

Preparation for Transnationalism: Changes in China's Top Secondary Schools

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This article argues that new international programs within public secondary schools in China represent a vigorous and legitimized approach to meeting the demands of newly affluent Chinese families for pre-collegiate education that equals the best international standards and constitutes preparation for higher education at the leading universities of the U.S., U.K., Australia, and beyond. From a transnational perspective, it offers insights into the changes that have taken place within China over the last decade as well as provides an overview of some of the variation in educational programs and practices as they relate to the internationalization of secondary education in China.

Keywords. International Education; Internationalization; Transnationalism; Secondary Education; China

The internationalization of higher education continues to increase in importance and complexity as demand for an overseas education by countries with limited higher educational options meets the needs of American universities to globalize their campuses and fill their coffers as investment in public education diminishes (Knight 2004; Shin et al. 1999). Emergent affluence, combined with pressures both local and national to acquire degrees, has set in place a vigorous debate not only on how to respond to the diversity of this international population, but also how to identify the quality of the students and the schools from which they come.

The proliferation of studies on the internationalization of higher education reflects the reality of a growing phenomenon of global education mobility since the late 1980s. As part of this phenomenon, international student migration has benefited

from global economic opportunity, rapid development of technology, and improvements in transportation and telecommunications (IOM, 2008). It has also been affected by economic instability, political conflict, family reunification, and fears of an unknown future or a desire for what might be perceived as a better one (Shields, 2013). International education, once marginalized in the field of educational research, has moved closer to the center as greater attention is paid to the ways in which education continues to be impacted by global forces (Dolby & Rahman, 2008).

However, most of the literature on international higher education tends to look at either the process of adaptation for the students and the host campus or at methods of recruitment (Altbach & Knight, 2007). This article attempts to broaden the discussion towards a more transnational perspective by including both home and host

country factors in deepening our knowledge base. It is our belief that only through incorporating the historical, cultural and economic context of the home country can we begin to more fully grasp some of the reasons for student migration, the extent of their preparation, and the role that the government, educators, and parents have played in this phenomenon.

While we acknowledge the range of students throughout the world studying in preparation for overseas study in a variety of settings, this article focuses on programs in the People's Republic of China from now on called China, which for the most part have as their mission to equip students with the academic background as well as social and intellectual skills to survive and thrive as undergraduates at four-year universities in America. In addition to delineating some of the historical, cultural and economic conditions in China contributing to the upsurge of international programs in secondary education, the authors use data collected in May and June of 2013 during visits to sixteen Chinese high schools and four universities in six cities, covering 2,000 miles. This research offers insights into the changes that have taken place within China over the last decade as well as provides an overview of some of the variation in educational programs and practices as they relate to the internationalization of secondary education in China, something which has been largely ignored in the literature of international education. Given that issues surrounding student migration have mainly been investigated in the context of the host country, this article provides an alternative framework offering perspectives from both the home and host country context.

International programs in Chinese secondary education

Current Chinese secondary education is divided into academic secondary education and specialized/vocational/technical secondary education (Jiaoyubu [Ministry of Education], 2004). Variations in types of secondary schooling in China reflect the

intention of policymakers to maximize options for young people while also providing venues for skilled workers to gain expertise. While the range of choices allows parents an opportunity to assess their child's strengths and reconsider an appropriate pathway through which their children might fulfill their potential and dreams, the options are limited depending on the scores received on the high school entrance exam since academic secondary schools are selective. And while the vast majority of parents worry incessantly about their child's success on the exams and their future well-being, the problem of choice is particularly challenging for wealthier families who have the means to consider one more option: education abroad. The reasons behind such a difficult choice may be due to several factors but two which most often come up in this research are 1) the reluctance to force the child to undergo the hardships required to succeed in the competitive examination system, and 2) an awareness that the child is not capable of competing at a high enough level to attend a top academic secondary school. These parents, having the ability to pay for study overseas, inadvertently are placed in the position to send their child away, usually their only child, sometimes at a very early age for schooling. Public schools in China, aware of this conundrum have begun to develop sophisticated international programs to prepare students for an easier transition to foreign schools for further study and to increase their revenue base as the additional costs are significant.

