Abstract: The popularity of international league tables has intensified the competition in the global higher education market. Countries across the world have been actively participating in the global ranking exercises, aiming to enhance the competitiveness and reputation of their higher education systems globally. Like its Western counterparts, China has also committed to establishing world-class universities. In this context, the article examines the internationalization of higher education in China. Discourse analysis is adopted to analyze milestone policies issued in the past three decades to illustrate China’s changing response to internationalization, which can be categorized in distinct stages, including awareness, response, and adaptation to and determination of the process of internationalization. The shifting strategy toward internationalization indicates that higher education is increasingly used as an essential tool to enhance China’s national competitiveness and international influence as a whole.

This article examines the changing discourse of internationalization in the context of education policy in China, aiming to illustrate shifts in
the state attitudes toward and strategies of internationalization. Although internationalization has frequently been debated by academics and policymakers in recent decades, international influence has been long observed in education in China, despite the absence of the term “internationalization.” As early as in the late Qing Dynasty, which is more than a century ago, the state sent students overseas to learn advanced science and technology (Yang 1994). During 1912 to 1949, when China was under the governance of the Kuomintang, Chinese education was in the early stage of modernization. Great cultural diversity was observed, characterized by the coexistence of different values from both indigenous tradition and overseas experience. Traditionally, the feudal values of Confucianism persist, even though the Keju system (imperial civil servants examinations) was abolished with the collapse of feudalism (Hayhoe 1984). Internationally, culture learned from developed countries injected fresh thinking into Chinese education. To modernize its education system, first China began to emulate the systems of Japan and later those of America and Europe since the early nineteenth century. Later, the Soviet influence also spread to China. Influenced by the communist ideology, the Yanan style of education emerged in the 1920s. It had significant effects on what later became a socialist education system with the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) (Hayhoe 1984).

Since the rise of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to power in 1949, the state had attempted to build a modernized education system with greater efficiency. The Soviet model was deliberately adopted to achieve this aim (Wiloch, Bereday et al. 1959) (online sources cite single author “Wiloch” for the 1959 source; is a separate reference intended for Bereday??). Specialization, unification, and centralization became the keywords for education reforms as announced in the First National Conference on Higher Education (HE) in 1950 (Orleans 1987; Pepper 1996) (these two references are missing). Consequently, a highly centralized HE system was established in the early 1950s with a structure of “one comprehensive university devoted to pure theoretical studies in the arts and science in each region,” surrounded “by a cluster of polytechnical, normal and monotechnical institutions” (Hayhoe 1984: 43).

To achieve rapid enhancement of China’s competitiveness, Mao Zedong called for a Great Leap Forward in the national construction in 1958. A national mass movement was initiated in every walk of life. All sectors expanded aggressively to “construct socialism with greater results, higher speed, better quality, and less cost” (duo kuai hao sheng de jian she she hui zhu yi) (People’s Daily 1964). Education at all levels expanded quickly and in HE, enrollments increased from 561,800 entrants during 1953–57 to 1,138,700 during 1962–68 (Henze 1984). However, this expansion was achieved at the
price of education quality due to a lack of resources. Soon the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution broke out, inciting mass class struggle throughout the country that lasted for a decade (1966–76). The education sector was restructured to serve the revolutionary agenda. “Revolutionary committees” controlled universities, and political royalty became more important than academic merit in HE enrollment (Henze 1984). International exchange was suspended against the background of a mass movement to eliminate capitalist influence (Miao and Cheng 2010). Although the Cultural Revolution arguably promoted educational equity by favoring children from the underprivileged working class (Yang 2006), it largely ruined academic quality and freedom.

