Introduction To Special Issue

Goals, Models, and Practices of International Partnerships in Higher Education: Toward Global Peace and Harmony

Liwen MA
Associate Professor, Institute of Educational Psychology and School Counseling, Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China
liwenma@bnu.edu.cn

Joseph L. SUBBIONDO
Trustee, California Institute for Human Science, Encinitas, CA, USA
jsubbiondo@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper is focused on a variety of approaches and paths to increase and advance international education partnerships. It studies methods in general considering their theoretical frameworks as well as their aspirations, goals, and outcomes. It also presents exemplary models currently used in Eastern and Western higher education that are largely applicable to most universities. The paper also notes areas of impact that international education partnerships can have on teaching, learning, and research because of national educational differences, multi-cultural perspectives, and global interconnectedness. In addition, it highlights two exemplary models of international education partnerships at Beijing Normal University. Throughout, the paper references essays included in this special issue as well as elsewhere. The underlying theme in this essay and the special issue is that universities contribute to the integrity of education as well as global peace by increasing, updating, and assessing international education partnerships that facilitate meaningful global interactions and shared learning among faculty, students, and universities.
Keywords

international education partnerships – multi-cultural perspectives – exemplary models – Belt and Road Initiative – global interconnectivity

1 Introduction

In this special issue of the *Beijing International Review of Education (BIRE)*, we will consider goals, models, and practices of international education partnerships in higher education. While they have long been a part of higher education, current global issues demand our attention to the pressing need to increase, assess, and update them. Considering our ongoing transformation to a global society, international interactions among students, faculty, and educational leaders from all countries have a higher priority than ever for all segments of education. For example, the current pandemic has stressed the need for educational interactions among nations as we have learned that only by continuing our international exchanges of university personnel, research, and medical equipment will we overcome this crisis. We are now very aware of the dynamic global interconnectedness that overshadows all our activities – we understand that what happens in Nairobi and London affects Chicago and Shanghai.

A common theme resonates throughout the essays in this special issue: It is critical for our survival that higher education develop and maintain international collaborative partnerships to ensure the personal, academic, and professional wellbeing of its students, faculty, institutions, and countries. In addition, international partnerships pave the way to world peace. We realize more each day that countries need each other; and that despite our differences, we can only move forward with the help and support of each other. In this essay, we will discuss the underlying philosophy, attitudes, and goals of international educational partnerships as well as refer to essays in and outside this issue that address and illuminate them. We conclude our paper with presentations of two exemplary models of international education that are being offered at Beijing Normal University (BNU).

We have arranged the essays from the general to the specific, starting with an overview of education partnerships by Michael A. Peters and Tina Besley and concluding with a detailed case study of a highly effective program at St. Edward's University written by its creators, George Martin and Caroline Morris. In between these essays, David Pollick introduces us to his protologism ‘acceptionalism’ that he coined as an antonym to ‘exceptionalism,’ and he
outlines a history of the philosophical underpinnings of international education programs; William J. Berberet treats us to a memoire of the notable programs and networks that he developed throughout his academic career; Sha Fan, Qingjie Liu, Kunling Zhang, Biliang Hu, and Liwen Ma present us with a study of the most extensive international program in history, China’s “Belt and Road Initiative”; and Hangyin Qin traces the development of China’s response to Education 2030 as an example of international educational partnerships that have been inspired by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), an agency aimed at promoting world peace and security through international collaborative partnerships in education, arts, sciences, and culture.

As we shall see, the contributors to this collection discuss a variety of international partnerships and programs that promote global interaction, increase communication, encourage understanding, foster cooperation, and advance innovation. The partnerships and programs can reduce international conflict and violence by recognizing the long-term mutual benefits of collaboration for universities as well as for their people and governments. They not only enhance academic quality, seek international equality, promote dialogue, enhance co-prosperity, and support global peace. Our intention in co-editing this special issue is that it contributes to increasing effective international education partnerships and programs. In so doing, we will all participate in an overdue world-wide transformation of education.

