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## Editorial

### *Emerging and (Re)shaping 'Identities' in Chinese Higher Education*

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#### 1 'Identity' and Chinese Higher Education

China's modernization of higher education took off after the 1979 implementation of the 'opening door' policy. Deng Xiaoping, with his proposal of 'three faces of education' in 1983, required Chinese higher education to learn from the west, and maintain the socialist orientation. Since the start of this century, with its booming economic power and global influence, China has further driven higher education development. By launching a series of national strategic plans and policies, particularly the '*Medium to Long-Term Educational Development Plan (2010–2020)*' and the '*Double-First Class*' project, the central government has been supporting and regulating higher education internationalization. Currently, Chinese institutions are administering many substantial international exchange and cooperation, including faculty and student exchanges, research collaboration, provision of English-mediated courses, joint degrees, and offshore campuses. In 2018 China hosted 492,185 international students from 192 countries and regions, and these students studied in 1,004 Chinese higher education institutions (MoE, 2019a). Over 660,000 Chinese students were studying overseas in 2018 (MoE, 2019b).

'Identity' is a fundamental issue for humans, and its analysis traces deep roots to the 1950s work of the psychologist Erik Erikson. The nature and features of identity have been explored and discussed by many other scholars (e.g. Albert & Whetten, 1985; Bhabha, 2012; Burke, 1991; Castells, 2011; Dai, 2020; Hall, 1990; Jenkins, 2008; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; McCall & Simmons, 1978). For example, Hall (1990) argues that identity is a fluid concept concurrent with the changes in history and culture that people

experience in life. In his own words, Hall stresses “... we should think ... of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall 1990, p. 222). Moreover, the change of identity is ‘constructed in transactions at and across the boundary’ (Jenkins, 2008, p. 44).

Within the increasing complexity and diversity of Chinese higher education, it is important to explore ‘identity’, particularly the changes with identity which flow from cross-border exchanges of ideas and personnel. Although research on identity (re-)formation are wide-ranging, two major focuses are identified regarding Chinese contexts. The first group of research explores the identity (re-)construction *of* Chinese higher education. For example, Tian and Liu (2019) conduct a qualitative study on different stakeholders’ (e.g. Chinese academics, government policymakers, and university leaders) understandings of the nature and features of Chinese higher education. Drawing on the analysis of policies and practices of international student education in China, they argue that Chinese higher education is best interpreted as a ‘global common good’, which contrasts with the traditional destination countries which have marketized their systems in more recent decades. The proposed ‘global common good’, as they argue, is in line with ‘a community of shared future for mankind’, and therefore the Chinese concept of global governance.

The second group of the research explores identity (re-)construction *within* Chinese higher education. For example, Dai (2020) analyses his identity changes in a transnational education programme drawing on the theoretical concept of ‘in-between space’. He argues that transnational education creates an in-between learning space that shapes international students as intercultural in-betweeners. Distinct from Dai’s (2020) study, Ai (2019) critically analyses his working experiences as an academic returnee from Australia to China, and that how he experienced a journey of dynamic changes of identity across various intercultural settings. Similarly, Lei and Guo (2020) examine Chinese academic returnees’ (re)adjustment experiences in Chinese higher education, revealing how these returnees conduct their research in a transnational space with multiple types of identities.

## 2 Critical Examination of Identities in Chinese Higher Education

Inspired by these existing studies, in this International Journal of Chinese Education special issue we critically examine identity (re-)formations across a range of international/intercultural settings. This special issue collects research outputs from the 2019 *Wang Yongquan* Educational Roundtable held at Peking University’s Graduate School of Education. In this discussion scholars from

Australia, China, and the United Kingdom contributed thoughts about identities and Chinese higher education from policy, pedagogical, international and student perspectives. We hope that this special issue offers insights into identity (re-)formation *of* and *within* Chinese higher education.

This special issue includes five papers. The first paper, written by Yifei Liang, Kun Dai, and Kelly Matthews discusses potential connections between Chinese culture and the concept of 'students as partners' (SaP). SaP-based pedagogical reform has been adopted in Western universities to promote student engagement in learning. The introduction of SaP to teaching practices in Chinese education supports the reformation of students' identity from passive learners to active contributors. The second paper by Hu Yiyun and Fan Lijun compares and analyses Chinese policies of internationalization and those of Mexico. This south-south comparison offers an impressive lens to understand the strategies and underlying rationales of education internationalization.

Following these theoretical and policy discussions, another three articles empirically explore student and teacher identity formation. The article by Ruan Nian investigates the actors influencing Chinese students' decision making of 'stay' or 'return' upon their graduation from the host country universities. It discusses the changes in identity that these Chinese students experience in the processes of shifting between home and host contexts.

Next, Vicente Reyes and Wenbo Zhang explore Chinese students' post-migration experiences in Australia, with a focus on the Chinese students' changes in identity from international students to employees. Then Xiaona Wang and Wenqin Shen investigate Chinese doctoral scholars' changes of identity in international research collaboration. From a sociological perspective, the authors analyze Chinese doctoral scholars' self-positioning as international collaborators while working with their Swiss supervisors.

Together, the five articles probe the identity of Chinese education and different Chinese stakeholders' changes of identity within Chinese education. Nevertheless, we would like to note that this special issue was planned and prepared before the outbreak of the 2020 pandemic. This pandemic brought about immediate challenges to education internationalization globally, not least with the enforcement of strict travel bans and international students along with over a billion others being forced to stay in their home. How Chinese education responds to the pandemic and how different stakeholders in Chinese education (re-)form their identities in this crisis are beyond the scope of the special issue. We strongly recommend the authors and readers of this special issue continue to research. The articles in this special issue reveal that there is no single best model for analysing or discussing identity (re-)formation. It seems likely, drawing from the articles in this special issue, that in-between position is fruitful. Such an 'in-between position' allows

researchers to adjust identities flexibly depending on various research settings, so as to most reasonably capture and conceptualize the complexity and dynamics of the identities *of* and *within* Chinese higher education.

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