Confronting the devastating damage caused by the Cultural Revolution, the CCP shifted its focus from class struggle to economic development. A policy of opening up was adopted to facilitate the establishment of a market economy. Consequently, neoliberal reforms were introduced to the education sphere. Strategies such as marketization, privatization, and decentralization were widely adopted with the aim of granting autonomy to and enhancing the competence of Chinese universities (Mok 2005; Wang 2010). As with the emergence of the global knowledge economy and China’s vigorous engagement with the rest of the world, HE in China faces the challenge of being competitive not only domestically but internationally. The popularity of international league tables has intensified the competition in the global HE market. Countries across the world, including China, have been actively participating in the global ranking exercises, aimed at enhancing the competitiveness and reputation of their HE systems globally. The quest for world-class status has become a prominent agenda reshaping university governance.

This article examines how the discourse of internationalization of HE has been used tactically in China, focusing on recent strategies adopted since the opening up in 1978. It finds that, on the one hand, China is eager to improve education quality through a number of projects and aims to become world-class as measured by existing standards. On the other, it actively expands its influence and promotes a Chinese model worldwide through education (Yang 2010). A paradigm shift in internationalization strategies has become apparent in that HE is increasingly used as an essential part of a policy package to enhance China’s national competitiveness and international influence.

Motives for Internationalization

The 1990s witnessed sharply increased internationalization activities, such as flows of students and scholars, international collaboration on education programs, and the establishment of overseas campuses (Knight 2004). Indeed,
in a globalized world, the internationalization of HE is viewed as an inevitable worldwide trend (Welch 2005). This leads to a question: What are the motives for the internationalization of HE?

There is a vast and growing body of literatures on the motives and rationales for the internationalization of HE (Qiang 2003). While many studies overlap, some investigate the issue from different perspectives. For example, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development identifies four approaches of internationalization in accordance with different rationales. First, the mutual understanding approach mainly serves political, cultural, academic, and development assistance goals by encouraging academic exchange. Second, “the skilled migration approach encompasses the goals of the mutual understanding approach,” but actively targets talented foreign students and scholars (OECD 2006: 78). Third, the revenue-generating approach, while incorporating the goals of the first and second approaches, has the more immediate concern of generating revenue from high tuition fees paid by overseas students. And finally, the capacity-building approach is used to facilitate capacity building in an emerging state by importing HE services.

Marginson (2009) notes that globalization strategies are driven by different stakeholders. At the national level, governments promote these strategies to facilitate capability building, establish education hubs, and boost the exchange of educational services. At the institutional level, internationalization mainly serves the purposes of building partnerships and consortia, and carrying out transactional and long-distance learning. Globalization can be driven by several stakeholders simultaneously, such as institutions, regional or local governments, nonprofit organizations (NPOs), and private companies, using what Marginson calls “jointly driven strategies” (Marginson 2009: 17) and “multi actors strategies” (19).

Knight (1997) summarizes the rationales for internationalization of HE into four categories, including political, economic, academic, and social/cultural rationales. According to her, different stakeholders aim at different goals through the internationalization of HE. Governments, local or national, adopt internationalization as an investment for potential political benefits, direct economic gains and future economic development, enhancement of education quality, and promotion of national cultural and improved cross-cultural understanding (Knight 1997). Most of these goals are shared by universities when participating in internationalization activities, except that the political rationale does not often appear to be their primary concern. Society engages with internationalization in two ways. On the one hand, individual students and scholars benefit from this process in terms of improved employability, academic ability, and cross-cultural communication and understanding. On the other, independent agencies offer platforms for discussion among con-
sumers by comparing and reporting different aspects of university services (Marginson 2009). At the market level, revenue generation is a prevalent motive for private firms as well as institutions. In the global education market, universities are forced to play by a number of “rules of the game,” such as publication in leading English-language journals, among many others, to stand out in international league tables, which are becoming increasingly prominent. This, in turn, brings considerable commercial benefits to private rankers as well as to publishers.

It has been observed that the importance of different rationales alters in the context of wider socioeconomic changes (Qiang 2003), which suggests the contingency nature of the adoption of internationalization strategies. Primarily focusing on the government’s intentions and strategies for internationalization, below we examine the tactical use of internationalization discourses in relation to the changing wider context in China in the past three decades.