2 Studies of International Education Partnerships

As globalization increases and draws people closer together, universities are increasingly recognizing that they no longer can confine their educational programs to the borders of their campuses and countries. They recognize that national differences in approaching education can substantively improve teaching and learning, that multi-cultural perspectives are critical to advancing the core and substance of education, and that international interactions nurture the prospects of attaining world peace. It is our intention in co-editing this special issue that we document the emerging reality that international education can no longer be regarded as entertaining indulgence enjoyed by a few faculty and students, but that in be understood as essential for maintaining academic integrity and relevance as well as critical for advancing global understanding. Considering this new and pressing reality, we need studies of international education partnerships, both theoretical and practical, that will enlighten, inspire, and inform us.
In the first sentence of their essay “A New Model of Educational Collaborative Partnerships: Social Innovation and the Creation of Public Goods,” Michael A. Peters and Tina Besley point to the significance of partnership and collaboration in that they “have transformed the field of education in the post-war era, enhancing collaborative research, teaching and student exchange while at the same time achieving economies of scale and advancing the international knowledge economy in learning, enquiry and professional development” (p. 188). They provide us with a constructive theoretical framework that sets the stage for this special issue. In their perceptive and informative paper that draws on their commitment to and experience in international education partnerships, they propose four models of partnerships: the School-Community Partnership, the Public-Private Partnership, the Transnational Strategic Partnership, and the Partnership as Collaboration and Social Innovation in the new digital economy. They support their insightful analyses of these models by drawing on a variety of relevant examples and research.

In “Overcoming Inequality of Access and Participation Through Institutional, International, and Governmental Collaboration: A Case Study,” George Martin and Caroline Morris provide us with a detailed and practical case study of the remarkable program that they created at St. Edward’s University in Austin, Texas. Drawing on their extensive experience, they contend that universities thrive by not solely working within the limitations and confines of their own institutions. They devote a section of their paper to the increasing significance of case studies of successful international and national partnerships. They focus on the critical importance of organizations’ looking outward nationally and internationally, and not only inward in seeking institutional partners and resources. They know that only by expanding their institution’s horizons can universities discover and secure the resources and support to achieve their international academic goals.

Martin and Morris devote a very useful section to the exploration and development of international partnerships in which they point out they that often need to be developed by senior administrators, including presidents of the universities, by personally travelling to universities outside their countries and building enduring relationships with their counterparts through frequent visits. Moreover, they know that they must guide and nourish these partnerships from beginning to end. St. Edward’s University established programs with international universities that, to a large degree, shared their academic vision and mission through such visits. The similarity in educational philosophy enabled productive and effective faculty and student exchanges from the outset of the relationship. In a relatively short time, St. Edward’s University created active international education partnerships with universities in 19 countries.
across the globe including Argentina, Australia, Austria, Chile, China, England, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Scotland, and Spain. Given their ongoing success as evident by the strength of their programs, we are grateful that they are generous in sharing their strategies and approaches in providing a rare and illustrative practical case study.

For more studies of international programs, see Brewer and Cunningham (2010), Gürüz (2011), and Phillips and Schweisfurth (2014).

3 National Differences and Education

Because countries cultures have a diversity of viewpoints, preconceptions, and appreciations of teaching and learning especially regarding the content and esteem of academic disciplines, international educational partnerships often challenge faculty, students, and administrators to reconsider their own long-held assumptions regarding the nature and value of education. For example, the study of psychology in the East is typically characterized by broad philosophical considerations than it is in the West with its emphasis often primarily on clinical approaches. In a variety of Western psychology programs, the influence of Indian perspectives has often moved them to offer more programs that integrate Eastern and Western approaches. Because both approaches have significant advantages, faculty and students can enrich their education by such blending. In the United States, the history of a discipline such as the history of linguistics is rarely offered in the major curriculum; while in Europe, the history of a discipline is commonly taught for all students majoring in the discipline. The personal interactions of colleges and universities across nations and help students and faculty rethink the nature of general education as well as of that of their disciplines. For example, in the U.K. as in many European countries, students majoring in law and medicine begin their studies as undergraduates; while in the U.S., students start their study of law and medicine as post-graduates due to the emphasis in American colleges and universities on general education. However, an advantage to “late blooming” students in the United States is that because a strong undergraduate record can often overcome a weak performance in secondary school, it can enable them to be accepted into law and medical schools.

