comes from World Education Services (WES), a leading credential evaluation organization that operates in Canada and the United States. The WES Gateway Program provides credential assessments to individuals who have been displaced by political unrest, conflict, or natural disasters, and who also lack access to verifiable documents.

During a one-year pilot project, WES created an assessment methodology based on documents in the applicants’ possession and worked with community referral partners to help bring applicants into the program. Based on 45 years’ worth of educational records and sample documents in its database and its expertise in credential evaluation, WES was able to assess credentials where a transcript was available and to “reconstruct” qualifications and offer an assessment in cases where only partial documentation was available. As a result, 337 Syrian refugees received a credential assessment report.

Encouraged by the success of the pilot, WES established a full-scale program that is available to eligible individuals from additional countries. The WES Gateway Program

Since the beginning of large-scale resettlement of Syrian refugees in late 2015, Canada has taken strides to improve the recognition of credentials held by refugees.

was launched in late fall 2018 in Canada, serving clients with education from seven countries where access to academic documents remains problematic: Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine, and Venezuela. Over the past year, 452 individuals received assessments through the WES Gateway Program. Sixty of them had the reports sent to postsecondary institutions in Canada.

US Responses

Attempts to address the assessment and recognition challenge in the United States have been more limited. Progress is hampered by a much larger and diffuse higher education sector, as well as a tougher sociopolitical climate regarding immigration and refugees. A US higher education association, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), convened a working group of experts on the topic of admissions (specifically credential requirements) for refugees in US higher education. In early 2019, AACRAO released a report synthesizing this group's knowledge and recommendations for addressing the credential recognition barrier when admitting refugee students into US colleges and universities.

AACRAO has also teamed up with the University of California, Davis, and the American University of Beirut in Lebanon to develop a cloud-based online storage program for the academic and professional documents of refugees. This storage system is known as the Article 26 Backpack. (Article 26 refers to the article in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guaranteeing all people a right to education.) Documents stored in the Backpack can be accessed anywhere in the world for whatever need, including assessment by a credential evaluation organization, admission to a university, or gaining employment. So far, the program has been piloted mostly in Lebanon with Syrian refugees. There are plans to roll it out more widely, including in the United States.

Toward Worldwide Responses

Worldwide momentum is growing to ensure that all globally mobile individuals, including refugees, have access to a fair evaluation of academic qualifications. In November 2019, UNESCO ushered in the [Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education](#). Like the LRC and other regional conventions, the Global Convention commits nations to fairly evaluating credentials from other countries. The convention also requires that refugees be given a fair assessment of their qualifications, even in the absence of full documentation. In the face of this momentum and of the increased focus on identifying and implementing best practices in evaluation and recognition, more countries and their higher education institutions are likely to find ways to assess and recognize the qualifications of deserving refugee students and professionals, to the greater benefit of both individuals and the countries in which they settle. ▲

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Measuring the Impact of Equity Promotion Policies

Jamil Salmi

Abstract

This article analyzes five case studies of what works in equity: Australia, Austria, Colombia, South Africa, and Vietnam. The studies confirm that achieving strong equity results requires a high degree of alignment among leadership, policy goals, policy instruments, and resources. They also show the interaction of structural elements influencing disparities in higher education: streaming within high schools, selectivity in university admissions, institutional differentiation of higher education systems, and availability of financial aid for disadvantaged groups.

A 2018 study sponsored by the Lumina Foundation, *All Around the World*, reviewed the policy commitments of national governments to promote equal opportunities in access and success in higher education. The study found that, with the exception of a few fragile states recovering from a natural catastrophe or a major political crisis, equity is a priority theme in the higher education discourse of most governments.

Leading up to this year's World Access to Higher Education Day (26 November 2019), the Lumina Foundation sponsored a follow-up study to explore which equity promotion policies seem most successful. The new study followed a mixed-method approach combining a literature review of methods to measure the impact of equity policies in higher education and case studies focused on a small sample of countries from all continents: Australia, Austria, Colombia, South Africa, and Vietnam.