The Changing Discourse of Internationalization in China

Five policies are chosen to investigate the changing discourse of internationalization manifested in education policy in China:

1. CCP CC Decision on Educational System Reform (CCP CC 1985) (hereafter, the 1985 policy);
2. Outline for Reform and Development of Education in China (CCP CC and State Council 1993) (hereafter, the 1993 policy);
3. Action Plan for Revitalization of Education in the Twenty-First Century (MOE and State Council 1999) (hereafter, the 1999 policy);
4. 2003–2007 Action Plan for Revitalization of Education (MOE 2004) (hereafter, the 2004 policy); and
5. The National Outline for Mid- and Long-Term Education Planning and Development (State Council 2010) (hereafter, the 2010 policy).

These policies have been chosen for analysis for several reasons. First, they are all guideline policies that have significant effects on the development of education in China. Second, they are comprehensive policies concerning all aspects of education governance. The description of internationalization in the documents indicates the extent to which the government is aware of and responsive to internationalization, which in turn suggests the importance of internationalization for Chinese government relative to other aspects of education governance. Finally, they are landmark policies outlining directions of education development in different periods of time. An analysis of these policies issued in the 1980s to 2010 helps to show the changing discourse of internationalization over the past three decades.
Each of the policy documents is examined using the method of qualitative content analysis. The analysis consists of three phases. First, the author looks for expressions and synonyms of internationalization in Chinese, such as international (guoji), world (shijie), and global (quanqiu), in each policy. Then the frequency of appearance of the expressions is counted and categorized according to the relevant aspects of internationalization (Table 1). Finally, the contexts in which the expressions are used are analyzed to determine the specific goals of internationalization and the means of accomplishing them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>1985</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2010</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Academic exchange and cooperation</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Competition</td>
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<td>Influence</td>
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<td>Status</td>
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<td>Vision</td>
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<td>Leading status</td>
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<td>Norms</td>
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<td>Quality resources</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Internationalized personnel</td>
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<td>Promotion of Chinese</td>
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<td>Education aid</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>World</strong></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td></td>
<td>World-class</td>
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<td><strong>Global</strong></td>
<td>Globalization</td>
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Note: Years represent the time a given policy was issued; the full titles of the policies are given in the text.
In the CCP CC Decisions on Educational System Reform issued in 1985 (CCP CC 1985), expressions relevant to internationalization appear five times, four of which are connected loosely to the context of internationalization, such as worldwide technology reforms and the gap between China and developed countries in education development, and one expression referring to international academic exchange and cooperation. According to the policy, universities are granted the autonomy to carry out international academic exchange and cooperation by utilizing “funds raised by themselves” (zi chou zi yin). This is the only time internationalization practices are mentioned in this document, with the aim of giving universities freedom of international academic exchange. This policy suggests that the government was aware of an increasingly internationalized context, but the response to the changing environment was limited to academic cooperation initiated by individual universities. It appears that the key player in internationalization was universities at that time, and the state facilitated the internationalization process by granting relative autonomy to the universities.

The Outline for Reform and Development of Education in China issued in 1993 (CCP CC and State Council 1993) shows increased attention to internationalization. Expressions related to internationalization were used in fifteen places, which is much more frequent than in the 1985 policy. A majority of the expressions (eight) are used to describe an internationalized context, such as international economy, worldwide technology reform, changing international politics, and international competence. International academic exchange and cooperation is mentioned in three different places, reiterating the importance of and determination to promote international academic exchange and cooperation. In addition to autonomy for academic exchange as specified in the 1985 policy, the 1993 policy further grants universities the freedom to establish institutions with their foreign counterparts (mentioned in one expression). Promoting teaching Chinese as a foreign language (TCFL) is also mentioned once, as it is considered necessary for further opening of the education system and strengthening international exchange and cooperation. Moreover, entries referring to leading world status appear twice to express an aspiration to achieve a higher level of research capacity in the world.