In “The Teaching of Linear Programming in Different Disciplines and in Different Countries,” Anesa Hosein, James Aczel, and Doug Clow conclude that “US lecturers were more likely to teach theoretical aspects of LP [linear programming] whilst the UK lecturers were more likely to use common software such as spreadsheets rather than dedicated LP or math software” (2006).
Anne-Wil Harzing and Axelle Giroud in their article “The Competitive Advantage of Nations: An Application to Academia,” note that “Within the field of bibliometrics, there is sustained interest in how nations ‘compete’ in terms of academic disciplines, and what determinants explain why countries may have a specific advantage in one discipline over another” (2014:29).

In this issue, David Pollick in “Reflections on ‘Exceptionalism’ and ‘Acceptionalism.’” discusses a situation in which the restraints placed on the curricular content in one country motivated a university to move itself to a neighboring country. While this was a extremely rare undertaking, it shows the determination of an academic community to insist on having the academic freedom it believes necessary for providing a meaningful education. Also, in this collection of essays, Hang Yin Quin explores how China’s distinctive national history and culture contribute to the panorama of education that are represented in the international collaborative partnerships that drive UNESCO, the education group of the UN.

4 Multi-Cultural Perspectives and Education

As we are becoming more aware of the role of multi-cultural perspectives in often radically changing and amplifying knowledge, we have come to recognize that those who hold different perspectives from our own are critically needed to represent and elucidate them. It is impossible to speak authentically to the nature of a multi-cultural perspective if one does not hold that perspective. International education partnerships are needed to facilitate meaningful cross dialogue on university campuses, be they be at home or away. Unless multi-cultural perspectives are well represented and studied, education is limited to the provincial thinking of the local setting of the university. A university, by its very definition, must include and study as many multi-cultural perspectives as it possibly can.

In their essay “Why can’t we be friends?: Multicultural attitudes and friendships with international students,” Christina Williams and Laura Johnson focus their attention on international students studying in the U.S. and the difficulties they often face due to a lack of understanding multi-cultural perspectives. In their research, they explore “how students with and without international friendships differed on multicultural personality characteristics, intercultural attitudes, and multicultural experiences, such as participation in study abroad” (2011:41). Zhigeng Zhang and Margaret Brunton argue in “Differences in Living and Learning: Chinese International Students in New Zealand” that meaningful education can only thrive in an international environment. They contend
that “The results show that recognition of the influence of sociocultural factors beyond the learning experience itself is vital in facilitating mutually beneficial outcomes for Chinese international students and the international education industry in New Zealand” (2007).

Huilin Huang of Beijing Normal University (BNU) contends that today’s world culture presents a diverse pattern of cultural styles that are influenced and developed through cultural exchanges and collaboration of what she describes as the ‘pole cultures.’ She notes:

Regarding the multi-cultural patterns in the world today, the most influential cultures are the European and the American cultures, which can be called the “two poles” of world culture. With its grand tradition developed over thousands of years, Chinese culture can be called the “Third Pole” for its unique characteristics, as well as its influence on and contributions to the world. The Chinese culture influences, conflicts with and learns from European, American and other cultures, thereby forming a varied cultural landscape (2014).

Huang notes the same can be said for the world’s film cultures. She contends that the intersecting of the multi-cultural perspectives of the three poles “in forming a varied cultural landscape” is an inevitable trend in the development of all countries, and that it has a profound influence on global education and understanding (see Ma, 2019; Rošker, 2021). As we shall see in our discussion of exemplary programs at BNU, Huang leads the University’s Looking China Youth Film Project in which young foreign filmmakers visit China to create short video documentaries about Chinese cultural perspectives for viewing in their home countries.

In this special issue, Sha Fan, Qingjie Liu, Kunling Zhang, Biliang Hu, and Liwen Ma in their essay, “Education Effect of the Belt and Road Initiative – An Empirical Study on International Students in China,” maintain that because China has become the leading host for international students in Asia and the third in the world, its influence on worldwide education is continually increasing. They point out that the impressive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the most expansive project in international education to date, has greatly increased the number of international students in China, especially from Africa as well as the middle and low-income countries (see Peters and Zhu, 2021).