International programs were initially set up in the 1990s within a few high schools in major cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai¹ and Shenzhen. Over the past two decades the number of high schools with international programs across China has dramatically increased and affected the ways in which young people are viewing their educational and occupational options. At the same time, The National Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) implemented by the Ministry of Education outlines a plan to improve the variation and internationalization of secondary education

(chapter 4 and chapter 16). The rapid growth of programs has attracted scholars' attention, particularly those in China, which has led to a steady flow of articles (Ding, 2012; Li, 2003; Wang, 2011), some critically analyzing the curriculum and program management but others seeking insights into how new global and transnational identities will find a place in the modern Anglo-American university.

Theoretical framework

1. Educational desire

One of the most useful contemporary frameworks for understanding the increased, if not frenetic, demand for education in China is Kipnis's book, *Governing Educational Desire* (2011). While acknowledging that educational desire reflects universal dilemmas of human desire and social status as well as relationships between systems of education and social hierarchy in all modern societies, Kipnis uses as his frame of analysis the interplay between local and national pressures, policies, and practices in China to lay out his argument. And while the research is drawn from a study of a town in Shandong Province, it is clearly applicable to larger contexts, as indicated in his comment, "desire is a complex phenomenon that influences many other aspects of social relationships inside and outside of China" (p. 5). Accordingly, he applies three major theoretical concepts: culture, governing, and emplacement to discuss the complexity of this phenomenon. While government use of education as a tool for political control is not unique to China, China does have one of the longest histories of using education as a governing strategy. The most pronounced example of this is the infamous Imperial Examination System that has been in place for over a millennium, providing the ruling elite with a "meritocratic" process of selection. It is this same system, with certain modifications, that drives educational desire today in combination with other social forces and leads to a theoretical

understanding of migration history as well as the implementation of alternative educational programs in secondary education of China.

2. Educational investment

The dramatic growth of Chinese student migration to the United States since the late 1980s reveals the interrelationship among economic, cultural, and political capital. Most Chinese families use education as an efficient tool to acquire tangible capital. As noted by Xiang and Shen (2009, p. 514), "The Chinese new rich converted economic capital to internationally recognized cultural capital, which is in turn converted into political capital that legitimates their newly acquired status." Educational investment in international education, both by the Chinese government and individuals, reflect the forces of globalization and the prerequisites of successfully performing on the international stage. Meanwhile on the domestic front, parents, unsure of the changes taking place in China and how their child will be affected by them, grow increasingly anxious about an educational system that might undermine future life options. This is particularly true for middle-class and more affluent families who can afford alternative educational programs geared towards preparation to operate within a global context. Lee (2000) examines this issue in his book on the history of Chinese education where he points out the various ways that Chinese families' strategies have played an important role in determining the success of an individual's social advancement. Acknowledging the dynamic nature of the social, economic, and political factors that intertwine with an individual's educational success in China will allow educators as well as educational researchers to capture more fully the complex picture of the internationalization of secondary education in China today.

3. *International education*

As noted by Knight (2004), internationalization tends to be defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education. As such, the majority of educational research pertaining to the internationalization has focused on higher education (Zhao & Zhang, 2011). In the late 1980s a few scholars began to break with this tradition, including one of the authors of this article (name suppressed), and started to focus on the process and impact of internationalization on K-12 education. During this period, however, due to limited access, few scholars were able to examine how this played out in China (Zhou, 2013) and even fewer attended to secondary education. Over the last decade marked changes in this trend have been noted as scholars in China have critically analyzed the challenges and opportunities that secondary education faces as it moves towards greater inclusion of international issues and pedagogy (Bo and Li 2011; Zhou 2013). Ding (2012) further discusses the strengths and weaknesses of these changes as well as the role of individual reflection in international programs. Other scholars focus on a specific program through conducting case studies in schools (Li, 2003) but there remains very little investigation which has been examined and supported by conceptual or theoretical frameworks (Wang, 2011).