Compared to the 1985 policy, the 1993 policy not only showed a higher level of attention to internationalization but also outlined more specific strategies as a response. It explicitly described the goal of internationalization as to establish 100 key universities of leading quality to achieve “strategic advantages” in competition in the twenty-first century. It also proposed specific strategies toward achieving this end, including (1) promoting international academic exchange and cooperation; (2) permitting cooperation between Chinese and foreign universities in running institutions; (3) encouraging Chinese
students to study overseas and to contribute to the modernization process in China either by returning to China or by other means; (4) streamlining the admission process to Chinese universities for foreign students; and (5) promoting TCFL (chapter 1, article 4).

The Action Plan for Revitalization of Education in the Twenty-First Century passed in 1999 went further in its quest for world-class status. Expressions related to world class, such as world-class university, world-class discipline, and world-class level, appeared ten times throughout the text. In addition, phrases referring to international leading status were mentioned twice. Other expressions related to internationalization were used to describe the internationalization background (two), international norms (one), and academic exchange and cooperation (one).

The focus on world-class status in the 1999 policy suggests a new interpretation of internationalization. Different from earlier policies emphasizing the contextual importance of internationalization, the 1999 policy stressed China’s active response to the internationalization process. The desire to establish world-class universities was explicitly stated, which not only reiterated but also upgraded the previous policy goal of achieving higher or leading status. Moreover, the state showed more commitment to assisting in achieving this aim by outlining practical strategies. For example, the government has set up special funding to attract outstanding academics by global recruitment. A comprehensive visiting scholarship program for both Chinese and foreign scholars was initiated to advance international academic exchange. The adoption of distance-learning technology is also encouraged and subsidized by the state. A call for overseas Chinese students to return to China to work is repeated in this policy.

The 2003–2007 Action Plan for Revitalization of Education issued in 2004 is an update to the Action Plan for Revitalization of Education in the Twenty-First Century, based on implementation of the latter from 1998 to 2002. Expressions related to internationalization appeared more frequently than in the previous policies examined above, with a total of twenty-four occurrences. This usage suggests that the policy shifts the priority of internationalization to the promotion of TCFL, which is discussed more frequently (eight times) than other internationalization practices. Discussions of other aspects of internationalization are more or less similar to the previous action plan including one reference to the context, five references to academic exchange and cooperation, one to international competency, one to China’s international status, two to international organizations, two to internationalized human resources, two to leading status in research, and two to world-class universities.

Most of the goals outlined in the 1999 policy were repeated in the 2004 documents. However, the 2004 policy employed a new strategy as a response
to the internationalization process: expansion of the global influence of Chinese. According to this policy, the Chinese Bridge Project (han yu qiao) was launched to enhance the popularity of Chinese worldwide and facilitate cross-cultural understanding. A policy package was also adopted for this aim, and included initiatives such as the establishment of Confucius Institutes (CIs), standardization of the Chinese proficiency test (HSK), and the training of Chinese teachers. Moreover, this document highlighted the significance of the private sector and supranational organizations in the process of internationalization.

The National Outline for Mid- and Long-Term Education Planning and Development was issued in 2010 after several rounds of public consultation (State Council 2010). This recent policy showed a more comprehensive understanding and evaluation of the internationalization process. Expressions related to different aspects of internationalization were frequently used, including six times for the context, ten times for academic exchange and cooperation, three for competition/competency, one for international influence, one for international status, one for international vision, five for leading/higher status, four for world-class status, one for international norms, three for quality resources, one for international organizations, one for promotion of TCFL, one for promotion of cross-cultural understanding, and one for provision of education aid to developing countries.