International studies on disparities in higher education are few and far between. The choice of indicators to measure inequalities is heavily influenced by the availability of data about various equity groups. On the whole, countries tend to focus mainly on access data, at the expense of graduation results. By and large, gender and socioeconomic background are the two variables most often collected across the globe.

Results of the Country Studies

Australia stands out as one of the few countries in the world with a comprehensive higher education equity strategy supported by a wide array of policies, instruments, and measures with both universal and targeted elements. It has a good information system that produces detailed data disaggregated by equity groups. This has enabled proper targeting, adequate accountability, and performance-based funding. With HECS-HELP, the income-contingent loan system, Australia has been a pioneer in developing a universal funding system that is both financially sustainable and socially equitable. The HEPPP institutional grant mechanism has been a catalyst for organizational change by increasing university focus on student equity, promoting understanding of barriers to participation, and creating an expert workforce on equity issues.

Austria has one of the highest enrollment rates, which can largely be attributed to the open-access nature of its higher education system and the absence of financial barriers. Gender parity is quite good, even in STEM programs. Data collection and monitoring are well established for gender. Finally, institutions have responded positively and effectively to the recent refugee crisis.

In Colombia, the increased presence of public and private universities in the regions has helped achieve an impressive expansion of enrollment, with higher participation of low-income students and minorities. ICETEX, the first ever student loan agency in the world, has been the principal equity promotion instrument at the national level. The leading public universities implement equity promotion interventions through financial aid and nonmonetary instruments. Some of the private universities have also implemented substantial retention programs. Finally, the Colombian government has included new equity target groups to recognize victims of violence, displaced population groups, and gender diversity.

In South Africa, a more balanced geographical spread of higher education institutions since the end of apartheid has helped serve underrepresented groups and drastically augment the number of black students. Improved funding for students from disadvantaged backgrounds through grants and, more recently, the elimination of tuition fees for the lowest income groups, have raised access. The government has put pressure on universities to diversify their racial composition and, by and large, universities have been responsive in enrolling a more diverse student and academic body. Finally, South Africa has the largest open university in the continent, offering opportunities to students who cannot access regular higher education institutions.

Australia stands out as one of the few countries in the world with a comprehensive higher education equity strategy supported by a wide array of policies, instruments, and measures with both universal and targeted elements.

In Vietnam, the rapid expansion of the higher education system has helped increase the number of students from traditionally underrepresented groups. Affirmative action policy has helped give better access opportunities to students from ethnic minorities. Vietnam has also achieved good results in reducing the gender gap. Finally, tuition exemptions, small scholarships, and loans are available to help needy students overcome financial barriers.

Common Findings at the National Level

The country studies confirmed one of the major findings of the 2018 Lumina study: to achieve strong equity results requires a high degree of alignment among leadership vision, policy goals, policy instruments, and allocated resources. Continuity in equity policies is also essential. Too often, politics get in the way of sound policies. To improve access and success for underrepresented groups in the long run, it is important to stay the course and carry on with both financial and nonmonetary equity policies in a consistent way, independently of which party is in government. Additionally, the study noted that Austria is the only country surveyed with equity promotion policies influenced and strengthened by supranational considerations (the Bologna process and the social dimension agenda of the European Commission).

Finally, the case studies confirmed the interaction of four structural elements that strongly influence disparities in higher education. First, the extent of streaming between general education and vocational training within high schools negatively affects the chances of children from low-income families. The level of selectivity in the admission policies of universities is the second factor affecting opportunities for students from underrepresented groups. The third contributing factor is the degree of institutional differentiation of higher education systems. Last but not least, the availability of financial aid for students from disadvantaged groups is an important determinant of equity.

Key Findings at the Institutional Level

The five case studies also included a review of institutional approaches and experiences to promote access and success for underserved students. They revealed that institutions must have a clear strategy that can either take the form of a stand-alone document or be embedded in the institutional strategic plan. The University of Wollongong and Deakin University in Australia, and Uniminuto in Colombia, are good examples. All three have put a strong emphasis on equity as part of their core mission. In this regard, having a department responsible for all equity-related activities under the direct authority of an institutional leader is also an important factor of success. In low- and middle-income countries, innovative partnerships between higher education institutions, local authorities, and local businesses can generate additional resources to finance scholarships for needy students. In addition to ensuring greater access, elite public or private universities that want to be more inclusive should strive to provide a welcoming environment for first-generation students, who often feel uncomfortable within an elitist institutional culture.