They document that presently 60 Chinese universities have active agreements with 24 countries along the Belt and Road. They contend that rather than following the traditional Western approach to international education, China by engaging in the BRI is taking a different approach by focusing on
ensuring that the interconnectedness of education in China with international communities is established and supported. Their paper documents the validity of their claim. Following their thorough review of the research on international models of education, the authors review extensive and detailed data gathered from 196 countries. They conclude that the BRI has significantly increased the number of international students studying in China. Moreover, they have discovered that recruitment varies considerably by continent with significant increases students from in Africa and Asia, and slight increases in students from Oceania and the Americas.

5 International Education Partnerships and World Peace

Contemporary scholars are increasingly recognizing that international education contributes to advancing world peace. For example, as the title of her article indicates, “International education: a force for peace and cross-cultural understanding?” Lorraine Brown (2009) asserts that only if universities create opportunities for students to mingle with students from other countries, they will interact only with members of their own national group. As contributors to our special issue point out, one of the many benefits of developing international educational partnerships is that they create international educational communities that often endure for years beyond the initial interactions. In community settings, students can engage in open dialogue with administrators, faculty and students—not only about their courses but also about non-academic issues as well.

In “Reflections on ‘Exceptionalism’ and ‘Acceptionalism,’” David Pollick argues against the dangerous and uninformed notion that a country is exceptional in all areas. Instead, he creates the word “acceptionalism” for recognizing that all countries, their own included, have strengths and weaknesses; and they approach all countries with the spirit of accepting them as they in turn expect their country to be accepted. To move students away from the narrow thinking of exceptionalism, he makes a strong case that students live with host families and be involved in their local communities. Only in this way can students escape the cocoon that prevails in too many international programs. Pollick commends Kalamazoo College for its unique emphasis on experiential learning to achieve lasting international connections that go well beyond the perfunctory models too often found in study-abroad programs. He notes that students at Kalamazoo College not only learn from their international host families and their communities, but they also have opportunities when they return to campus to integrate their experiences into the College’s curricular
programming. Thus, all students and faculty at the College benefit from the College’s international programs.

William Berberet connects a variety of international programs to world peace in his biographical essay, “International Educational Partnerships for a Troubled World: One Educator’s Experience.” He points out that the partnerships that he developed and/or participated in during the 1970’s and 1980’s were influenced by the “people to people” movements that engaged the United States and European countries to end the Cold War by promoting international partnerships that led to collaboration and understanding. Guided by that early experience, he understood throughout his career with its various international partnerships that effective international programs require experiences before and after international visits to prepare students to receive the maximum benefit when they are away and when they return to their home campuses. Moreover, Berberet learned that international educational experiences should extend to those outside the university by including policymakers as well as members of religious and citizen groups such as the United Nations Environment Program.

As Fan and her colleagues conclude in their study of China’s Belt and Road Initiative, close relations between people leads to better relations between countries. Their concluding maxim is confirmed by the fact that closer people-to-people ties are being forged by China’s attracting a growing number of international students. They note that the Initiative is creating greater ties of peace and collaboration among all countries, including the developed countries in Europe and the Americas. In the final sentence of their contribution to this special issue, they affirm the need for the overall goal of world peace through global interaction: “Therefore, from the perspective of international education, China’s effect to promote education internationalization and communicate with the Western world based on mutual-understanding is still much needed” (p. 268)

In her paper, “A Humanistic Approach to Education in 2030: Perspective and Practice in China,” Hangyin Qin raises the question of how can education contribute to a better common future for humanity. She provides a detailed history of how China has impressively responded to this question by its concrete strategic plan inspired by Education 2030. China has developed and implemented its plan within the context of the international goals set in 2015 by UNESCO, the leading UN international agency in the field of education, science, and culture. Qin’s approach is to reflect on the educational theory and practice that have been rooted in Chinese civilization for thousands of years and how they can contribute to the progress of world peace and harmony in the 21st Century.
6 Exemplary initiatives at Beijing Normal University

To offer exemplary programs in international education, BNU has created the Academy for International Communication of Chinese Culture (AICCC). Through academic research and artistic works that reflect the unique aspects of Chinese culture, the Academy was founded to communicate internationally aspects of Chinese culture in the spirit of promoting world harmony and peace. Jointly established by BNU and the US International Data Group (IDG), the Academy effectively integrates resources that are provided by organizations and communities including BNU, IDG, government departments, non-government groups, and non-profit organizations.

