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SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORIAL

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Chinese Students and Scholars in the Global Community: Challenges of Integration

China has a long higher education tradition that has evolved over more than two millennia (Zha, 2012, p. 452). As with other systems of higher education, China has adopted elements from and been influenced by many varied models of the university over its long history. Since the reform and opening up of the end of the 1970s, China has also felt the pressure of "the international imperative in higher education" (Altbach, 2013). But this is not the first time that internationalization is taking place in Chinese history. Before the founding of the People's Republic of China, many Chinese people went abroad to study. After 1949, students and scholars were sent to the then Soviet Union and other socialist countries. The tense political zeitgeist of the 1960s marked a pause in study abroad. But soon after this period of autarky, Chinese scholars again left to study abroad from 1978 onwards.

In this introduction, I would like to explain why a special issue on Chinese students and scholars abroad is published with *Frontiers of Education in China* and why it is important to do more research on these populations. I am well aware that many researchers in the field of academic mobility and migration now try to avoid what could be referred to as "methodological nationalism," i.e., concentrating on representatives of one country rather than comparing their experiences with students from other countries. Yet I believe that the case of China, an increasingly important world player, is unique. First of all, Chinese students and scholars are familiar faces on most campuses around the world. Besides there is societal and media interest in the presence of Chinese nationals in world education—which is not the case, for example, with American students in Europe. In recent years, several novels have been published on the experience of Chinese students (e.g., Guo, 2007; Masson, 2014); last year the safety of Chinese students in France was highly mediatized. My second argument is

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related to the fact that China is one of the word's biggest senders of students abroad, leading in some cases to brain drain (see Zweig & Changgui, 2006 for the USA). According to Docquier & Rapoport (2012), China ranks number four with 0.784 million "brains," amongst the main international suppliers of brains behind the Philippines, India, and Mexico. Though the idea of brain drain is often criticized—wrongly as it tends to be so complicated and fast-paced, many scholars found evidence in the case of China that return migration (Zucker & Darby, 2007) leads to investments and managerial participation in high-tech industries in China. In their 2013 working paper, Luo et al. offer evidence that temporary and/or permanent returnees who hold corporate leadership positions in Chinese companies gain more patents in Chinese photovoltaic firms. No doubt this contributes to China's strengths but also to the current *Changst* ("angst" about China in the world) (Chu, 2013, p. 6).

Let us continue by examining Chinese figures in relation to study abroad. Our first reaction is that they are staggering. The academic and student mobility and migration of Chinese nationals have increased steadily over the last decades. Chinese students, teachers, and scholars are now familiar faces in international higher education, especially in Australasia, Europe, and North America and increasingly in other parts of the world, the "South" included. According to the Center for China & Globalization (2013), Chinese overseas students account for 14% of all international students in the world. As such more than 100,000 Chinese have studied abroad annually since 2002, with an increase at about 20% each year. In total, between 1978 and 2011, 2.25 million students were sent abroad. In 2012, a total of 399,600 Chinese students went to study abroad, which represents an increase of 17.65% from 2011. This has led to major interest from foreign institutions. Thus the 2013 China Education Expo, a yearly exhibition tour taking place in Beijing, Shanghai and other cities, hosted by the China Education Association for International Exchange, saw more than 600 foreign institutions trying to attract prospective students. Overall, 30,000 visitors packed the exhibition in Beijing in the same year.

As study abroad and teacher/scholar mobility and migration are complex phenomena, it is difficult to delineate Chinese students' motivations for studying abroad as they are many and varied. Recent studies highlight certain patterns. Griner and Sobol (2014) examined the cases of Chinese students from Zhejiang province, and found the following motivations: personal dynamic, parental

influence, and globalization persuasion. Counsell (2011) studied the Chinese students pursuing their higher education in the UK and identified the following factors: search for a quality higher education, a desire to improve their foreign language skills, and UK degrees being seen as of great value for their future careers.

The problem of trying to grasp the characteristics of Chinese students abroad is related to the complexity of the idea of academic mobility. Firstly many different terms are used to describe mobility phenomena in academia: student mobility, international students, residence/study abroad, study visits, etc. Besides, mobility can be organized or spontaneous. It can be also be short-term or long-term. According to Teichler (2003), mobility can be horizontal or vertical. Vertical mobility refers to studies in a foreign country which offer the possibility to study a field or a subject which is not available in the home country, while horizontal mobility corresponds to studies which are similar to the ones proposed "at home."