The 2010 policy set more ambitious goals for China’s education in an internationalized era. Apart from reiterating the determination to improve the quality of education to a world-class level, it also called for enhancement of China’s overall international competency and profile through education. On the one hand, a number of projects, such as the Changjiang Scholar Program (hang jiang xue zhe) and Overseas High-Level Recruitment (hai wai gao ceng cir en cai yin jin ji hua) were launched in a search for talent from across the world. These projects are subsidized by the state to provide competitive packages including both research support and living benefits to attract top players. On the other hand, the request for international reputation also led to initiatives to promote cultural exchange. Scholarships are provided by the state to attract foreign students to study in China. An increasing number of CIs have been established in different countries to promote the influence of Chinese language and culture. Moreover, it is noted that, according to this policy, China will increase international education aid to train skilled labor for “developing countries.” It would appear that the internationalization of Chinese HE in the new millennium implies not only catching up with developed economies and becoming world-class, but exporting education services to less developed countries to expand China’s influence worldwide.
Examination of the policy contents demonstrates a changing discourse of internationalization and shifting policy focuses (Table 2). The 1985 policy did not clearly conceptualize internationalization in the Chinese context or highlight the significance of internationalization for HE. Rather, it suggested that the promotion of academic exchange was China’s primary response to internationalization. Consequently, universities were given autonomy for these internationalization practices. Indeed, empowerment of the university was a major aim of this policy as it was issued during the transition from a planned economy to a market economy, thus corresponding to a wider transformation in the public sector where administration was streamlined in accordance with the market. As with deepening of the opening-up reform, the 1993 policy focused more attention on internationalization. Despite most entries emphasizing the contextual importance of internationalization, this policy made it explicit that China was preparing to meet the challenge of internationalization by improving education quality to a world-leading level. The 1999 policy went even further and made the request for world-class research universities. Improved education quality and the quest for world-class status were central to internationalization practices during the 1990s as illustrated by the two policies. Meanwhile, improved education quality also served the broader goal of preparing a skilled labor force as required by the emerging global knowledge economy. Therefore, it is recognized in these policies that internationalization matters not only in terms of Chinese HE academic quality but also in terms of economic competency and development of China.

The policies passed in the new millennium indicated a new direction of internationalization practices. Apart from repeating the request for world-class universities as a response to internationalization, the policies also implied that the state had tried to adapt to and manipulate the process to its advantage. Promotion of TCFL was emphasized in the 2004 policy as a strategy to expand the influence of Chinese across the world. Moreover, the intention

<table>
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<th>Implication of internationalization</th>
<th>1980s</th>
<th>1990s</th>
<th>2000s</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contextual importance</td>
<td>World-class status</td>
<td>China’s soft power</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>State’s attitude</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Active response</td>
<td>Manipulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy focus</td>
<td>Introduce the world to China</td>
<td>Catching up by international benchmarking</td>
<td>Promotion of Chinese model and value</td>
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</table>
to enhance China’s overall influence was clearly stated in the most recent policy passed in 2010. The political and social motives of internationalization were evidently manifested in the promotion of Chinese language and cultural. Exportation of education services in the form of educational aid to developing countries and the establishment of CIs worldwide are considered effective strategies for expanding Chinese value in the world. Some went even further, arguing that education has been used as an important source of soft power to facilitate the rise of China in recent years (Yang 2010).

A review of these policies shows that the state has played a leading role in response to internationalization. As the state’s attitude toward internationalization changes in accordance with the socioeconomic environment, shifts in policy focus are observed. According to the varying significance of internationalization in different periods of time, China has gone through stages in trying to introduce the world to China in the 1980s, to catch up with developed countries and establish world-class universities in the 1990s, and to play with established rules of the game while simultaneously promoting China’s model in the new millennium. It indicates a paradigm shift in university governance from “walking on one leg” to “walking on both.”

**Internationalization with Chinese Characteristics: Walking on Two Legs**

A review of the policies suggests that China has shifted its strategy of internationalization from catching up in the 1980s and 1990s to attempting to “walk on two legs” more recently. On the one hand, a “bringing in” policy was adopted, as China actively participated in the global search for talent to attract the best minds to work in China, with the hope of enhancing the country’s international competitiveness. On the other, “going out” is another essential element in the internationalization package. By vigorously promoting Chinese language and values to the world, China is eager to expand its international influence and enhance its international status.