The Academy is governed by a Council and managed by a director. Its Academic Committee is responsible for strategically planning the agenda of its academic research as well as hosting and supporting its many activities, programs, and productions. Its Creativity Committee plans, directs, and participates in its artistic activities. In all its work, the Academy draws on accomplished scholars and talented artists throughout the world. Moreover, it sets up research teams and studios for its projects, and it shares its personnel with many organizations worldwide.

We will focus our attention on two of its leading initiatives, the Looking China Youth Film Project and the International Symposium on the Communication of Chinese Culture.

7 Looking China Youth Film Project

Looking China Youth Film Project (lookingchina.bnu.edu.cn) is a cultural experience program sponsored by the Huilin Foundation and hosted by the Academy. It has been successfully operating for 12 years, and it has extended its reach throughout China as well as beyond. In showcasing distinctive characteristics of China, the program has become a distinguishing feature of the University. The Project has been designed to introduce China to other countries by comparing China’s simplicity with its complexity as well as its tradition with its modernity. It does so through the perspectives of young foreigners who visit China to produce 10-minute videos that document vignettes of Chinese culture. The Looking China Youth Film Project expands the influence of China’s international cultural as well as strengthens cross-cultural communication, exchange, and cooperation among young people in China and abroad. By drawing on their personal experiences in China, the young foreign filmmakers produce works that express their
own personal insights from the vantage point of one raised and living in a non-Chinese culture (see Ma, 2019).

As Professor Huang, the founder and director of the Looking China Youth Film Project, clearly notes that her project advances an academic vision with strategic thinking regarding the pattern of world cinema development. The vision derives from our understanding of the comprehensive revitalization and development of the Chinese film culture in the new century and reveals a timely necessity for Chinese films to confront the challenges of globalization (Huang, 2014).

Huang contends that “In today’s global cultural context complete with pluralistic dialogue and multipolar existence, it is inevitable that cultures constantly exchange information and integrate with one another” (ibid.). She notes that the Project is part of a far greater vision,

The Chinese film culture, under the premise of preserving its own subjectivity and meeting the needs of the times and social development, should absorb and learn from all different film cultures, including those from Europe and America. Continuously enriching, developing and creating the Chinese film culture can make film a more efficient art form with which to present the national spirit and core values of the “Third Pole” culture. To develop the “Third Pole” film culture is an important, and possibly the only, way to make China a true leader of world cinema (Ibid.).

As of 2020, the Looking China Youth Film Project has engaged 735 young people from 83 countries including Georgia, Ecuador, Portugal, Belgium, India, United States, Mexico, Columbia, Australia, Serbia, United Kingdom, Romania, Korea, Canada, Ghana, France, Israel, Singapore, Finland, Syria, Japan and Kazakhstan. The participants have produced 712 short films that have received over 120 international awards. The book series “The People-to-People Bond: ‘Belt and Road’ Looking China Youth Film Project” and “The People-to-People Bond: ‘BRICS’ Looking China Youth Film Project” have been designated as the official publications at several major diplomatic events, including the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, BRICS Leaders Meeting, BRICS Young Diplomats Forum, and BRICS Seminar on Governance.

The program is not only broadcast on China Central Television, Beijing TV, Beijing People’s Radio, and other mainstream media; but it also receives

1 BRICS is an acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.
extensive coverage through its continued exposure in over 200 Chinese and overseas mainstream media including Xinhua News Agency, People's Daily, Guangming Daily, Beijing Daily, CCTV, huanqiu.com, sohu.com, tudou.com, and ifeng.com. The films have also been widespread on overseas social media including YouTube (www.youtube.com/channel/UC9opo9d_lzczRg_n23s4Qdw), and Facebook (www.facebook.com/lookingchinaproject).

Through the Project, BNU anticipates establishing an international team of countries and national groups to recognize each other and cooperate to build a broader world. The online and offline three-dimensional distribution of short films have formed an effective non-governmental promotion model for the Institute. It allows the Institute to drive a wide range of Chinese and foreign platforms as well as individual and independent dissemination in exploring a path of communication connecting BNU and young people. These productions have been widely received in homes, schools, and communities. They allow overseas people to see and even fall in love with China.

