

An Interpretive Framework to Understanding the Development of Internationalised Education in China

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Abstract. This paper proposes an interpretive framework to examine China's internationalised education development. Utilising a range of theoretical perspectives, encompassing the realms of politics, economics, legacy, driving forces and trends, this paper posits that the advancement of internationalised education within China is influenced by a multifaceted interplay of cultural, economic, and political factors. By examining the historical context of China's connection with the world and the role of the Chinese state in promoting internationalisation, the paper sheds light on the dynamics of this process. It highlights the struggles and tension, resulting in updated local policies, between the need to compete on the open global stage and the desire to maintain national sovereignty and cultural identity. Through a critical analysis of key policy documents in China, the paper identifies several challenges and opportunities for the future development of internationalised education in China. Ultimately, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of the globalisation of education and its implications for China's future development.

Keywords: Internationalised education; internationalised school; development; China.

1. Introduction

The internationalisation of education has become an important trend in China in recent years. As a rising economic and political power, China has undertaken significant endeavors aimed at enhancing its educational infrastructure and increasing its global outreach. The internationalisation of education has become a key component of these efforts, with a growing number of international schools being established in the country, which cater to both local and expatriate students. These schools often offer curricula based on Western educational systems, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) or British GCSEs/A-levels, and often employ foreign teachers [1].

However, the evolution of internationalised education within China is a multifaceted and intricate phenomenon that is subject to a plethora of socio-cultural, political, and economic forces. For instance, the growing request from Chinese middle-class parents for a global and bilingual education for their children, the opportunity to increase China's competitiveness in the world and a way to attract foreign investment and talent to China, etc. [2].

This paper aims to provide such a framework, drawing on relevant literature and empirical evidence to identify the key motives, challenges, and impact of the internationalization of education in China. Specifically, it will explore the historical and ideological roots of this phenomenon, the role of government policies and initiatives, the impact of market forces and globalisation, the challenges and opportunities faced by different stakeholders, and the implications for China's education system and its global standing. By developing an interpretive framework that considers the multiple dimensions and perspectives of this phenomenon, it is within the realm of possibility for people to gain a discerning and informed understanding of the manifold opportunities and challenges that arise in the process of implementing internationalised education in the Chinese context and its potential implications for the future of education in the country and beyond.

2. Political & Economic Background of a Modern Education System in China

2.1. Early 20th Century Educational Development: The Interplay between Economics and Politics

In the early 20th century, China faced a period of significant turmoil and transformation, with new ideologies, technologies, the country's growing need for modernization and increased global economic and political dynamics that shaped the course of its history. The epoch was characterised by momentous political convulsions, notably encompassing the cessation of the imperial era and the inception of the Republic of China in 1912. This led to a focus on education contributing to greater productivity and economic growth, with significant investments made in education by both the government and private sector. The New Culture Movement during the 1910s and 1920s was instrumental in championing the significance of education in facilitating both individual and national liberation. The impact of these factors on education can be seen in the growth of primary, secondary and higher education organisations and institutions, as well as the development of new educational programs and curricula aimed at meeting the needs of a rapidly changing society [3].

Amidst these changes, education, which is thought to be of great significance in various reform agendas, as China sought to modernize and compete on the global stage. Through a combination of government policies, social and cultural movements, and changing global power dynamics, China's modern education reform and development has lasted for over a century and a modern education system has been set up and becomes one of the largest systems with its uniqueness and characteristics in the world. Following its establishment in the early 20th century, the educational system of China has undergone substantial changes and advancements. Nevertheless, the underlying economic and political foundation set during that epoch has remained a formative factor, exerting a significant impact on the course of China's educational development [4-6].

2.2. The Chinese Worldview and Global Political Order

The Chinese worldview has evolved throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, shaped by various political and cultural developments both within and outside of China. The 20th century proved to be a tumultuous period for China, marked by several watershed events, including the founding of New China (the People's Republic of China), the onset of the Cold War, and the advent of open-up policy. These transformative developments have exerted a profound impact on China's position in the global political order, precipitating a complex set of political, economic, and social changes that continue to reverberate to this day. Moreover, the accelerated economic expansion and escalating worldwide influence of China during the 21st century have engendered a profound alteration in its interactions with other nations and organisations.

In the first half of the 20th century, China underwent a period of significant upheaval and metamorphosis, characterized by the dissolution of Qing imperialism, the ascent of contending warlord factions, and an intensifying degree of foreign intervention. During this time, Chinese intellectuals and leaders sought to modernize and revitalize the Chinese nation, which led to the formation of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 [7].

During the second half of the 20th century, China's leaders focused on socialist modernization and building a strong and self-sufficient economy. China rejected the international system of that time, which emphasized non-alignment and independence from the Western-dominated international order [7].