The Context

From 1978 to 2011, approximately 224 million Chinese left China to study abroad (Jiaoyubu [Ministry of Education] 2012a). In 2011, alone 34 million made the journey to enhance their studies and their status with degrees from overseas. More than 75% of these students went to the English-speaking countries of the U.S., the U.K., Australia and Canada, with the U.S. in the lead. Chinese students from PRC alone comprise

25.4% of all international students, making them the largest “group” in American universities (IIE [Institute of International Education] 2012a). While the majority of Chinese students study at the graduate level, the number of students and parents opting for their children to study at the undergraduate level has risen significantly in recent years to about 38.4% in the U.S. (IIE 2012b). It is safe to say that the combination of perceived scholarly and financial rewards for both Chinese students and overseas universities, combined with the massive supply of qualified Chinese high school graduates, has created an industry of recruitment, English instruction, and consultation so complex that families and schools are often at a loss as to how to mediate this terrain.

And the flow does not just go one way. China is now home to hundreds of schools and branch universities created by foreign English-language institutions attempting to meet the intense ‘educational desire’ accompanying China’s rapidly developing urban and affluent population. In addition, some existing Chinese public, (government supported) schools, acknowledging the need to better prepare their students for a global world, now offer a separate track called an “international” program for students interested in overseas study. Many of these students do not take the Gaokao (The College Entrance Exam) but rather participate in a curriculum comparable to some of the best British or American upper secondary schools (high schools). These international programs are not to be confused with International Schools. The latter are private schools set up around the world to accommodate young peopleⁱⁱ who are either not from the country where they are now living, or have studied abroad and, as a result, cannot easily fit into the traditional curriculum of their host or home country. In contrast, any Chinese student who can pass the entrance exam for the particular high school that offers an international program and then successfully passes the additional exam to enter this special program can participate, as long as

s/he is able to pay the extra fees. This article focuses on these special programs and how they are impacting both Chinese and American education.

History of student migration from China to the U.S.

In 1847 three Chinese boys were brought to the United States to study in Massachusetts by an American missionary. As the first Chinese student in the United States, Yung Wing graduated from Yale University in 1854 and returned to China to take various positions. After approval by the Qing Dynasty government, he organized 130 Chinese young students to study in the New England region of the United States between 1872-1875. Most students at that time came with the objective of attaining a degree or degrees from an American college or university, then return home to become leaders of the new China. Between 1948 and 1949 about 3,916 students were enrolled in colleges and universities abroad; this marks the peak of Chinese student enrollment prior to the Communist takeover (Lee 1960)ⁱⁱⁱ.

The “opening-up” policy, implemented in 1978, determined the direction of development of Chinese society in the following decades. The new rationale by Deng Xiaoping clearly indicated that the key to modernization lay in science and technology and the key to these lay in education (Pepper, 1991). The imperative made plain the urgent need for China to learn and seek assistance from the West, especially the United States, where science and technology were most advanced. With the completion of the normalization of Sino-American relations in 1979, individual desire for education was reignited and combined with governmental desire to catch up with the West. As a result, 10,000 Chinese academic and technical specialists soon found themselves studying in the United States (Fairbank, 1992).

For the past thirty years China has remained the leading sending country to U.S. higher education with only a small blip in the numbers between 2001 and 2008

when India gained top place. Since 2009 China has resumed its position as top exporter of students to study abroad, in particular to the United States (IIE, 2012a). However, this remarkable achievement has not been without drawbacks, causing a frenzy and confusion on both sides of the ocean. Individual striving for access to foreign universities has led to the accusation that Chinese are far more interested in status than education. The term “gold gilding” (*dujin*) has been coined and is in frequent use to critique this phenomenon. Its meaning alludes to the paying of money to purchase a label without necessarily acquiring new knowledge or skills (Xiang & Shen, 2009).