In addition to these multifaceted aspects of mobility, describing and understanding the experiences of Chinese students often seem to be affected by preconceived ideas and ideological positions. Many studies produced about Chinese students abroad in the "West" tend to essentialize them, especially academically. For instance Gu and Schweisfurth (2006) argue that "the phrase 'the Chinese learner' invites us to see this group as homogeneous, and their needs and responses as determined by their cultural background. However other aspects of the process: the backgrounds and goals of the learners, their specific motivation for learning, the setting for the interaction and the nature of the relationship between teachers and learners, are also influential" (p. 75). Tian and Low (2011) are critical of the argument that "Chinese culture leads to a lack of critical element in Chinese students' academic work when studying abroad" (p. 62). They attribute what appears to be a lack of criticality to a lack of relevant subject knowledge and a lack of appropriate language proficiency rather than the ideological "excuse" of culture. In a similar vein, applied linguist Kumaravadivelu (2008) makes an important point about "Asian" students that seems to apply to Chinese students too: "the language teaching profession has shown a remarkable readiness to forge a causal connection between the classroom behavior of Asian students and their cultural beliefs even though research findings are ambiguous and even contradictory" (p. 54). Another

interesting aspect of Chinese students' mobility reported in research, is the impression that they cling to their own group without being "assimilated."

This special issue of *Frontiers of Education in China* is interested in the characteristics of Chinese academic mobility as well as the myths that seem to surround it. As very few studies or research projects have looked into Chinese teachers and scholars working abroad, this issue gives some space to research into these populations. The following "host" countries are covered by the authors: Australia, Denmark, Finland, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Singapore.

The first article, written by Gillian Skyrme, is entitled "Being Chinese or Being Different: Chinese Undergraduates' Use of Discourses of Chineseness" and deals with undergraduate Chinese students in New Zealand. The author examines how the students use the notions of Chineseness to explain their experiences abroad, fortifying at the same time their identity and sense of belonging to Chinese culture. In a similar vein, Regis Machart, Sep Neo Lim, E-Lynn Yeow, and Sin Zi Chin discuss the intercultural experiences of Taiwanese exchange students in Malaysia, where they study Mandarin. The authors analyze the processes of essentialization and othering in the students' discourses. While Skyrme found in the previous article that her students were able to question their preconceived ideas, Machart et al., interrogate the added value of study abroad in relation to interculturality. In the next article, "Privilege, Prejudice, Predicament: 'PRC Scholars' in Singapore—An Overview," Peidong Yang offers an ethnography of the sociocultural experiences of Chinese students studying at pre-/undergraduate levels in Singapore under Singapore's government-sponsored "foreign talent" scholarship schemes. The themes of privilege, prejudice, and predicament serve as guidelines to propose a complex analysis of this particular form of study abroad. Yuzhuo Cai's article closes the section on Chinese students. Entitled "Enhancing Overseas Chinese Graduate Employability: The Case of Chinese Graduates with Finnish Academic Qualifications," the author explains that the graduate employability development in the Nordic country of Finland should be a joint effort of multiple stakeholders, including students, graduates, academics, programme coordinators, employers, and policymakers in order to make employability more successful. The last two articles of this special issue look into the experiences of Chinese teachers and scholars in Denmark and Australia. "Chinese Teachers' Professional Identity and Beliefs about the Teacher-Student Relationship in an Intercultural Context" was

written by Li Wang and Xiangyun Du. Based on a sociocultural perspective, the ethnographic interviews reveal that Chinese language teachers in Denmark hold certain beliefs about their roles as teachers and about student-teacher relationships. The move to Denmark led to a transformation for most teachers, especially in relation to their professional identity. The final article, by Michael Singh and Jinghe Han, reflects on the education of teacher-researchers from China in order to help them to teach more effectively in Australia. The program under scrutiny, ROSETE, is based on the ideas of "cross-sociolinguistic similarities" and "recurring everyday sociolinguistic activities."

I hope that through the variety of studies on both Chinese students and scholars abroad presented in this issue of *Frontiers of Education in China*, more critical research on these populations will ensue. I regret that the topic of "internationalization at home" in China is not dealt with here and therefore wish that it may gain more attention in the near future.

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