When the staff of the Looking China Youth Film Project visited the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) for a screening event in 2015, Huang noted that the future of young people is the future of the world. She indicated that human communication, tolerance, and understanding are the premises and foundations for the active development of peace and harmony the world. Similarly, Goncelo, a Portuguese teacher, noted that the Project should be renamed the Loving China Film Project because of its positive approach to educating the world regarding the past and present of China (see Xu, 2021).

Since the official launching of the Project in North America in 2019 with the cooperation of Eagle Dragon Media, it has been presenting three short films on its major platforms each week. By 2020, the Project’s series of short films has been broadcast on five major platforms, including DishNetwork9949, Los Angeles 18.9 channel, and IPTV channel. (IPTV is the largest satellite channel in the United States with more than 35 million viewers worldwide, and it has broadcast films a total of 2340 times). At the same time, 59 segments have been aired on mainstream news stations and general information channels in the United States, and they have attracted viewers throughout North America with network viewers exceeding 10 million.

As an indication of its growing prestige in China, President Xi Jinping speaking at the National University of Singapore on Nov 7th, 2015 commended the Looking China Youth Film Project for its mission, quality, and originality.
8 International Symposium on the Communication of Chinese Culture

Since 2000, the International Symposium on the Communication of Chinese Culture has sponsored annual international conferences (see Ai and Li, 2015; Gong, 2017; Gao, 2019; and Shi, 2021). From multiple areas, including history, current events, and theory and practice, the Symposium explores a variety of ways to effectively communicate the international influence of Chinese culture. Starting with today’s cultural patterns, the Symposium builds on the world influence of contemporary Chinese culture.

Huang Huilin notes that “Historically, Chinese culture has been disseminated to the outside world through different means such as sending envoys and translating classics, and it has also evolved and developed in this kind of communication” (Ai and Li, 2015). She adds “By exploring in depth the ways in which the international influence of Chinese culture is generated, we can explore a diversified development path based on mutual communication, understanding and respect” (ibid.). She regards this approach to be critical for the harmonious development of world civilization as she believes that Chinese culture is a historical product of long-term co-existence and mutual integration of multi-ethnic and multi-religious perspectives and cultures. Qiu Jin notes the natural integration in Chinese culture in that “Traditional Chinese culture concentrates many widely recognized characteristics” (ibid.).

The Symposium has offered conferences on the development of laws and the spiritual essence of Chinese culture in different times and places, as well as on the creative transformation and innovative development of philosophical ideas, humanistic spirit, and moral concepts contained in Chinese culture in contemporary times. Moreover, the Symposium has analyzed the theoretical bases, paths of cultural exchanges, and mutual learning between China and other countries. The goal of the program is to explore the traditional values, zeitgeist, and significance of Chinese cultural diversity to contribute to a greater understanding of Chinese culture.

The Symposium strives to offer strong ideological support and spiritual motivation for human progress in its ongoing collaboration and partnerships with other countries.

9 Conclusion

International education partnerships have the power to bring the world closer together as they advance an education in which all participants from various
countries have opportunities to gain an informed understanding of each other’s countries, cultures, and people. In their programs, courses, and activities, the goal of engaged international communication strengthens the integrity and quality of higher education by dispelling erroneous, misleading, and often dangerous national and cultural stereotypes, biases, and misinformation. Given that we live in an increasingly interconnected and mutually dependent world, higher education needs to provide international experiences to maintain and advance the credibility of higher education. We hope that this special issue contributes to this growing need, and that it inspires colleges and universities to ensure that its education be international not only in its academic content but also in its interpersonal contact. This special issue is part of a growing study of the evolving theories and practices of international education partnerships that are intended to facilitate productive and long lasting collaborations. Such partnerships have intrinsic academic value, and they also play a unique role in promoting a climate of free and open inquiry of all that a culture and a country cherishes and celebrates. Undoubtedly, it will at times include difficult conversations, but they are necessary if we hope to create and secure lasting global peace and harmony.

Acknowledgements

Funded by the International Joint Research Project of Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University. No. ICER 201907.

References