Contemporary education in China: 1978-present

The post-Mao administration of Deng Xiao Ping clearly proclaimed that the quantitative goals of education must be sacrificed for quality (mass primary education vs. key schools based on the Soviet model) with the aim to serve the immediate needs of economic development (Pepper, 1991). This coincided with the implementation of the “one-child” family policy, which was viewed as a means to accomplish the goals of the “Four Modernizations” in agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defense. Most children born in China after 1979 have benefited from the “one-child” policy. Being raised and protected by more than six family members, careful consideration was brought to bear on both childrearing and education (Davin, 1991). Kipnis (2011) goes so far as to claim that the birth control policy should be the starting point for any discussion of educational desire in contemporary China. And while this policy enhanced parental investment in the education of their children, it also led to a generation dominated by their whims. Having one’s identity and hopes pegged to a child’s success can easily lead to excessive pressure and exaggerated expectations as noted in Kipnis’s analysis of Chinese parents’ desire for a son to become a dragon

and a daughter a phoenix (*wangzi chenglongde xinli*) (Kipnis, 2011, p. 61).

The limitation on child births insured that parents and grandparents would compete to position their dragon or phoenix to not only enhance the child's options but also their parents' status. Aware of this potential frenzy the government introduced a policy of "quality education" (*suzhi jiaoyu*) aimed to moderate or redirect this energy and bias toward academic over vocational forms of education. However, as demonstrated in the Shandong case study, rural parents did not value technical diplomas even if these led to well-paying, secure jobs and reasonable careers; college degrees trumped practical skills (Kipnis, 2011).

Around the same time, facing pressure from reformists the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council in 1999 conceded to consider a move away from an "exam-oriented" education system and return to a modified version of providing quality education for all children (Zhao 2009)^{iv}. While the quality education reforms are still in place, they run parallel to, and intersect with, the current examination system of the Gaokao, which was reintroduced in 1977 after Mao's death. The Gaokao remains competitive and affects every aspect of China's education system as well as most parts of Chinese society. This ancient meritocratic system, now resurrected, receives wide support from the government as the most effective means of insuring fair and equal access. And while Kwong (1983) reminds us of the dominant view that "before the system of grades, everyone is equal," he raises concerns about inequality of educational opportunities by social class backgrounds and concludes that the examination system is not the root of social inequality but it certainly reflects, maintains, and even exaggerates it.

Methodology

The ethnographic reports used in this article were collected from visits to sixteen high schools and four universities in six

cities (Beijing, Tianjin, Shenzhen, Zhongshan, Suzhou, and Shanghai) in 2013. Thirteen of the high schools are Chinese public institutions, all with an additional international program that requires coursework in English for three years. Only one school was private and it was a gift from a local man to his community. It is also the only one that is K-12, the remaining are 7-12, which is the definition of "middle school" in China. In addition, two "International Schools" were visited. These are radically different institutions with a different clientele as discussed earlier, mostly children of ex-pats or whose parents are working overseas. In addition to visits to schools, interviews were conducted with counselors, teachers, principals, and parents, as well as various groups of students ranging in size from 2 to 300. English and Mandarin Chinese^v were used to conduct both individual and group interviews. Overall, conversations of varying degrees of formality were held with approximately 500 students and 100 educators. Interview appointments with educational leadership of each school were set up ahead of time through a network of colleagues. Most of these interviews were conducted individually with the guidance counselor/s, the principal or vice principal and a few teachers lasting between thirty minutes to two hours. Conversations continued over lunch and dinner and in a few cases took place in the homes of those interviewed.

Data collected for the research included field notes not only by the researcher but also written comments taken by assistants who had provided access to a couple of the schools. Class observations were limited in some schools due to the close proximity to the taking of the end of year exams, including the Gaokao. However, discussions with individual students were plentiful as were presentations to groups of students outside of class, in the auditorium or in a public forum area. Visits to common spaces such as the athletic field or cafeteria also provided opportunity for contact. A plethora of materials were offered and gathered from schools, including both written and

electronic information relating to the school's history, transformation, and academic success. The latest statistical data on the school's ranking in various categories were made available. Due to the sensitive nature of the research, audio recording was not done; however, after the school visits and the typing up of notes, specific questions and verification of data were requested by the researcher of the people interviewed. In all cases, email responses were quick and responsibly detailed. Findings and questions were further triangulated through discussions with university colleagues whose area of specialty is in the field of education in China as well as parents and educators from other institutions. Analytic memos (Saldaña, 2009) were taken along with the process of conducting and transcribing the interviews. As noted below, access to these schools and individuals was achievable through a complex network.