Areas for Further Research

Policy makers, university leaders and researchers interested in advancing further equity in higher education could bear in mind some of the results of this study. Moving forward, it will be important to undertake impact studies to measure which equity promotion interventions and combinations of interventions are most effective, building on the work of [Geven and Herbaut on financial aid strategies \(IHE #99\)](#). Countries and higher education institutions need to put in place comprehensive information systems to identify all equity groups and measure their progress in terms of access and graduation. With respect to gender disparities, it is necessary to identify effective policies to improve gender balance in STEM institutions and programs, in the top academic positions, and in university leadership functions. Finally, it is indispensable to better define the needs of students with disabilities, provide them with sufficient resources, and empower universities to place this dimension higher on their equity agenda (see [Thompson on inclusive universities in IHE #100](#)). ▲

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Abstract

Throughout the world, tuition at any level is regarded as a significant barrier for university access to disadvantaged socioeconomic groups. In the United States, student debt levels are at an historic high. In most cases, the political movement for free tuition does not provide any significant plan on how to make up lost revenue. Consolidating existing financial aid sources, combined with progressive tuition levels, may be a promising model.

The Allure of Free Tuition

John Aubrey Douglass

Throughout the world, tuition at any level is regarded as a significant barrier for university access to disadvantaged socioeconomic groups. In South Africa, students demanded free tuition at all public universities and engaged in major and disruptive protests. The #FeesMustFall movement resulted in the suspension of classes, the occupation of university buildings, and the demand that the government deliver on its promise of free university education. Similar protests occurred in Chile.

In the United States, student debt levels are at a historic high, although largely fueled by dramatic increases in the number of students entering for-profit institutions and students taking on debt for professional graduate degrees that bring high levels of future earnings. Nevertheless, the cost of attending a public university or college emerged as a major campaign issue in the pending 2020 election for the presidency. Democratic candidates made promises of unprecedented levels of federal funding to states to eliminate tuition for all students—often without regard to personal family income and without a coherent model on how it could be financially or legally accomplished.

In virtually all of these national cases, the political movement for free tuition does not provide any significant plan on how to make up lost revenue. Universities are like other organizations in society: if they lose significant income, there are consequences that can include reductions in access and in the number of courses offered, and rising student-to-faculty ratios.

In societies with substantial disparities between rich and poor, like California, Chile, or South Africa, free tuition actually represents a substantial subsidy for the wealthier students. Depending on the composition of the student body at a public university, free tuition is essentially a transfer of wealth to upper-income students. In addition, many countries with free or nearly free tuition, including Germany and France, tend to have more selective admissions to public universities—in essence, limited access to a highly sought public good, sometimes in favor of vocational education.

Does the allure of free-tuition public universities make sense in the United States, in California, or elsewhere?

The Case of California

Nearly a year ago, the University of California (UC) regents approved a 2.6 percent increase in tuition for nonresident students for this academic year, but left in-state undergraduate tuition steady. UC is still struggling to make up for the huge cuts in state financing that came on the heels of the Great Recession. But why increase only nonresident tuition, and not plan a similar and predictable increase for California residents? One reason is that Californians and their lawmakers have significant concerns regarding the impact of rising tuition and student debt levels. Another reason is that even incremental increases in tuition are perceived as bad politics. UC resorts to short-term, year-to-year negotiations with lawmakers on tuition and fees, but is often faced with an ultimatum not to increase tuition.