However, in recent decades, China's growing economic and military power has led to a shift in its worldview and its role in the global political order. As China has become more assertive in asserting its interests, dominance and impacts on the global order, it has challenged the existing international system [8].

Overall, China's worldview has been shaped by a complex mix of domestic and international factors, including its historical experiences, political and economic development, and changing global

power dynamics. The May Fourth Movement and subsequent political changes in the early 20th century marked a shift towards a more Western-style education system and increased focus on science and technology. Meanwhile, China's evolving worldview and its relationship with the global political order have also shaped the country's approach to education. China's commitment to social stability and economic development has led to a focus on vocational training and practical skills, which are seen as essential for building a modern economy. In contemporary times, China maintains a consequential position in shaping the trajectory of the worldwide political system, and its stances and undertakings hold considerable ramifications for the global society.

3. The Internationalised Education Development in China

3.1. Burdens and Legacies of the Past

On 11 August 1872, China's first batch of government-sponsored overseas students set out from Shanghai. Since then, during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), international education in China was limited to a small group of elite students who were selected to study abroad in countries like Japan, the United States, and Europe. The primary purpose of these international educational experiences was to acquire knowledge and technology from the West and to facilitate the modernization of China [9].

The burdens of international education during this period included:

Limited Access: Only a small number of students had the opportunity to study abroad, and most of the population was not exposed to international education.

Cultural Disconnect: Some students who studied abroad experienced a disconnect from their cultural heritage and identity, as they were exposed to Western cultural norms and values.

Political Unrest: The political instability in China at the time made it difficult for students to return home after their studies abroad, and some students remained in their host countries permanently.

Despite these challenges, the legacy of international education during the Qing Dynasty was significant, as it provided a path for modernization and the acquisition of knowledge and technology from the West. The international education experience also helped to develop a small group of individuals who were well-equipped to facilitate change and progress in China.

The National Southwestern Associated University (NSAU) was a short-lived, but influential higher education institution in China, established in 1938 during the Sino-Japanese War. The NSAU was a coalition between Peking and Tsinghua universities in Beijing and Tianjin's Nankai University during the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and was considered the best school in China at the time [10, 11].

The NSAU played a role in connecting the academic communities of the West and China, as it was one of the first higher education institutions in China to incorporate international faculty and students into its academic community. The NSAU attracted a diverse group of international faculties, including scholars from the United States, Europe, and Japan, who brought a range of expertise and experience to the university. It offered courses in multiple languages, including Chinese, English, and Japanese, to accommodate the diverse student body.

These international features helped to make the NSAU one of the most highly regarded universities in China at the time, and its legacy continues to influence the development of international education in China today, as it helped to promote academic excellence and the pursuit of knowledge in a time of political and social turmoil. Its unique educational concept and rich ideological and political education methods provided some enlightenment for the high education of modern universities [12].

3.2. Driving Forces of Internationalised Education in China

The impetus for the internationalisation of education in China during the early 20th century was intricately intertwined with the broader historical and political milieu of that era.

During this period, China was undergoing significant political and cultural changes, and there was a growing interest in Western ideas and education. This was in part due to the influence of Western

powers, which had established a presence in China and were promoting their own educational systems. The early 20th century had seen the development of political parties and a few elections in China, and internationalised education was seen as a way to help the country catch up with the West [13]. Besides, many Chinese elites believed that internationalised education was necessary for preparing young people for leadership roles in the rapidly changing society and to participate in the country's modernization efforts.

The driving forces behind China's internationalised education development in the early 20th century included political ideologies, engagement with the West, and a focus on social mobility and economic development. Political ideologies such as Communism, Nationalism, and Liberalism had differing views on education's role in society. China's engagement with the West facilitated an exchange of ideas and knowledge that influenced the development of education in China. Education then was also viewed as a key tool for social mobility and economic development, which was considered a way to modernize the country, prepare young people for leadership roles, and compete with other nations in the region.

3.3. Features of Internationalised Education in China

Internationalised education in China attracts a diverse group of students from around the world, creating a culturally rich learning environment. To cater to this diverse student body, many schools in China have begun to offer courses in multiple languages, including Chinese, English, and other languages. The teaching content is also designed to integrate an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of post-secondary education in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and make a meaningful contribution to society", encouraging students to think critically about international issues and their place in the world [14].

The popularity of internationalised education in China has made it a highly desirable form of education, and China has established itself as a significant global provider of international education, with its education services ranking among the largest in the world. The legacy of internationalised education in China has exerted a significant impact not only on the advancement of education domestically, but also on its evolution in international contexts. Chinese universities have established partnerships with international institutions to promote academic cooperation, knowledge exchange, and research collaborations. This has helped to foster innovation, promote cross-cultural understanding, and facilitate the flow of ideas and knowledge across borders.