**Walking on One Leg: Bringing in Talent**

The main aim of internationalization in the policies consistently appears to be the improvement of academic quality. The change of expressions from “higher status” and “leading status” to “world-class” indicates the increasing expectation of education quality. Key to the establishment of world-class universities is the attraction of world-class staff and students. As discussed earlier, initiatives have been launched to attract Chinese and foreign experts to work in China in both the long and short terms. However, China has long
suffered from a brain drain. Indeed, China was alerted about the scale of the brain drain as early as 1988 (Zweig, Fung, and Han 2008). The United States, as a major destination for talent migration, has attracted a large number of Chinese students for years. Statistics show that in the past two decades, an overwhelming majority (about 90 percent, with slight variation over the years) of Chinese students who received doctorates in science or engineering from American universities choose to stay in the United States for the first five years after graduation, and the stay rates fall only slightly in the longer term (Finn 2007, 2010). The most recent data (see Table 3) show the stay rates of Chinese doctoral recipients in the United States during 2003–7 are higher than the rates for any other country (Finn 2010).

Moreover, this phenomenon is not limited to the United States. In general terms, a significant number of Chinese students trained abroad do not return home (Figure 1).1 Facing the large-scale brain drain, China adopts various strategies to utilize valuable overseas human resources (Zweig 2006). The policies examined earlier repeatedly call for the return of Chinese students trained overseas. Both the public and private sectors are actively participating in the search for talent. Special programs are initiated by the state to provide financial incentives and streamline administration process for returnees. Associations for overseas students and scholars are also established in many countries, supported by the Chinese government, to facilitate the exchange of information and to strengthen the bond between overseas Chinese and their motherland (Zweig 2006). At the same time, the competition between regional governments for talent intensifies. Competitive employment packages and various other incentives are offered by local governments to attract talented people to contribute to the local economy. In addition, individual institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foreign doctorate recipients</th>
<th>Percentage in the United States</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>2,139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7,850</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Finn (2010).
Figure 1. **Number of Returnees and Students Studying Abroad in Selected Years (1978–2008)**


and enterprises are also actively engaged in competition for the best minds with the goal of enhancing institutional performance (Zweig 2006; Zweig, Fung, and Han 2008).

This trend of international talent flow predominantly from developing countries to advanced economies has often been viewed as a brain drain that harms the developing countries. However, this argument has gradually changed (Altbach 2004; Zweig, Fung, and Han 2008). Increasing numbers of Asian scholars work in the West and return to their country of origin as the academic system and overall living conditions at home improve. In China, in recent years, more and more students have returned after graduation, thanks to the efforts to attract overseas Chinese (Figure 1). Although a significant majority still chooses to stay (Fin 2007; 2010), they are no longer viewed as a permanent loss by the Chinese government. A shift in policy strategy toward people trained overseas is seen in the internationalization discourse as examined above. Instead of merely emphasizing return as in earlier years, China now encourages either returning or contributing to the homeland by multiple means that mobilize the valuable overseas human capital. Realizing that it is unaffordable to give up the potential value of overseas Chinese, considering the large population of those who stay abroad, the state has passed policies to encourage them to serve the country from abroad by means of engaging in various business and academic cooperation (“A Number of Opinions” 2003). This is viewed as a “diaspora option,” which helps China to “turn human capital, lost through the brain drain, into a positive force for development by encouraging overseas citizens or educational migrants to help their home country” (Zweig, Fung, and Han 2008: 2).

Altbach (2004) proposes a push-and-pull model to explain the international flow of talent predominantly from the less developed periphery to a more developed academic and economic center. According to him, the talent migration is caused by both pull and push factors. The former refers mainly to positive attractions at the centers such as higher salary, better working conditions, and career opportunities. The latter, on the other hand, are often negative deterrences at the periphery, including lack of academic freedom, favoritism or even corruption in promotion, limited career development opportunity, and the like. He argues that change in the current talent flow relies more on elimination of the push factors, because “the ‘push’ factors can be moderated,” while the “‘pull’ factors at the centers cannot be altered much” (Altbach 2004: 14).