The counterintuitive fact is that increased undergraduate tuition rates for Californians at UC over the past decade did not lead to decreased access for low-income students. Their numbers actually went up. How did tuition go up dramatically in the wake of state disinvestment, while access to low-income students went up? UC pursued what I call a “progressive tuition model” that raised tuition while providing significant financial aid to low-income and middle-class students. Approximately 33 percent of all tuition income goes back to financial aid. This return-to-aid policy started in the 1990s, with the beginning of state disinvestment in public higher education. As state funding on a per-student basis continued downward, and enrollment increased dramatically, the role of tuition has gone up. In 2000, UC enrolled just over 183,000 students; today it enrolls over 280,000. Further, the ability to increase tuition will likely be a decisive

factor in UC's ability to create a more stable funding model and grow in enrollment and programs in line with California's population and labor needs.

In this disjuncture between perception and the actual impact of tuition lies a potential solution.

Exploring a New Pricing Model

Tuition rates might be more clearly stated for middle- and lower-income undergraduate students (students with family incomes below \$80,000 pay no tuition or fees). But is it possible to do this in a politically acceptable way?

UC's leaders should consider a revised tuition pricing model that offers five (or so) tiered tuition rates for students depending on their family income, with federal Pell Grants for low-income students, university-sourced financial aid and Cal Grants (also for low-income students) directly reflected in the pricing. Students eligible for these forms of financial aid are not difficult to identify.

Clarity of costs could enhance access to disadvantaged groups who, like all students, are often confused by complicated sticker price tuition (the total yearly cost of college education), which can only be mitigated by complicated pathways for financial aid. Just as importantly, clarity of costs could also change the dynamics of often misinformed debates on the real impact of tuition on students and affordability.

Because of UC's high return-to-aid rate, when an increase in tuition and fees is proposed, there is an assumption that it is an increase for all students, when only about 50 percent of students are affected. Explicitly raising tuition for high-income groups while, for example, maintaining or even reducing costs for middle- and lower-income students, would change the contentious politics and symbolism of the tuition debate in California.

Repacking and consolidating existing financial aid sources, combined with additional tuition income from those who can afford it, should also be modeled to actually increase funding for need-based-aid and generate additional income for academic programs.

A Model?

Might some version of this progressive tuition model work in other countries? That is a complicated question, as there are significant differences in the mix of institutional types in various parts of the world. There are also differences in how universities are funded, the financial aid that is available to students, nations' political and cultural expectations, and the socioeconomic challenges they face (see [Gayardon and Bernasconi on the free tuition movement in IHE #100](#)).

The fact is that the significant movement toward mass higher education means growing financial costs for most, if not all nation-states. In the past, free tuition worked financially in part because a smaller proportion of the college-age population went to a tertiary institution. Free tuition connoted the concept of higher education as a public good, but in many parts of the world it was largely free to a privileged class.

Today, promising free higher education is different than actually providing it. While free tuition is politically popular with voters, forming the basis for many a political campaign, there is almost a universal neglect of how to fill the budget hole that it leaves for universities, most of whom are struggling financially under the weight of growing demand for their services and increased expectations of stakeholders. And, as noted, most countries have serious problems with inequality. Simply making tuition free, even if it can be accomplished, may exacerbate income inequality or, at least, present a dubious further transfer of wealth to the already wealthy. ▲

Might some version of this progressive tuition model work in other countries?

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The conference, marking the 25th anniversary of both the Center and *International Higher Education*, is intended to bring together senior academics and leaders in international higher education from around the world, alumni and friends/partners of CIHE, as well as other scholars, doctoral students, and postdocs with an interest in the field. The event will be organized around two tracks—international and comparative higher education, and the internationalization of higher education—and will include invited keynote presenters, panel discussions, and presentations of individual papers. Confirmed keynote speakers include Philip G. Altbach and Hans de Wit (Boston College), Simon Marginson (University of Oxford, UK), Rajani Naidoo (University of Bath, UK) and Ly Tran (Deakin University, Australia). It is our intention to publish some of the presented papers in special issues of *Higher Education* and *Journal of Studies in International Education* (there is no guarantee that a paper selected for inclusion in the conference program will be published in either journal, but all selected papers will be considered).

A modest registration fee will be charged to all attendees. The full call for proposals (for those interested in presenting a paper) and the registration link are both available on the [CIHE website](#). Paper submissions are due by May 15, 2020.

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