1. Position of the researchers

The foundation for this work was laid decades ago when the researcher (name suppressed) first taught in Taiwan at the age of nineteen and commenced language study that then led to degrees in East Asian Studies, Mandarin, and Japanese, then later advanced work in Higher Education. Travel and research throughout Asia continued over the decades with numerous articles, chapters, and books being written about her work on access to education and how this varies across countries and cultures. In addition she has developed and taught both undergraduate and graduate courses on Asian cultures and schooling as well as Urban Education and Immigration in America. Several of her research projects confirmed a lack of awareness by most American educators with regards to the link between home country schooling, immigration, and host country educational adaptability. These inquiries led to the current research on how Chinese schools are preparing students for study abroad as well

as why the increase in interest among Chinese families in overseas education.

In addition to the author's faculty position, she has served as a resource for the university in admissions policy. With an increase in international students at research institutions has come awareness that few people who serve in an Admissions capacity know much about educational systems beyond their shores or the variations among countries and how access to quality schooling is affected by regionalism and socio-economic status. Without this knowledge it is difficult, if not impossible, to verify the quality of students, their schools, or their transcripts. It is also problematic for the institution, faculty, and staff. Greater knowledge of students' backgrounds increases overall global awareness of the entire campus. It was in this capacity as faculty Chair of Admissions that this author offered to identify and visit a range of top Chinese secondary schools that provide programs oriented towards overseas study. The preparation for this research required approximately eight months of work on top of regular responsibilities of teaching, service and writing for other venues. A second researcher is a graduate student under the first author's sponsorship. She has extensive international educational experiences in China, Japan, Korea, and the United States and also speaks several of these languages. She has worked with the first author for four years as she finishes her study of Chinese-American students in San Francisco. Her research has demonstrated educational desire as the main cause of immigration, the importance of positioning children in schools for status, and the transnational identity of contemporary Chinese migrants who do not see themselves as immigrants. The research trip was aided by a host of contacts garnered from several sources including the parents of this researcher who hosted (the first author) at Peking University for a portion of the trip.

2. *Network development*

As Creswell (2008) suggests, it is imperative to gain access to the research site by seeking the approval of gatekeepers. And while networking is a part of any ethnographic research project, it is essential to the success of any work done in China. The term *guanxi* used repeatedly and for generations, meaning “connection” or “relationship,” is not to be taken lightly as one’s credibility is based on not only your own status and credentials but also who has sent you, who you know. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why so few educational researchers from Western countries have done fieldwork in China; a credible network is essential to be able to move into spaces, into institutions, and into the lives of people who will offer their candid views that go beyond superficial or politically correct responses. Being able to gather accurate information requires not only the ability to provide a valid image but also the knowledge base to be able to move graciously and efficiently when making inquiries. Contacts provide access but credibility and trust are in the hands of the researcher.

Thanks to years working in the field of East Asian Studies, having some ability in the language, and teaching and publishing in the area, the first author has cultivated colleagues who, when learning of her interest in returning to China to inquire about the educational changes over the last five years in top secondary schools that send a portion of their youth abroad, offered to assist. These individuals then linked her to others, sometimes three or four people removed, who then opened their school, and their minds to the author. In many ways this is the real story of research. It is a part of the process of doing research in particular in places like China, Japan, India, Bhutan, and elsewhere that is often left out when telling an American or British audience about one’s research. The process for the present report began in June 2012 with the prospect of visiting one university and its attached high school and led to hundreds of emails and

numerous visits to her office by a host of people who wanted to assist, including Chinese faculty, staff, graduate students, and professionals. In no case was a broker or travel agent involved. The result, eight months later, evolved into invitations to visit sixteen top performing secondary schools across 2,000 miles of the Eastern seaboard of China.