Nevertheless, it seems that the efforts adopted by China to combat the brain drain and attract talents fit more comfortably into the pull factors. Most, if not all, of the strategies are related to financial incentives and career opportunities. This, however, does not mean the state has completely ignored the push factors
such as lack of academic freedom. The policies examined above repeatedly emphasize the importance of university empowerment. It is undisputable that Chinese universities are enjoying greater academic and administrative autonomy than they did decades ago, which is due to the adoption of neoliberal strategies such as decentralization, marketization, and privatization (Mok 2005). However, it is argued that this autonomy is restricted and the state still retains effective control over key aspects of HE governance. The strong tradition of government intervention and the well-established mechanism of control ensure smooth implementation of decisions from both the state and the ruling Chinese Communist Party (Wang 2010).

Attempts to eliminate other push factors such as academic corruption and favoritism are also reported. However, despite such efforts, academic corruption and erosion of academic ethics are still considered major problems in Chinese universities (Wang 2008; Zhang 2007). The high penetration of the party-state control system and consequently administrative dominance has largely transformed the HE sector into an attachment to the government (Wang 2010). Academic corruption is deeply rooted in the Chinese bureaucratic system and therefore has to be tackled as part of a bigger problem associated with the public sector in China as a whole. While it is difficult to eradicate the push factors in the short term, it appears easier for China to focus in practice on pull factors to attract talent. This is probably why financial incentives are used by Chinese government and institutions to create effects pulling on the intellectual flow.

Walking on Another Leg: Going Global

Apart from attempts to bring in talents, China is also eager to expand its international influence and to promote the Chinese model globally. This intention is stated explicitly in the more recent policies, those of 2004 and 2010. Education is viewed as an important tool to achieve this aim, as it provides suitable channels for introducing Chinese values and culture to the world. One of the most effective strategies adopted along this line is the establishment of Confucius Institutes (Yang 2010).

Following the 2004 policy’s call to expand the global influence of Chinese, China has begun to establish overseas CIs, which soon mushroomed around the world. By the end of 2010, 322 CIs had been established in 96 countries (Confucius Institutes Online 2011). Hanban, or the Office of the Chinese Language Council International, is their headquarters as well as a major funder. CIs are managed by its executive council, which consists of officials from a number of government departments and is headed by Chen Zhili, state councilor and former minister of education. Parallel to the executive council is
a nonexecutive council with members from participating Chinese and foreign universities (Yang 2010). CIs are primarily language-teaching institutions that integrate with language centers at universities in different countries. According to official sources, CIs are a response of the Chinese government to address the “sharp increase in the world's demands for Chinese learning” (Confucius Institutes Online, 2011). Its mission is to “serve as a bridge for information exchange and communication of minds between the CIs around the world as well as between Chinese people and those who love Chinese language and culture” (Liu 2008, cited in Yang 2010: 238).

However, debates have arisen in regard to the swift expansion of CIs, including wide observations of suspicions or even criticism about the hidden agenda of the CI project (Yang 2010). There is a consensus that CIs, together with other strategies to spread Chinese, are used as a tool to enhance China’s soft power (Gil 2008). Responding to these accusations, Hanban repeatedly denies the soft power argument and instead emphasizes the value of CIs in promoting cross-cultural understanding and forming of friendships between China and other countries (Lu 2009). However, although the official clarification may explain one (probably important) aim of CIs, it does not eliminate suspicion on the hidden agenda. After all, language is the carrier of culture and value (Lu 2005). The process of spreading Chinese language around the world spontaneously promotes Chinese culture and values. Consequently, this not only facilitates cross-cultural understanding but inevitably expands China’s international influence and ultimately its soft power. Furthermore, the intention to enhance China’s international influence and status through education is clearly manifested in China’s education policies. According to the more recent policies examined earlier, particularly the 2004 and 2010 documents, enhancement of China’s international influence and status is a major goal of internationalization of HE, and the promotion of Chinese language and culture globally is considered an important means to achieving this goal.