In conclusion, the internationalisation in Chinese education has culminated in a multifarious student body, a culturally rich learning environment, and a broader perspective for students. The legacy of internationalised education in China has not only made it a desirable form of education, but it also influenced the educational development in and outside China. As China's ongoing and substantial influence persists, it assumes a significant and consequential role in shaping the trajectory of the global political order. the promotion of internationalised education in the country will remain a key feature of its education system.

4. Long-term Trends in Internationalised Education Development

China has seen significant developments in its education system in recent decades. Significant strides have been taken in China towards expanding access to education, especially in rural and underdeveloped areas. In 2014, the General Office of the Ministry of Education, the General Office of the National Development and Reform Commission, and the General Office of the Ministry of Finance issued the Circular on the Bottom-line Requirements for Comprehensively Improving the Basic Conditions of Poor schools Providing Compulsory Education in Poor Areas. At the same time, the Chinese government has emphasised the improvement of education quality, with a focus on satisfying basic learning needs, and enriching the lives of learners and their overall experience of living [15, 16].

Another key trend is the significant growth in international student enrolment, with China now emerging as one of the largest providers of international education globally. This has led to a corresponding expansion of academic partnerships between Chinese universities and institutions in other countries, facilitating knowledge exchange, research collaborations, and joint degree programs. Moreover, Chinese universities have begun offering courses in multiple languages, including Chinese, English, and others, in order to accommodate the diverse student body. Thus, China's international student statistics had grown more than ten times from 36,855 to 442,773 from 1995 to 2018 [17].

At the same time, China's focus on research and development has led to significant investment in research, with Chinese universities seeking to attract more international students and researchers to participate in collaborative research projects. Finally, the integration of international perspectives into teaching and research programs has been a major trend, as universities are striving to enhance the standard of researches and teaching and prepare students to be global citizens. In short, these trends reflect China's ongoing efforts to enhance its reputation as a global center of learning and contribute to the globalization of education.

5. Interest Groups on Internationalised Education Provision

Chinese government acts as a dominant role in guiding the development of education in China. As a result of its focus on education, the government has created many policies and regulations to officially regulate the internationalisation of education, which has been considered the obstacles to internationalisation of education. Educational institutions are encouraged to expand their international reach by building partnerships with universities and educational institutions around the world. Additionally, professional associations such as the Chinese Association of Higher Education have supported the internationalisation of education by organizing conferences, seminars, and other activities that promote international collaboration and exchange. For primary and secondary education, the Chinese government announced new laws to stop schools from teaching western curriculum covering from kindergarten to compulsory education grades and prohibiting foreign corporations or entities from owning or running any private K-9 schools, and also framed tough rules to regulate private tutoring market with the intention of lowering family living expenses for raising the country's birth rate while also relieving pressure on school children, which were strong and negative signals to internationalised schools [18].

In recent years, business groups have also become interested in the provision of internationalised education in China. China's rising economy and influential significance in trade and investment have risen growing interest among business groups in developing a highly skilled workforce that can operate in a globalized economy. As a result, business groups have invested in internationalised education programs and have partnered with educational institutions to create training programs that prepare students for careers in international business and trade. These programs equip students with the skills and knowledge for surviving in the competitive global market. Just as mentioned before, the new notice issued by the Chinese government discouraged many business groups, the ownership of business group is diminishing, but the participation of certain business forms is still acceptable in some way [19].

Besides, the development of internationalised education in China has also been driven by educational institutions themselves. Many universities and other educational institutions have recognized the importance of offering programs that prepare students for careers in an increasingly globalized world. As a result, they have developed a wide range of internationalised education programs, including study abroad opportunities, joint degree programs, and language courses that are designed to assist students in acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in a global environment.

In conclusion, the provision of internationalised education in China has been influenced by a variety of interest groups, including the Chinese government, educational institutions, professional associations, and business groups. These interest groups have worked together to develop policies,

regulations, and programs that support China's education internationalisation. The result is a marked escalation in the availability of internationalised education programs within the nation, ultimately positioning China as a major contributor to global international education provision.

6. Challenges and Opportunities for China's Internationalised Education

China's internationalised education system has achieved significant progress in recent years. However, it also faces various challenges and opportunities. One major challenge is the increasing competition in the global education market, which has resulted in the emergence of new education providers and the need for existing providers to innovate and adapt to new technologies and educational models. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented a significant challenge to the internationalised education sector, as it has disrupted the flow of international students and increased the need for online and distance learning.