3. *Access to the schools*

Access to Chinese schools is extremely difficult. Most schools, and all of the schools in this study, are gated, usually to the height of six to ten feet. All have security guards who check identification as well as phone the person inside who is to be responsible for your presence on campus. To gain access, an invitation has to be extended by someone within the school at a relatively high rank. Even Chinese professors who train teachers and are located in education departments do not have knowledge of what goes on in K-12 schools because they are not provided access^{vi}.

Almost all of the schools that the first author visited, fourteen out of sixteen, were “attached” schools, meaning affiliated with a university (*fuzhong*). From an outsider’s perspective it may sound like these are simply what might be called “elevator” schools, in fact it was made very clear that the *fuzhongs* operated with complete independence from the affiliated University, and in some cases the reputation of the quality of the secondary schools exceeded that of the University to which they were affiliated. This did not mean that the University reputation was not good but rather that the middle school’s reputation for quality education is far superior to that of the affiliated University.

Findings

Manipulating curriculum in depth and breadth

In contrast to the oft quoted assumption that Chinese schools have retained their same character over the last fifty years, focusing on the memorization of math and science equations and offering little in the way of creativity or language learning, the findings from this research prove this not to be the case. The Chinese educational system has changed and continues to change as it is influenced by forces beyond governmental control. Nowhere is this more evident than at the leading “middle schools” whose students are being prepared with a curriculum that is not only rigorous in depth but also in breadth. Three years of physics, biology, chemistry, and advanced math are matched by art, theatre, dance, music and a range of sports programs with facilities to match. Extensive use of advanced technology has resulted in some schools having programs in robotics and game design and heralding labs supported by high tech companies such as Cisco Systems. Large, modern well-equipped buildings are surrounded by grassy fields and areas for students to gather. In addition to facilities that would be the norm in any American high school, each of the sixteen schools visited for this research project also had its own convenience shop, coffee shop, bookstore, medical facility, and dorms. And English language learning is required of all students beginning in primary school.

Since many middle schools (including all of those in this study) provide dorms for some of their students, meaning that kids will be boarding from Monday to Friday and go home on the weekends, the schools take seriously their role of *in loco parentis*. Medical and psychological services are on site with appropriate professionals available to assist students. Remember the schools discussed here are large public schools with populations between 2,000 and 6,000 in six grades. These are not the same as our stereotypes of private British or American boarding schools. First of all, costs are extremely low, ranging from \$100 to \$600 per semester; this includes tuition, room and board. Second, these schools are not only for the elite. Students must pass competency

tests to demonstrate ability to handle the work, but the kinds of families represented in the student body would surprise many who still believe it is only through contacts that access to top schools is possible.

Within the social and economic context of China, there are many arguments in favor of boarding students. Given the one-child policy, boarding schools provide peers for children with whom to play and interact. They learn cooperative social skills and create bonds that last a lifetime. Boarding schools also “liberate” parents from their children so that they can both work outside jobs without being concerned with the whereabouts of their children. (In contrast to Japan and Korea, middle-class educated women in China work full-time responsible jobs). No latch key kids; no shuttling kids off to afterschool events; no disputes about when to go to bed or get up for school or if and when to do homework. After a day of classes and sports, students have a choice of afterschool activities. Then following dinner two hours of study hall were monitored by teachers on a rotating basis. This again is in contrast to Japan and Korea where most children in middle and senior school attend private *jukus* or *hagwons* after school, returning home late at night. Traversing back and forth to these “tutoring centers” leaves young people on the streets and parents worrying at home. All of the schools the researcher visited highly discouraged parents from putting their children into supplementary education classes on the weekends and were ardently opposed to the use of brokers for seeking further education.