In addition to the global spread of Chinese language, another strategy essential to expanding China’s international influence is education aid. The 2010 outline specifies that China will not only continue to provide but also dramatically increase educational aid to “developing countries” to help them to train a skilled labor force (State Council 2010). This idea has been well implemented in the practices of China’s educational aid to Africa. Different from the Western paradigm of educational aid concerned mainly with universal access to basic education as promoted by projects such as Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDG), China’s education aid focuses on training human capital for economic development through HE
and vocational education (China-Africa Minister of Education Forum Beijing Declaration 2005). Indeed, China highlights the difference of its aid policies from the Western discourse and actively promotes the Chinese model as suited to Africa’s development. Guided by pragmatism, China emphasizes the importance of mutual benefits gained from bilateral cooperation and refuses to establish a Western donor–recipient relationship (King 2006a, 2006b). Promotion of the Chinese model in Africa appears to be meeting China’s expectations, as African countries demonstrate a high level of acceptance of China’s presence and influence in their countries (King 2006a). However, more recently, apparent changes have been noted in China’s aid policy, which ironically suggests that China now plays more of a donor role in the Western sense and deviates from what it previously advocated as a “win–win” approach (King 2006b). In the field of education, China has recently stepped up the scale of aid tremendously. Sharp increases are observed in many aspects of education, for example, in providing more scholarships to African students, building more schools, and sending more teachers and volunteers to Africa (King 2006b). Large-scale education aid in Africa is anticipated not only to help in preparing a skilled labor force for the African economy but also to promote China’s model and its value in this region. The aggressive expansion of China’s involvement in Africa indisputably enhances China’s influence in Africa as well as in the world.

Conclusions

This article examines the changing discourse of internationalization of higher education by reviewing major policies issued in the past three decades. Different policies demonstrate different interpretations of and responses to internationalization. It is apparent that the understanding of the significance of internationalization has shifted from an awareness of the changing context in the 1980s, to the facilitation of economic competitions in the 1990s, and to the enhancement of international status in the new millennium. Accordingly, the motives and rationales for internationalization have been altered. Academic and economic rationales are consistently expressed throughout these policies, but more recently policies appear to focus more on the political and social/cultural influence of education in the internationalization process.

This is consistent with China’s overall development strategy in the internationalized context. When the policy of opening up was adopted in the late 1970s, China was making the transition from a planned to a market economy. In the process of gradual exposure to the rest of the world, China
started to become aware of the relevance of internationalization to its future development. With economic growth and increasing integration into the international society, the influence of internationalization became unavoidable. Therefore, the state actively responded so as to catch up and it endeavored to become world-class as evaluated by established international standards. This appears to be the central theme of internationalization in the 1990s and early 2000s. The more recent policies, on the other hand, suggest the emergence of a new policy priority. With the rise of China and the slowing of Western economic development, particularly after the Global Financial Crisis, China is taking advantage of the international context and trying to manipulate internationalization to its own benefit. Adoption of the “walking on two legs” strategy is observed in the education sphere. On one side, China is trying to reduce the gap in education quality by establishing world-class universities. On the other, it is strategically spreading Chinese language and promoting China’s model to the world. By preparing a highly skilled labor force and promoting Chinese culture and values to the world, education is used as an important tool to facilitate China’s rise by improving its global economic competitiveness as well as enhancing its international influence not only in educational terms but also in economic and political terms.

Note

1. Figure 1 does not indicate the precise rate of returned students to those studying abroad in the selected years, as returned students normally study abroad for a few years before they return to China. Nevertheless, it suggests an estimate of the size of returnees relative to those studying overseas.

References


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