Another challenge for China's internationalised education is the strict policies on international curriculum implementation and international schools. In recent years, policies have been proposed and implemented by Chinese government like government notice which aimed at strengthening the control of the Communist Party of China in the education system and promoting "core socialist values." This has led to a tightening of restrictions on foreign textbooks and curriculum in some areas and has also resulted in increased oversight and regulation of international schools. The impact of the policies will not only be the weakness to attract and retain capable students and teachers, but also the concerns about the quality of education. The discrepancies in educational results and experiences must be addressed, as well as to provide sufficient support for students to help them adapt to new cultural and academic environments. The quality of teaching and research needs to be maintained at high standards, and new models of education, such as competency-based education, need to be designed to fulfil the requirements of both learners and employers [19].

Nevertheless, these challenges have not completely diminished the opportunities for growth and innovation within the industry. Notably, the high demand for international education among Chinese students and families has been a driving force behind the expansion and modernization of internationalised education. As Pew's income band classification shows, China's middle class has been among the fastest growing in the world, swelling from 39.1 million people (3.1% of the population) in 2000 to roughly 707 million (50.8% of the population) in 2018 [20].

Innovative methods that may provide students with an education of comparable standard have been created as a result of the rising popularity of international education, while complying with government regulations. For example, online and blended learning approaches have emerged as promising solutions for delivering internationalised education in China, especially during lockdowns with COVID-19, which is thought to have a positive impact on both teachers and students. These models offer the flexibility and accessibility demanded by students, while addressing concerns about foreign influence and cultural values. The pursuit of innovation in international education has allowed the sector to adapt and overcome regulatory challenges, providing new opportunities for growth and development [21].

It is also a great opportunity for international schools to work more closely with the Chinese government and educational institutions to ensure compliance and develop innovative educational programs that meet the needs of both Chinese and foreign students. Some schools have already begun to collaborate with Chinese universities and educational organizations to develop joint programs and research projects.

The Chinese government has signalled its willingness to work with international schools to create a more open and inclusive education system that promotes internationalisation and prepares students for the challenges of the 21st century. As such, the challenges and opportunities facing China's internationalised education system are complex and multifaceted and will require ongoing collaboration and dialogue between all stakeholders to ensure a sustainable and successful future,

probably with the emergence of a new form of international education, international education with Chinese characteristics [22].

7. Conclusion

Internationalised education in China has a rich and complex history, spanning several centuries, and has been influenced by a variety of economic, social and political aspects. The development of internationalised education in China started in the late Qing Dynasty, where Chinese students studying abroad began returning home to modernise the educational ideology and system of China. The early 20th century saw significant developments in internationalised education, as Chinese educational institutions began to establish partnerships with foreign universities and organizations, setting the stage for a vibrant exchange of ideas and knowledge. The National Southwestern Associated University, established in the 1930s, was one of the earliest examples of internationalised education in China, with a curriculum that combined Chinese and Western learning and a faculty that included both Chinese and international scholars. Political unrest and warfare, such as the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese Civil War, and the Japanese invasion of China, caused this era of internationalised education to come to an end. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, China embarked on a new era of reform and international brought by open-up policy, which saw a renewed emphasis on internationalisation in education. Today, China's internationalised education sector is flourishing, with a large and diverse student body from around the world and partnerships with universities and educational institutions worldwide.

The internationalised education sector in China is characterized by a multicultural student body, multilingual education, global perspectives, advanced technology, international exchange programs, and cultural exchange. These features have made internationalised education in China highly desirable and have helped the country to become one of the largest international education providers worldwide. The Chinese government, without any doubt, is a dominant power in the development of internationalised education, providing policies and support for initiatives such as the "One Belt, One Road" strategy, which seeks to promote educational and cultural exchange between China and countries along the ancient Silk Road. Chinese educational institutions, including universities and schools, have also been actively involved in the developing internationalised education, establishing partnerships with international organizations and offering courses and programs in multiple languages.

Professional associations, on the other hand, also promote international education through collaboration, knowledge-sharing, research support, and cultural exchange, contributing to a globally competitive education system in China. The China Education Association for International Exchange, for example, is a national association that promotes educational exchange, cooperation and partnership between China and other nations. Business groups have also gotten involved in developing internationalised education, with many international companies and organizations investing in the sector and collaborating with Chinese educational institutions to develop training and exchange programs.

The legacy of China's internationalised education continues to shape its development and beyond, and its impact on education will last for generations and youngsters will feel it. The future of internationalised education in China is bright, with ongoing efforts to increase access to education, improve the localisation and standardisation of international curricula, and develop cultural exchange and understanding between China and the rest of the world.

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