Alternative approach to the traditional exam-oriented education

Entrance to “high school” (upper middle school) is based on an exam taken in the ninth year of schooling. The score on this exam determines the high school to which you will be admitted. As we discussed earlier, academic high schools are geared towards preparation for the senior year examination, the Gaokao. As a result the first two years of high school usually

provide extensive curricular rigor but spend the third year learning the particulars of test taking and memorization of material for success. While this is still the norm, many schools are breaking away from this model, especially in urban areas, and providing a variety of alternative programs for some of their students.

One such program is designed for students who want to continue their higher education overseas after high school. These international programs are nested within the larger high school but have a separate curriculum whereby most or all courses are taught in English. A select group of native English speaking teachers come from all over the world to teach in these programs and, as a result, the cost for participating in the international program is significantly higher than in the regular Gaokao program (about \$16,000 a year including tuition, room and board vs. \$800 for Gaokao). The schools the researcher visited varied significantly in the size of these programs from 450 students out of 6,000 in one school to 50 out of 2,000 in another.

Students in the international program associate with the other students in their high school. However, because their courses are distinctively different, seldom are students allowed to cross over into the regular Gaokao program once they have begun with the international program. This means that, for the most part, they cannot attend a Chinese university since these, with a few exceptions, require the passage of the

Gaokao for entrance. This does not mean that only students in the international programs are prepared for overseas study. Some of the best students are in the Gaokao program and have the intention of attempting to score high enough on the Gaokao to be admitted to one of the two preeminent and most selective universities in China: Peking University or Tsinghua University. If they are not accepted to these two, as repeatedly told to the researcher by Beijing educators, then these top students would consider overseas study^{vii}.

Top Chinese public schools draw from a range of students, even beyond their catchment area, whose academic abilities have won them access. Hence, these schools with international programs are elite in accomplishment but not necessarily in family affluence, though parents who encourage a child to enter an international program in a public school are well aware of the financial and emotional costs both in China and in the U.S. Because of the immense commitment required by all concerned, in some schools parents are interviewed when a child makes application, long before their child is admitted to 10th grade, to insure that they are aware of the expectations and multiple costs that such a decision will incur.

The curriculum in the international programs usually follows the American or British model, offering AP, IB, A-Level and PGA courses (Please refer to Table 1).

Table 1
Models in the International Programs

Curriculum	AP	IB	A-Level	PGA
Definition	Advanced Placement Program by The College Board	International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme by IBO	General Certificate of Education Advance Level	Program developed by China Center for International Education Exchange (CCIEE) and ACT Education Solutions (AES)
Education system	U.S.	Independent	U.K.	U.S.
Recognized by countries	Over 60 countries	Top universities across the world	British Commonwealth countries, U.S.	Mainly by the U.S.

Some of the programs observed in this research included material taught for the Gaokao as well as more "progressive" Western material, believing that their students should be able to function in both the Chinese curriculum and the international. However, even these students were not required to take the Gaokao; rather they use the last year of high school in seminar-style electives, presuming that this is what will be offered at an overseas university. Many, but not all, of the programs assisted in preparation for TOEFL, SAT and IELTS. Those that did not felt that the intensity and the range of courses offered at their school were sufficient for success. Since no public school in China is allowed to offer the SAT, students must travel, sometimes a significant distance, to take the exam, which is required by the majority of American colleges and universities. The fact that students all over China, hundreds of thousands, must get themselves to either Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Macao or South Korea to take the test requires not only reservations on planes and ferries but also hotel accommodations at an enormous cost of parents. Because of this predictable flow of human energy, schools

often close for at least one day, and some for several days.

It needs to be said that these international programs, offered in the top academic secondary schools, serve as a supplementary piece to the traditional exam-oriented education that exclusively focuses on the Gaokao preparation. The surging growth of these alternative programs has begun to complicate the picture of education practice in contemporary China, which should no longer be a simplified.

Implications for educators

Having a consciousness of the forces that drive Chinese student migration is an initial step to understanding the reasons for the flood of students arriving in English-speaking classrooms around the globe. In order to grasp who these students are, why their performance might vary, and eventually how appropriate support can be provided by colleges and universities, it is essential that educators gain an awareness of some of the historical, cultural and social variation offered in this article and how these are impacted by differences in socioeconomic and educational backgrounds of parents and grandparents.

While this research focuses on the international programs in China, as researchers in the field of international and comparative education, we hope educators realize that the increase in better prepared students from all over the world is due not only to affluence but also lack of capacity in their own countries to accommodate the demand for quality higher education. While status has been a leading factor in receiving an education overseas this is now being matched with a desire and need to prepare young people to take their place in a global society as transnationals.

Both home and host countries cannot ignore the fact that higher education has never been limited by national boundaries since its first establishment in the Middle Ages, and today it maintains this character through the driving forces of globalization. Educators on both sides should be clearly aware of the benefits and challenges which result from collaboration across cultures and countries. The development of cooperative relationships based on trust and respect will serve us far better in the future than the current popular perception that we are competing for a finite group of students.

Conclusion

This article argues that new international programs within public secondary schools in China represent a vigorous and legitimized approach to meeting the demands of newly affluent Chinese families for pre-collegiate education that equals the best international standards and constitutes preparation for higher education at the leading universities of the U.S., U.K., Australia, and beyond. This development calls for extending models of “educational desire” and the immigrant experience to encompass the development of transnational identities and the resultant mobility sought by millions of well-educated Chinese youth.

Movement in this direction has been explored through the lens of sixteen top secondary schools as the traditional exam-based curriculum been expanded and at times replaced by programs offering a range

of options including the IB, AP, British A-levels and PGA. Most of these options are part of what is known as International Programs, some of which utilize material from the Gaokao, others in absolute resistance to it. This shift is taking place throughout urban China as the demand for higher education increases along with the discontent felt by students and parents alike towards a system that is seen as stultifying.

A rising middle-class with recently acquired wealth, often without the educational credentials to match, see the education of their children both as a means to ground their social position as well as a possible avenue to a life beyond China's borders. While pressure is exerted on children to either make up for their parents' lack of sophistication or reaffirm status already achieved, schools go about developing programs to make the transition to study abroad more efficient and effective. Such programs, however, mostly designed to align with Western schooling, bring to light not only educational but also social and political difficulties that would not normally be raised in the traditional curriculum. Teachers from English-speaking countries bring with them their own frame of reference and inadvertently pass this on to students. In the process a significant shift is taking place with repercussions felt not only in China but in the host countries that accept these young people.

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the United States (Tsinghua University Website, 2013).

^{iv} These included the abolishment of the entrance examination for middle school, the development of graduation requirements by individual middle and elementary schools, the reform of curriculum and textbooks, new approaches for the evaluation and assessment of schools, teachers and students, the reform of college entrance exams, and increased access to higher education (Zhao, 2009).

^v When first author gave a short lecture to a group of 10th graders, she began in Mandarin and then switched to English. Afterwards several students came up to her and said, "you are the only person who has visited us from any school in the world who speaks Chinese; and we get visitors from hundreds of school."

^{vi} An example of this is when the researcher was asked by a faculty member who is a colleague at one of the top universities in Beijing if she could accompany the researcher into her daughter's school, Renmin University's Affiliated School, the top middle school in China, in order to find out about their program.

^{vii} The researcher met the father of one of these students, who had a TOEFL score of 118 (120 is perfect). Granted he had traveled abroad with his father but the student still had opted for the Gaokao Program even though he is currently studying in the U.S. This was after he was accepted and attended one year at Peking University.

ⁱ In Shanghai alone more than 6,000 students are currently enrolled in eighteen programs established by thirty-three schools located in fifteen districts (News, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.chinanews.com/edu/2013/05-10/4806778.shtml>).

ⁱⁱ These are often children whose parents are working temporarily in China but it can also be Chinese people who have lived abroad, received permanent residency, and are now returning to attend an International School. No Chinese person without these requirements is allowed to study at an International School.

ⁱⁱⁱ Another example is Tsinghua University, which was built in 1911 and was partly funded by the Boxer Indemnity, was known as a preparatory school for students who were sent by the government to study in